



## **The Mothers of Jesus: Tamar**

### **Advent Series #1**

**Genesis 38**

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**November 27, 2011**

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This is the first Sunday of Advent which means we're going to enter into a series of Advent messages and we're going to break away for five Sundays from our "Behold Our God" preaching and Bible reading series. If you have been following along with the Bible reading plan, there are Bible readings scheduled through the end of the week. We're going to take about five weeks off so it might be a great opportunity to get caught up a little bit if you've fallen behind. By the way, if you've started attending New Covenant part way through this Bible reading series and you want to get involved, we encourage you to jump in wherever we are and start reading at that point. Don't feel you have to go all the way back to Genesis 1:1. Just start reading where we are reading. I think it would be a blessing to you as it will follow the preaching series beginning again January 1.

The starting point for our advent series which is entitled "The Mothers of Jesus," is Matthew 1. I want to encourage you to go ahead and turn there in your Bibles. If you're using one of the Bibles provided under a chair somewhere near you, it is on page 807. I'm going to ask God's blessing on the preaching, reading and hearing of His Word today.

Heavenly Father, at this time of year, we remember again that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and that He, the Word, (Jesus) was with God and He was God. And He is God! And that no one has ever seen You but that the Lord Jesus has definitively made You known, God. I am grateful today that Your written Word reveals Jesus, the Word, to us and so I'm asking for Your help for each of us. I pray that You would give me a gift through the Holy Spirit to speak this Word truthfully and accurately and powerfully that it might do its intended work. And God, each one of us needs gifts to hear this Word and to receive it from You. We need the transforming work of Your Holy Spirit to break through the deadness and hardness of our hearts so that we might respond in a way that glorifies You and causes us to overflow in love for You and for others. God, we pray that You would do

this divine work in this room over the next several minutes. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The starting point for each of the messages in this Advent series is Matthew 1, the first book of the New Testament. It's one of the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Matthew, like the other three gospel writers, is telling us the story of Jesus' life. These gospels are biographies but not in the typical way we think of a biography we might pick up at the library. These gospel writers, including Matthew, are not just telling us specific events in the life of an individual named Jesus. Matthew is choosing events and putting them together in order to communicate a message about Who this Jesus is. As with any sermon, he wants a response from those who are hearing it. The response should be to embrace this Jesus by faith and to trust in Him.

Gospels are an extended sermon with a point of faith in Jesus being the response. At the same time, they're biographies telling the story of the life of this Person, Jesus Christ. Matthew begins his gospel answering the question that his readers are going to have: "Who is this? Who is this Jesus?" That would seem to be a very relevant question to be asking at Christmas time.

Who is this Jesus? Is He a cute little baby with a halo around His head, lying in a manger, no crying He makes while farm animals smile nearby? Who is this Jesus? Is He one of many optional themes for a winter holiday? I can go with Jesus or I can go with Santa. Or I can go with Winter Solstice. Or I can go with Kwanzaa. Or I can go with Hanukah. Or I can let them coexist and go with all of the above.

Who is this Jesus at Christmas time? Is He one of those or is He just another convenient reason for me to take a few more days off of work, spend too much money, eat too much, drink too much and sort of soothe myself until I have to go back to the daily grind in January? Who is this Jesus?

Matthew tells us in chapter one, verse one. In the first verse of the New Testament, he lays his cards on the deck. He's not saving this for later on. He tells us exactly who he understands Jesus to be. Look at Matthew 1:1, "*The book of the genealogy [or the genesis or the origin] of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*" Here are three titles with massive meaning in them. "*Jesus Christ, the son of David, the Son of Abraham.*"

We have to remember that "Christ" is not Jesus' last name—it's a title He has. He is "The Christ." It's the New Testament word for the Old Testament word "Messiah." A Messiah was an anointed one. In the Old Testament, prophets, priests and kings were

anointed for a specific purpose, job or a mission. Jesus' title as "Messiah" or "Christ" reminds us that He was sent into this world, anointed, set apart by God for a specific mission as the Savior of the world.

He's also "*the Son of David*." He's the ultimate King—the ultimate authority. In the Old Testament, David was the grandest of all kings. He was the most highly exalted king yet God made him a promise in 1 Samuel 7. He made a covenant with him that one greater than him would come—a King Who would reign forever in David's line. Matthew is saying, "This Jesus is that King."

He is "*the Son of Abraham*"—this ancient seed that was destined to bless all nations. Remember in Genesis 12, God made this covenant with Abraham. He said, "*I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*" "There will come a descendent through you who will bring my blessing to the nations." The Christmas carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," captures it well when it says, "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight." All of this is coming together. Jesus, the Savior, the Christ, the Messiah, The Son of David, exalted King, the seed of Abraham, Promised One to bless the nations—all coming together in the person of Jesus. Huge, superlative titles for Jesus!

Matthew's primarily Jewish readers would have been impressed. But conscientious Jews and folks in the first century when Matthew was writing would have wondered, "Okay then, where did this Jesus come from? What's His family's history? What kind of pedigree does this King have? If Jesus is all that, He must have some kind of pedigree, some kind of family history that is going to match these exalted titles that Matthew is giving Him."

That's why Matthew begins his gospel with something that many of us Bible-readers don't get too excited about—a genealogy. "The begats." Some of the older versions of the Bible said, "This guy begat that guy and had this son and father begat, begat, begat." We don't find it too exciting. If you've been going along with the Bible reading plan, we've run into a few of these genealogies already. I think we tend to skim over them, thinking, "Okay, for some reason the Holy Spirit decided all these names had to be in the Bible. I'll just take it by faith and move on to a story or something I'd rather read." But genealogies, particularly in this time and place, are hugely important.

In the Old Testament, genealogies would help one understand his or her connection to the Promised Land and his parcel of it. It would be a great tragedy for that parcel, as we read in the Book of Ruth, to pass out of one's family possession. If someone's going to

ascend to royalty, he's going to want to know his family tree, his heritage and genealogy. Some of us might dabble with genealogy because we might think it's interesting. Maybe you want to find out if there is someone famous in your background. But probably most of us are not all that passionate about it. Do you think Prince William is pretty passionate about his genealogy? You can bet he knows it by heart; he knows what his claim to the throne of England is.

If Jesus is truly the Exalted King, then His pedigree—His family history, His genealogies—are important and ought to reflect the exalted status that He has. But therein lies a problem. If we look at Jesus' genealogy here in Matthew, we find out there are some pretty bad, messed up dudes in His family tree. Take a look at verses 8, 9, and 10—just an example of a few.

In verses 8 and 9 we meet Uzziah. The Old Testament says that Uzziah had the audacity to go into the temple and go where only the priests were to go and do only what the priests were to do in offering up incense. And then there's Ahaz, mentioned in verse nine. The Bible doesn't just say he sinned a little bit but that he transgressed grievously against the Lord. And then Manasseh, who most Bible readers will recognize as his name is infamous. There's a long list of the sins he committed and the abominations and idolatry—even to the point of sacrificing his own children.

That's a problem, but there's also another potential problem here. Not only are the fathers of Jesus mentioned but there are also several mothers of Jesus mentioned. That's not a problem in and of itself. It's not completely unusual for the mothers to be listed along with the fathers in a genealogy, but it's not completely common either. You would think that if a woman was listed in a genealogy, she would be one who would reflect well on the person's genealogy. Yet that is not the case here.

Look at the women who are listed in this genealogy:

- Mary—teenage mom, unmarried. She is listed as Jesus' earthly mother in verse 16. We're going to set her aside for a moment and think about the four who are listed in the first few verses here.
- All four were foreign born—pagan, idolatrous backgrounds.
  - One was a Moabite; a descendent of a Moabite was not even to be in the temple area for several generations of their family line.
  - Two practiced prostitution.

- One was the infamous mistress of a famous king involved in a national scandal.
- And one knowingly participated in incest.

These are not the people you would tend to list in a genealogy if you were going to try to impress somebody with a background of a person. So why these? Why are these folks listed? When you read the first few verses of Matthew, it's sort of like the Jerry Springer show and *As the World Turns* all in one. I'm not feeling the Christmas vibes yet. Why these women and, for our purpose today, why Tamar?

There's an answer to that question found in Genesis 38. This is really the only extended account of the person of Tamar in the Bible. She's mentioned elsewhere in genealogies, but this is the one chapter that gives us insight into her life. If you've been reading through the Bible you would have read this passage back in September. You probably weren't thinking a lot about Christmas then and after you read this passage, it probably didn't make you think about Christmas all that much more. In fact, you're probably wondering what this story is even doing in the Bible. I really don't anticipate a Veggie Tales episode coming out on Genesis 38 anytime soon.

Not only is this the account of a sordid, repulsive series of events, but secondly and maybe more importantly, it doesn't seem to fit into the storyline of the plot of Genesis. Yet it is very important to understand it within the storyline of Genesis. It looks like an interruption because at the end of 37, Joseph is being sold into slavery. Then, if you just pulled chapter 38 out and began in 39, Joseph is in Egypt. The story would just go along fine yet in order to understand the big picture of Genesis—the seed or descendent theology that's in Genesis—we need to understand Genesis 38.

What I'm talking about with the seed theology began in Genesis 3 when humanity fell into sin. Even as God is pronouncing a curse over all of existence, He's also promising a seed—a Savior Who will crush the head of the serpent and make all things right. If you're reading Genesis, you've got to see that we're looking for the seed of the woman who will accomplish God's purposes of redemption—of bringing things back to Eden, of bringing things back to Paradise.

Eve has a son and his name is Cain. Is he the seed? No. Definitely not. So we continue through the book of Genesis until we get to Abraham. God calls Abraham out of a pagan world to be the one with whom He will begin to establish a nation. He makes

promises to him and lets him know that all the families of the earth will be blessed in him. There's physicality to that. "In Him there's going to be a descendent from you. There's going to be a seed who's going to accomplish My purposes." But there's a problem. Abraham and Sarah can't have kids. Besides that, they're really old. Yet God miraculously gives them a son, Isaac.

Then Isaac and his wife Rebekah parent twins—Jacob and Esau. You would think Esau would be the seed—he's the older one. Yet in God's plan, He chooses the younger one to continue the line.

Jacob then has several sons; surely one of them is going to be the seed. Which one of them is it going to be? Should it be the oldest? It should probably be the oldest, Rueben. But we read in Genesis that because of his sin, Rueben is not selected as the seed. It was not God's purpose for him to be the seed. If it's not Rueben, maybe it's Joseph because Joseph is the oldest son of the wife that Jacob actually did love—Rachel. It looks like God is revealing Himself through dreams to Joseph, so maybe this seed is going to be Joseph. Yet we find out that it's not Joseph.

We find out that God, for His own purposes, chooses Judah to be the seed. This story right here, Genesis 38, involving Tamar and Judah, helps us understand who Judah is. He is the line through which the seed—the eventual Savior, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham—will come.

Now, if you're a student of the Bible and you hear the name Judah, you probably generally have good thoughts about him. Judah is the name of the favored tribe in the Old Testament. It's the name of the Southern Kingdom when the tribes split. Jesus is known as "The Lion of Judah." You probably would naturally think good thoughts of Judah. Not here though. Not in Genesis 38 which gives us a window into Judah's character as it was at that time. Let's begin by taking a look at Judah's character as it's revealed in God's Word beginning at Genesis 38:1:

*"It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her and went in to her, and she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah. Judah was in Chezib when she bore him.*

*"And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD put him to death. Then Judah said to Onan, 'Go in to your brother's wife*

*and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring (or seed, or descendents) for your brother.’ But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his. So whenever he went in to his brother’s wife he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother. And what he did was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and he put him to death also. Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, ‘Remain a widow in your father’s house, till Shelah my son grows up’—for he feared that he would die, like his brothers. So Tamar went and remained in her father’s house.”*

Are you feeling the Christmas warmth this morning? We get a clear picture of Judah here. We begin to get a picture of Judah in the previous chapter as he and his brothers decide to kill their brother, Joseph. Only Judah is a shrewd one declaring, “Why should we kill him and get nothing out of it? Why don’t we sell him into slavery and then at least we’ll make something on the deal.” It was his idea to sell Joseph rather than put him to death.

We see more of the same in terms of his character in Genesis 38. Judah appears to be someone who sees what he wants and takes it. That’s just the way he is.

First of all, we notice that he’s a friend of the world. Genesis 38:1 says, “*Judah went down from his brothers.*” Now remember that this little band is the beginning of God’s Old Testament people—the chosen people. So for him to separate himself from them is no small thing. Then he associates with the people of the world—the pagan culture around him. He starts hanging out with this Adullamite named Hirah. While he’s doing that, he basically sees a woman, takes her and gets her pregnant. Boom, boom, boom. “This is what I want. This is what I’m going to do. This is how I act.” He’s a willing slave to his own lustful desires. If he wants something, he takes it. It’s all about him and he’s passing this on to his kids.

Notice what it says about his sons. He takes a wife for his son, Er, named Tamar. But God’s assessment of Er is that he is so wicked in God’s sight, God decides to put him to death. Now certainly as the Creator of the heavens and the earth, as the Judge to Whom we all are accountable, God has every right to do that for those who have rebelled against Him. It’s only by His mercy and grace that you and I take another breath. But how wicked must this guy have been for God to decide to take him out? He’s the oldest and dies, without any male descendants.

We read in the Bible, as well as in the ancient world, about something called the Levirate Law. Because of the importance of descendants—family heritage and the homeland—the Levirate Law required that if the oldest brother is married and dies without any male descendants, it is the responsibility of the next oldest brother to take what would have been

his sister-in-law as his wife in order to produce male heirs. These sons would not be his heirs but heirs in his brother's line. (See Deuteronomy 25 also.)

Onan realizes that if he does this, the inheritance isn't going to him but to the child who is now the descendant of his deceased brother. So instead of honoring this law and his sister-in-law, he abuses this. Judah willingly allows his daughter-in-law to be abused and dishonored and Onan makes sure there aren't going to be any descendants through him. If he derives any pleasure from the whole system, it is all the better for him. And Judah just lets it happen. But this is wicked in God's eyes so God pronounces judgment on Onan.

At this point Judah is concerned. "I've got three sons. Two of them are gone. I only have one left. He's not to the marrying age yet." So while he's trying to figure out what he's going to do (if he's going to do anything) he tells Tamar, "Go back to your family and live there as a widow until Shelah, the younger son, is of marrying age." Presumably he makes it sound to Tamar as if he's going to give Shelah to her, but clearly he is not. As we read in the story, he doesn't have any intention of doing that. He doesn't want to see his third son die, not realizing or admitting that it was because of their own wickedness.

At this point, as we look at the person, the character, of Tamar. She would appear to be in a nearly hopeless, if not totally hopeless, situation. As a woman in the ancient world, she has very few options. Technically, she's engaged to this other guy but Judah is not making the marriage happen, so she's stuck. But we learn something about Tamar and her character in contrast to the wickedness of Judah's character. She's not willing to simply be a victim. So she takes very decisive action.

Now, a warning label here: The action that she takes is not necessarily commendable but I want us to realize she is acting on the amount of light and revelation she has—and it's not very much. But she's acting on it. We know that she hasn't given up hope because when the opportune time comes, she puts a very shrewd plan into action. You can see it beginning in verse 12:

*"In the course of time the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter, died. When Judah was comforted, he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. And when Tamar was told, 'Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep,' she took off her widow's garments and covered herself with a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage."*

Judah was not willing to honor her in this way:

*“When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. He turned to her at the roadside and said, ‘Come, let me come in to you,’ for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, ‘What will you give me, that you may come in to me?’ He answered, ‘I will send you a young goat from the flock.’ And she said, ‘If you give me a pledge, until you send it.” He said, ‘What pledge shall I give you?’ She replied, ‘Your signet and your cord and your staff that is in your hand.’ So he gave them to her and went in to her, and she conceived by him. Then she arose and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood.*

*“When Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite to take back the pledge from the woman's hand, he did not find her. And he asked the men of the place, ‘Where is the cult prostitute who was at Enaim at the roadside?’ And they said, ‘No cult prostitute has been here.’ So he returned to Judah and said, ‘I have not found her. Also, the men of the place said, “No cult prostitute has been here.”’ And Judah replied, ‘Let her keep the things as her own, or we shall be laughed at. You see, I sent this young goat, and you did not find her.’”*

Are you feeling the Christmas spirit yet? It's coming.

Now while the details of the plan that Tamar puts into action here are not commendable and have sin in them to be sure, her object of continuing the family line is commendable. We have to compare what's going on here.

Judah, a son of Israel, a covenant child, has a disregard for the covenant promises of God and is not ensuring that they continue. He's off the radar map. He's gone rogue. He's not in on God's plan for redemption through the seed.

Tamar, a Canaanite from a completely pagan background, who has a limited scope and understanding of the promises of God because it's coming through these wicked men who are imperfect witnesses at best. She takes massive risks to attempt to provide a seed for her deceased husband. She takes advantage of Judah's unchecked sexual appetite that has caused him to sin in a number of ways so far. Judah doesn't realize it, but he's been set up and he's about to realize it in verse 24:

*“About three months later Judah was told, ‘Tamar your daughter-in-law has been immoral. Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality.’ And Judah said, ‘Bring her out, and let her be burned.’”*

He's not interested in knowing the details. He's not interested in finding out who the guy is. He has a very convenient answer. He can make his problem of Tamar go away. “Good. She's messed up. Take her out and burn her.” Now, while execution was a potential punishment for sexual immorality during this time, the idea of burning was an especially

cruel way to carry it out. The wording here is classic Judah—short and to the point. “Take her out and burn her. Get it done with.” That’s Judah.

But he’s about to have his eyes opened up. Verse 25 says,

*“As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, ‘By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant.’ And she said, ‘Please identify whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff.’”*

The signet ring, the cord and the staff—he may as well have left his wallet with his ID in it because that’s how these things functioned in the ancient world. They were personalized. Even the staff was personalized. The signet was something you would roll into soft clay or wax to make your mark. It was your ID on a cord and he had left it with her. So there’s no doubting who it belonged to. Notice what she says to wake him up, to open his eyes to his own unrighteousness and his own sin. “Identify please.” In Hebrew it’s one word—recognize. “Do you recognize these?”

Look back at Genesis 37:32. Judah, on behalf of the brothers, brings a bloody coat of many colors to his father, Jacob. They’re lying to their father. They’ve sold Joseph into slavery but they dipped the coat in some animal blood and let Jacob assume he was killed by a wild animal. Judah takes the coat, stained with blood and takes it to his father, Jacob. “Recognize? Do you recognize this coat?” Of course he recognizes it; he gave it to Joseph.

Now Tamar has these items that belong to Judah brought to him. “Recognize this? Do you recognize these things?” And Judah does. But by God’s grace, Judah does much more than recognize that these things belong to him. He recognizes his sin. He recognizes his rebellion. Verse 26 says, *“Then Judah identified them and said, ‘She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah.’ And he did not know her again.”* Judah identified them and in identifying them, he identified his own sin and his own hypocrisy. He basically repents. He says, “She is more righteous than I. She, imperfectly, was seeking the right thing and I wasn’t. Not that she was righteous but she was more righteous than I. She was seeking for righteousness and I was not.”

There’s a transformation that happens in verse 26. It is the peak of the story. It is the punch line of the story yet there’s another paragraph—verses 27 through 30—hat follows it. It’s the story of the birth of their child. Birth stories are very important in the book of Genesis and this one is no less important. That’s why the writer took several lines to tell it. He could have just told us Perez was born. But instead, in verse 27, he lets us know,

*“When the time of her labor came, there were twins in her womb. And when she was in labor, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, ‘This one came out first.’”*

There’s the first born. Maybe he’s the seed. She wanted to identify him as the firstborn—as the potential seed.

*“But as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out. And she said, ‘What a breach you have made for yourself!’ [Or, What a breakthrough you have made of yourself.] Therefore his name was called Perez [which means breach, or breakout, or breakthrough]. Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah.”*

The very name Perez tells us of the breakthrough that is happening in Judah’s life. The rest of the story in Genesis is of a changed man in the person of Judah. Later on, the brothers go to Egypt because there’s a famine in the land and they don’t recognize that Joseph is the one in charge. They’re trying to purchase grain from him but Joseph recognizes them. He’s giving them a hard time; he’s testing them to see if their character has changed at all. It’s Judah who takes the lead; it’s Judah who first of all offers himself to his father as security to bring Benjamin back to Egypt. Then when Joseph wants to put Benjamin in jail, it’s Judah who offers himself to take Benjamin’s place. Judah offers to be the substitute—to be Joseph’s prisoner—bearing the punishment of slavery intended for Benjamin for allegedly stealing Joseph’s cup. It’s at this point when Judah is negotiating with Joseph, that it’s clear that Judah is a changed man. It’s at that point Joseph can control himself no longer and he reveals to his brothers who he truly is—that he is their brother, Joseph.

This is why the genealogy of Jesus Christ mentions Tamar and Judah. This is why chapter 38 is in Genesis. This seemingly shameful and embarrassing chapter is in the Bible to show that Jesus willingly came to bear our shame. Judah and Tamar are mentioned in the line of Jesus to let us all know that there is nothing new under the sun; that there is no sin, no shame, that cannot be redeemed in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus came, able to be a substitute for sinners, because He became human and identified with them. He was without sin but He fully engaged in the sinful, fallen existence that we live in—so much so that His family history bears out wicked, wicked things, as does mine and yours. Jesus, the Righteous One, more righteous than any human being, is the One Who breaks through into our fallen, messed up world to transform self-absorbed sinners into humble servants. The story of Tamar and Judah demonstrates that. And

Christmas is the story of God breaking through the darkness of our sinful sordid lives with the light of His grace and the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We should take great comfort in the fact that Tamar is a mother of Jesus.

In the few minutes we have left, consider the truth of Christ being the One Who breaks into our messed up world to transform us from self-absorbed sinners into humble saints. Then let's apply this based on the three titles—Messiah, Son of David and Son of Abraham—that Matthew gives us in his gospel.

### **1. As the Messiah, Jesus Breaks Through our Sin to be our Savior**

First, understanding the Messiah. As the Messiah, Jesus breaks through our sin to be our Savior. That's the first thing we need to take away from this passage. As the Messiah, as the Christ, as the anointed One, Jesus breaks through our sin to be our Savior. We look at a passage like Genesis 38 and we say, "Oh, there's a dysfunctional family. Oh, there are some really wicked people in there." Yet the Bible tells us that all of us have sinned and fallen far short of God's glory and that Jesus has come to save us—to save us from the penalty we rightly deserve for our sin. Humanly speaking, we look at Judah and think of all the things that guy deserved. Yet by God's grace, he didn't receive that; he received mercy because of God's transforming work in his life.

This year, as we begin to celebrate Advent and move toward our Christmas celebrations, each one of us needs to begin at this point with the title of Jesus as the Messiah Who breaks through our sin to be our Savior. We need to ask ourselves, "Have I been transformed—have I been transformed the way Judah was transformed? Have I recognized? Have I looked at myself and recognized my own sin and rebellion and realized I have no one to turn to except Jesus for eternal life? Have I come to Him in repentance and faith? Is He my Savior?"

For those who are trusting in Jesus as their Savior, do you still look to Him? Does He continue to be your refuge? This is a question I am constantly trying to discipline myself to ask: Where do I run for refuge? When something is difficult in my life; when little annoyances come up; when big problems come up, where am I running for refuge? Where am I looking for comfort? Where am I looking for help?

I was reading Psalm 52 this past week and was struck by some verses at the end of that chapter. David says in verse 7, "*See the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches and sought refuge in his own destruction!*" Now you

can substitute anything in there. “Trusted in the abundance of his talents. Trusted in the abundance of his experience. Trusted in the abundance of something that would soothe him or her for a little while, and sought refuge in his own destruction.” So often the places where we’re seeking refuge, God says, are the places that lead to our destruction. But the Psalmist says in 59:8-9a,

*“But I am like a green olive tree  
in the house of God.  
I trust in the steadfast love of God  
forever and ever.  
I will thank you forever,  
because you have done it.”*

I couldn’t help but think of when Jesus was on the cross and said, “It is finished. You have done it.” *“I will wait for your name, for it is good, in the presence of the godly”* (Psalm 52:9b). Jesus has come as our Messiah to break through our sin and shame and to be our Savior.

## 2. **The Son of David, Who Breaks Through our Pride to be our King**

He also came as the Son of David, Who breaks through our pride to be our King. It’s well-reflected in the second verse of “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” that we sang a few moments ago. Jesus was:

Born Thy people to deliver,  
Born a child and yet a King,  
Born to reign in us forever,  
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.  
By Thine own eternal Spirit  
Rule in all our hearts alone;  
By Thine all sufficient merit,  
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

He came as a king to reign in us. We trust Jesus as our Savior; He is our Lord as well. He couldn’t save us if He wasn’t our Lord. But is that lordship being realized in our lives? So often there’s a struggle in us between “the kingdom of me,” (the kingdom of self) and God’s kingdom. Tamar is an example to us of seeking God’s kingdom purposes. She could have concluded that life was over for her. She was in what everyone would say was a hopeless situation. We certainly want to have compassion on people who are in seemingly hopeless situations.

Maybe you feel like you’re in a situation or a relationship in your life and it’s hopeless. God very well may be encouraging you to bear up and trust Him in those

circumstances. There's not a guarantee that God will change your circumstances, though there is a guarantee in Scripture that He wants to work out His good purposes and to perfect you for His glory through them. Yet, I think we should be careful to say that a situation is hopeless and it could never change. In fact, I want to suggest that it is prideful to say that because who are we? Do we have infinite knowledge? Am I the Sovereign King Who rules all things well? Who am I to conclude that the story is over when God is the One who writes the final chapters?

Think of the book of Joel where the prophet is predicting a massive locust plague that's going to come in as an act of judgment. There is a promise from God in Joel 2:25 that He will restore the years that the locusts have devoured. You might feel like there are years or there's a certain timeframe in your life where the locusts devoured—where they just destroyed things. What a waste that time was! And yet there's a promise from God that He, in His redemptive grace, can restore that in your life if you trust in Him.

Certainly Advent reminds us that Jesus comes as the long-expected Savior. He comes in the fullness of time. Not too late, but just at the right time. He's our King.

### 3. **The Son of Abraham, Who Breaks Through our Fears to become our Leader**

Finally, as the Son of Abraham, Jesus breaks through our fears to become our leader. Jesus came as the seed of Abraham through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. Advent reminds us that Jesus began a mission to bless all the families of the earth when He came to this planet but that He also gives us a mission to bring that blessing of the gospel to others.

Matthew begins his gospel declaring that Jesus is the Son of Abraham—all families of the earth are blessed through Him. He ends his gospel in chapter 28 with a commission to His disciples to, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*" Christmas is a wonderful time to be reminded of that—to be reminded that everybody needs Jesus.

If we think of Tamar like the other mothers of Jesus mentioned in Matthew 1, she was outside the covenant family of God. How do we view those outside this room, those who don't know Christ, those whom we're inviting to the Christmas concert, those with whom we might share the gospel over the Christmas season? Are they targets? Are they people who will fill some chairs and make us feel better if this room is filled? Or do we

have compassion on them? Do we see them as Jesus saw them—lost, straying, without a Shepherd? Have we forgotten what it means, in the words of the Apostle Paul, to be alienated, strangers to the covenants of promise, to be without hope and without God in the world?

At Christmas we're reminded that Jesus came to be God with us. He came that we might be with God; that we might have hope in this world. We're reminded that by His grace this hope will break through to others. This hope should break out of this place and break into our community. Amen.

Heavenly Father, each of us was lost and without hope and without You in the world. Father, there are some in this room who are still in that state. I've prayed that the light of Your glorious gospel would break in and that You would open hearts to recognize their sin and turn to Jesus in repentance and faith as their only Savior. Father, I pray that You would renew our joy and our vigor. Renew our enjoyment of Jesus as revealed in the gospel during this Advent season. I pray that the truth of all that He is for us would break through and would break out all around us in our celebrations, in our conversations and in all that we do. In Jesus name. Amen.

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*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

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