

Christmas Hope: Tamar

SCOTT HOEZEE

When I was a kid, sometimes we visited people who had a large family Bible on the living room coffee table. Very often, when I opened these Bibles, I found on one of the very first pages, a family tree; and in most cases, the blank spaces on the family tree had been filled in, listing great great grandparents, uncles, aunts, parents, siblings, and so on, right down to the family currently owning this family Bible. I am not sure when that tradition began, but on page 1 of the New Testament we also encounter a family tree. Matthew gives us Jesus' family tree; and it is an interesting tree, as we will see beginning today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is the first episode of what will be a five-episode series that will center on the first seventeen verses of Matthew 1. This is often used as an Advent and Christmas reflection, and that is how we are going to be using it, too. We will have four sort of Advent programs and a Christmas program to cap it off; but to begin, let's set the stage a little bit, Darrell. Why would Matthew choose to open his gospel the way he does?

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, I mean, if you look at it, it doesn't seem like a very exciting way to open a book. It doesn't have like a hook or an action item or some crescendo or something like that. It starts with the names of the people in the genealogy of Jesus...and so, so-and-so the father, so-and-so the father, so-and-so...it is not exactly the most exciting way to start a book, but there is intention behind it for Matthew. So, as we see here in the first three verses, it says:

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham: ²Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar...

It is going to keep going on like this.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Fourteen more verses like that, and let's hang onto the name of Tamar from the end of verse 3 there, because that is going to be the focus of this program. So again, as you say, Darrell, what editor would let a novelist get away with opening a novel this way? I mean, they would say: No, no, no... There has to be kind of a MacGuffin. There has to be a...

DARRELL DELANEY

Setting.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; something to hook the reader because you only have a couple paragraphs, and if somebody isn't engaged, they are going to close the book. As a matter of practice, Darrell, I suspect most of us most of the

time, we just actually begin reading Matthew at verse 18...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which is the brief story of Joseph and the dream and the name of Immanuel, but that is a mistake, because Matthew knew what he was up to.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience, and his idea and main theme of this book, if we study it correctly, he wants to show that Jesus is the coming and promised Messiah; and so, he wants to show genetically that Jesus is the Davidic bloodline. So, he traces it back to David and Abraham, because he wants the people of Israel to understand, because genealogy is extremely important in the history of Israel.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; we think that maybe some of Matthew's readers...we think he wrote to Jews maybe in the city of Antioch, where there were a lot of synagogues in the ancient world and in Matthew's time in Antioch...we think some of Matthew's readers already had embraced Jesus as Messiah, but we think Matthew is trying to convince still other readers to embrace Jesus as Messiah; and if you want to get people from Israel to buy the idea that Jesus is the Messiah...Jesus of Nazareth...prerequisite number one is he has to be in the line of David.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You have to establish his credentials; and so, you have to use a family tree to establish that King David was the great, great, great, whatever, grandfather of Jesus. So, that is one of the things Matthew was up to, but it is not the only thing.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, then also, Matthew is trying to explain that not only is he the coming Messiah that is in the Davidic line, but the promise in Genesis 12 to Abram is that all the nations of the earth will be blessed through Abram; and so, if you want to trace him back to Abraham, then you realize that this messianic gift, whom Christ is, is not just for the Jewish people, it is for the entire world; and so, every one who comes to believe in the name of Jesus Christ gets to be part of this bloodline spiritually speaking—this family.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, on *Groundwork*, we have done a series on Jonah before, and one of the things we observed with Jonah is Jonah represented all Israel in the sense that he wanted God all to themselves. They wanted God to be only the God of the Israelites, not the God of the Ninevites or the Babylonians or the Egyptians or the Phoenicians. They wanted God all to themselves. Jonah was written to shake Israel out of that insularity, but it doesn't work because by the time Jesus comes, we have the religious establishment with the scribes and the Pharisees running everything, and it is still an insiders' only club; and there were even Jewish people in Jesus' day who weren't good enough for the Pharisees.

DARRELL DELANEY

That's right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Matthew really wants to open it up to remind Israel that Jesus the Messiah is for more than just Israel; and the way Matthew does that...one of the ways...is he includes the names of four women, but not the four

women who you might expect to see in a Jewish family tree.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, the highlights, if you will, would be Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah...they are all Jewish women...they are all Israelites; but these are not the women that he picks. He picks women who originally were not Israelites. He is picking Tamar, who is a Canaanite, he is picking Rahab, the Jerichoite, he is picking Ruth, the Moabite, he is picking Bathsheba, who was originally married to Uriah the Hittite; and so, it is actually intentional that Matthew would pick these four women who were not part of the original bloodline of Israel until they were married in; and that Jesus' bloodline is actually a beautiful mosaic of how there are different people coming in.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, it is a very clever way for Matthew to...if you were a Jewish reader of this family tree, you would have been stopped dead in your tracks to read the names of Tamar and Rahab and Ruth and Bathsheba, because family trees, you know, in a very patriarchal culture, are usually only the men, right? The father of the father of the father of. So, it is unusual to include the women's names; really unusual to include these names. So, whereas we might regard this family tree as kind of boring so we just skip down to verse 18, Jewish people would find this really interesting, and maybe even a little scandalous: Wow! What are you doing including these foreigners? But what he was doing is trying to open up peoples' imaginations to see that Jesus the Messiah came for more than just Israel.

It is also interesting, Darrell, that some of the stories...not Ruth's so much...but the stories of Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba...they have some, shall we say, interesting elements included.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is a good way to put it, Scott. I don't think you want to teach those in Sunday school in great detail. I think that, you know, it is more of a rated R...it is more of a serious situation of issues that we are going to get into with each of these stories...but I want to make sure that we don't make these women the problem or that they are the villains or that there is a reason why these things have gone wrong. I just think it is important that God highlights that these stories are not pretty and neat stories. They are messy and he includes them intentionally. He doesn't hide them from us; and we can take pleasure in understanding that our stories are not that way either; and we want to talk about what Tamar's story will be in the next segment, so stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork* and this first program in a five-part Advent and Christmas series that we are going to center on Matthew 1 and the first seventeen verses of the family tree of Jesus. Darrell, we just established that Matthew includes the names of four women, none of whom were Israelites. So, he is already suggesting to his readers to open up their minds to the idea that the Messiah came for more than just Israel; but some of these stories also have some other elements to them, and the first person that is named at the end of verse 3, which we read in the previous part of the program, was Tamar.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that story, actually, we are going to get into here, but to get a little bit of context, it is kind of a parenthetical story because we started talking about Joseph in Genesis 37, and then while we are trying to figure out what is happening with him, he is getting sold into slavery into Egypt, and then they take his coat and all this stuff happens, and we are like hanging on the edge to find out what is going to happen with Joseph, and then it is like, okay, pause Joseph and now we are going to introduce this story about Tamar; and then it will pick back up with Joseph in Chapter 39. So, I don't know why it is set up that way, but it is in between Joseph's story.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it seems like an interruption. I mean, at the end of Genesis 37 we are kind of on pins and needles: What is going to happen to Joseph? The last line is: Meanwhile, you know, Joseph was sold to somebody named Potiphar. Oh, good; so, we go to 38 and it is like, well, what happens...whoa, whoa, whoa; major time out. We are going to talk about one of Joseph's brothers, Judah; and it is a little complicated to set this up, so we will try to boil it down; but this story is told in Genesis 38. Before we even catch up on Genesis 38, let's remind ourselves, Darrell, there was this law in Israel—this tradition—you know, they had arranged marriages in those days; and so, if you had three or four sons, you would arrange for a marriage for your oldest son first. If something happens to him, if he dies, then the father of the family has to give that wife to the next son, and if something happens to him, the next son, and so on and so on until you are out of sons, I guess. So, that was the tradition of how you took care of your daughter-in-law. You made sure she was taken care of by giving her to the next brother in line. So, that is an important thing to remember, because otherwise we are not going to understand the key dynamic of Genesis 38.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, that is actually where we pick up because after they have this thing with Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery, we go on to talk about Judah, and he lives with the Canaanites, and his wife gave birth to three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah; and Er got married to a Canaanite woman named Tamar, which is what this chapter is about, Tamar's life. When Er died, then...apparently, he was wicked because he died immediately; so, the next in line is Onan, and then Onan marries her, but then he also didn't fare any better. He died as well; and then, so, Judah knew that Tamar needed to marry Shelah next, but obviously...I mean, in this passage it wasn't the time because Shelah was young or too young or whatnot.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, that is what Judah said anyway, that Shelah was a little bit young. So, he tells Tamar: Just cool your jets; just wait a little bit; but then time went on and Judah actually doesn't do anything. Shelah maybe got old enough to be married, but he still doesn't give Tamar... Maybe Judah has concluded Tamar's bad luck. I mean, he's lost two sons in a row who were married to Tamar. Maybe he thinks she is just bad luck, and he doesn't want to lose Shelah, too, but whatever, he fails; and so, we read this now starting at verse 12 in Genesis 38. His wife dies...Judah's wife dies.

When Judah had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah to the men who were shearing his sheep...¹³When Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is on his way to Timnah to shear sheep,"¹⁴she took off her widow's clothes and covered herself with a veil to disguise herself and then she sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that, although Shelah had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife.¹⁵When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute because she had covered her face.¹⁶Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, he went over to her by the roadside and said, "Come now, let me sleep with you." "And what will you give me to sleep with you?" she asked.¹⁷"I will send you a young goat from my flock," he said. "Will you give me something as a pledge until you send it?" she asked.¹⁸He said, "What pledge shall I give you?" "Your seal and its cord and the staff in your hand," she answered. So he gave them to her and slept with her and she became pregnant by Judah.¹⁹After she left, she took off her veil and put on her widow's clothes again.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, wow; huh; this is not something that we are going to tell the kids...

SCOTT HOEZEE

No; we warned you, it is not a Sunday school story.

DARRELL DELANEY

Now, why in the world would the author of Genesis put this in here? I mean, these circumstances on how she got pregnant, there is a lot of drama involved there, there is a lot of scandal involved, and deception even. This person, Tamar, is included in the line of David intentionally by Matthew with all this stuff happening.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the story goes on from there. Judah doesn't know who Tamar is. In the story, she disappears; and he asks the people of Timnah: Hey, where is that prostitute? And they said: What prostitute? There is no prostitute in this town. Well, okay, well, whatever; and he kind of forgets about it, but then we pick up the action at verse 24.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: About three months later, Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant." Judah said, "Bring her out and have her burned to death!" ²⁵As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. "I am pregnant by the man who owns these," she said. And she added, "See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are." ²⁶Judah recognized them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah." And he did not sleep with her again.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, dum, dum, dubba dum, right? The penny drops. Judah is huffing and puffing in righteous indignation over the sin of his daughter-in-law: Oh, how dare she! And then it turns out like oops. I think I am the one who messed up even more than Tamar. Not only did he fail to give Tamar to his son, the next in line, but he assumed she was a prostitute, which means apparently Judah thought sleeping with prostitutes was okay, too, which some of us would have issues with, I would think.

DARRELL DELANEY

That's a problem.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But in all of this odd way, Tamar becomes a member of the covenant people of Israel; Tamar becomes a great, great, great, great...great grandmother of Jesus. That is amazing!

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, and even though there is sin in that story and there is shame in that story and there is prostitution in that story, it is interesting how the intention of the story is to show that these stories are not clean, these stories are not neat, these stories are not perfect, but these are the things that are included in the scripture, and that gives me hope because my life is not squeaky clean either. I have had problems, I have had situations, and I realize that God still wants to use my story, too. So, Matthew puts Tamar in the story of Matthew 1, and we want to know what it means, and if there is any application in our own lives in the appearance of the family tree. So, we will find that out in the next segment, so stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Darrell, at the end of most of our *Groundwork* programs, as at the end of sermons that you and I preach, you sort of get to the part where you say: Okay, so what? So, we have had Tamar included in Matthew's family tree of Jesus in Matthew Chapter 1:3. We have reviewed Tamar's story from Genesis 38; and as we were just saying, it would have been so easy to leave this story out, right? I mean, if you skipped from the end of Genesis 37: Meanwhile, in Egypt, Joseph had been sold to someone named Potiphar; if the very next thing you read was Genesis 39:1, where we hear the story of Potiphar and Potiphar's wife, you wouldn't have

missed a thing...you wouldn't have missed a beat. Genesis 38 did not have to be there. How easy would it have been to leave it out, given how bad Judah comes off looking in the story—one of the patriarchs of Israel, right; the tribe of Judah becomes the key tribe eventually. It would have been really easy to leave this out, but the author of Genesis didn't, and so, why and so what?

DARRELL DELANEY

What is interesting to me, Scott, is that the issues of the text are not avoided or swept under the rug, so to speak; that these issues are actually brought into the forefront, and it all connects to the genealogy of Jesus' family tree. Each woman has a story attached to her name, and these stories have some issues in them; and that is something that you are going to see every time we go through each of these stories; and the people that are not part of Israel, that have been brought from the outside in, they play an absolutely key role if they are in the bloodline of Jesus Christ; and so, that is important that, not only is the drama not ignored, but also that even though they have this stuff going on, they are still part of Jesus' bloodline.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is interesting; so, we just said the author of Genesis or the final editor of Genesis could have deleted this story and you would never miss it...you would never miss it. You would just stick with Joseph. It is the main drama anyway; but the author/editor of Genesis left it in for a reason. Matthew could have left Tamar out, too, right? We wouldn't have missed it...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Judah is the father of Perez and you know, you didn't need to hear about Tamar; but even as the author of Genesis had a reason for keeping Chapter 38 when he could have deleted it, Matthew had a reason, and you know, kind of with the exception of Ruth, these women...and again, we said we don't want anybody walking away from this series thinking we are saying women are the problem...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No; Tamar was a victim. Most of these women are victims of their societies, victims of the sins of men, right? But the stories attached to them are kind of like skeletons in Jesus' family closet...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Matthew didn't have to allude to them, but he does. Maybe, Darrell, because Matthew wants to remind us: You know what? Stories like this...that is why Jesus came.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You cannot even tell Jesus' story without telling sinful stories, and that is why Jesus came.

DARRELL DELANEY

Why Jesus had to come to earth for our salvation, this is definitely the reason why he came. All of these stories have an element of sin in them, an element of challenge in them, and the reason why Jesus had to come to save us from all the penalties of these things is because of the drama in our lives. The things that we

may or may not have caused. In Tamar's case, and in some of these women's cases, they didn't cause these things; and so, the reason why he had to come, to deliver us from the sin and evil that you are seeing in these stories, shows up even in his own story. So, you cannot even tell the story of how Jesus got here without having the drama and those issues and those things being explained.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And maybe specifically about Tamar and Judah, Darrell...another lesson. Well, maybe Judah and Tamar remind us of the grand truth we read in Romans 8: ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long. We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. So, could Judah's sin, could Tamar's sin, could this tawdry story separate them finally from the love of God?

DARRELL DELANEY

And Paul says it loud for the people in the back: NO! There is nothing that can separate you from the love of God. No matter how much Judah messed up, no matter the problem that Tamar had faced through all of this, and even forcing Judah to do the right thing is going to be dicey; it was dicey in this picture. It was really, really a problem. There is a sexual relationship that is inappropriate between family members. There is a problem there, but that does not separate them from the love of God, by no means. It cannot cast them out of the family of God on a permanent basis, because his love and his mercy somehow work its way through these problems. That gives me hope because I have problems...I have situations...I have things that I am not proud of...the sins in my life; and somehow God's grace and mercy weaves its way through to get to my heart to change me, to help me; and that is hopeful for anybody.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, Darrell, I don't know about you, if you have had this experience, but I know as a pastor when I have done sermon series from the book of Genesis and I don't skip Genesis 38...I don't skip the story...but you sort of get vibes from the congregation that they wish you had, right? I did an Advent preaching series on the genealogy of Matthew, which means sermon number one was about Tamar, and I had some people kind of say: You know, we didn't really need to hear that—our kids didn't need to hear that. What's that got to do with Advent? What's that got to do with Christmas? Come on, let's keep it, you know, all sparkly and tinselly, and you know how we like to glitz up Advent and Christmas; but God doesn't want us to do that because otherwise we lose the why of the birth in Bethlehem. We lose the reason Jesus had to come and be born in that way.

DARRELL DELANEY

I have been a part of churches in the past, Scott, where they want you to send a parental advisory a couple of weeks before you are going to actually preach something like this because they don't want their kids...they want to shelter their ears or dismiss them early or whatever to make sure that they don't hear all this stuff that they think is over their heads; but God does not shield us from the problems and the brokenness of our world and our lives, and we cannot just glaze over it and sing *Joy to the World* and *Kumbaya* or whatever we want to sing. The drama is why Jesus came, and he is the one who is trying to show us that even in his birth...even in his genealogy...Matthew is making it clear that it wasn't squeaky clean, and neither are our lives either.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, exactly; yes, some of us have had the experience of suggesting that...we celebrate communion—we celebrate the eucharist—the Lord's Supper—on Christmas day...and people push back against that. It is like he was just born, he is a little baby. We don't have to think about when he died. Why do you want to think about how he died on the day we are celebrating his birth? It is like, because that is why he was born, so he could die. Some people say: Let's just sing *Joy to the World* and leave all this gross stuff out. Okay, but the third stanza of *Joy to the World* says: No more let thorns and sin infest the ground; and then (God's saving

love in Jesus) will extend far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found. So, Jesus' birth at Christmas and all of our Advent expectations...Darrell, it is all about dealing with the raw reality of our human sin, and Tamar's story reminds us of that, but it also reminds us that the real message of Christmas is that because of what Jesus has done, none of our sinfulness will have the last word in our lives, only God's grace has the last word, thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee; and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue the study of the women in Jesus' genealogy by looking at Rahab's story.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you or to tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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