

The Sting of Consequence, The Hope of Grace: *Part 2*

2 Samuel 13

*In him we have **redemption** through his blood, the **forgiveness** of our trespasses, according to the riches of his **grace**,⁸ which he **lavished** upon us, in all wisdom and insight*

Introduction: On April 26, 1986, a seemingly innocuous safety test took place in a little known part of Ukraine at a nuclear power plant in Chernobyl. Because of fatal flaws in design, stubborn hierarchical bureaucracy, and human error, a meltdown of reactor #4 produced one of the largest and devastating explosions experienced by mankind. With temperatures reaching critical levels and nuclear material mixing with graphite rods, multiple explosions were seen and felt for miles around, blowing off a 1000-ton steel and concrete roof like it was a lid on a soda bottle. The explosion released 10 metric tons of radioactive material, which is equivalent to 1,575 Hiroshima bombs by weight, as well as 400 times more radioactive material into the atmosphere. A perpetual fire burned for weeks, causing a slow but necessary evacuation of the city of Pripyet, which housed the families of the workers in the factory. It took the Soviet government **206 days** to build a covering over the ongoing nuclear fire, hastily covering the sight with tons of steel and cement, surrounding it and calling it a **Sarcophagus**. This meant for 206 days, tons and tons of radioactive material went skyward, exposing hundreds of miles and countless people throughout Europe to the effects. Even today, it is difficult to calculate the number of lives directly affected, from deaths in the first few years to hundreds who had cancer as a result.

What is fascinating about the solution to mitigate the nuclear fallout was to try to box in the perpetual fire and reaction, but it continued to burn, leak, and eat through the walls and ground. In 2016, another structure, a **35,000-ton new safe containment** building was retrofitted over top of the Sarcophagus, with the goal to dismantle the old one by 2024, but that date has now been pushed to 2029. Radioactive material and nuclear reactions could be covered, but they could not be contained. Even today, the hope is that the new containment will last **100 years**, but after that, another solution will have to be delivered. In the meantime, there are some who believe that the molten material could burn downward, effecting ground water, which would have devastating consequences to people in expansive radius.

Why are we starting with something that happened almost 40 years ago in a place far, far away?

Because the Chernobyl meltdown and attempt to cover and lock away an ongoing reaction is an apt illustration of what can go on in our hearts today. We have all experienced some sort of trauma, pain, abuse, hurt, or distress that causes a reaction in our minds and hearts, and far too often the solution we come up with is to try to box it in, cover it up in the vast recesses of our hearts, believing that it will not bleed out into the rest of our lives and hoping that if we hide the key, no one will be able to access it. *But this solution cannot sustain, and past pain will leak out, and it will affect the rest of our life, whether we think it will or not.*

This morning we will take another look at a tragic story that ends without resolution, or at least without a hopeful resolution. In this, we want to consider the story of **Tamar** in light of the **rest of Scripture**, where we will find **grace and truth, hope and joy, and the resources we need to walk through the type of pain that cannot be solved with medicine or that goes away.**

THE REALITY OF OUR MANKIND'S MAKEUP AND EXPECTATION

Before considering what happened to Tamar and considering what she would be facing afterward, we first must think through *how God made us* and *what He promises about this world and our well-being here*:

- **We are BOTH material AND Immaterial beings** – One of the greatest truths about humanity is that we are **distinctly made in God's image**, a differentiation from the rest of all Creation (Gen. 1:26-27). In this, every human for all time has inherent value and worth, since God crafted us uniquely and creatively for His pleasure and glory. That means that both **men AND women possess the same value**, which is reinforced in the NT understanding of the church (see Gal. 3:28-29). We were created with personhood, formed for **relationship**, and have been given a will to make decisions and choices.

In this makeup we have the *external, physical, and material part of our bodies*. We have a **physical** heart, brain, and other organs that both work to keep us alive and because of the tainted nature of sin, will wear out eventually. When we experience **trauma**, our physical bodies can bear the brunt. If we get a concussion or have a stroke, our brains can experience damage, which has repercussions with the other parts of our physical body. God has given us opportunities to address and even heal when our material parts are damaged, and this happens through **medical breakthroughs** like surgery and medication, and in that, we praise the Lord that He is the Great Physician that gives grace to many who commit their lives to this kind of material care (Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31)

But we also possess and **immaterial part**, and this is where trauma really digs in. When the Bible refers to the heart, it most often means the immaterial part, which is the seat of our emotions, volition, and affections. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37) is NOT a call to love God with the physical organ of our heart or our brains, but with the part of us that is NOT seen or can be contained physically. This is also where we experience things like **fear, anxiety, depression, hurt, trouble, deep sadness, distress, anger, and hatred**.

It is of utmost importance that we see the difference. It is impossible to heal something in our **immaterial part** with something **material**, though something material may be helpful. What we carry in our immaterial is addressed hopefully, consistently, and pervasively in Scripture. When Jesus said He came to heal as a physician, He was NOT merely or primarily talking about the material but immaterial. This is why the process of healing has to do with how we **think in our mind, feel and decide in our heart, and hope for in our soul**.

- **God has NOT promised a painless, comfort laden, justice infused, trouble free life on this side of eternity** - When sin entered the world, its effects were immense. It had clear consequences on our **material** body and on material things, since everything is in a state of disrepair, from our knees (hello knee replacement surgeries!) to eroding shorelines. But the state of the world also marks the **immaterial** part of us. In God's plan and perfect will, injustice is prevalent, selfishness pervades, power politics is the norm, a sense of *fairness* is low, and tragic things happen to unsuspecting and undeserving people. Two Biblical illustrations show this tension of a **good and sovereign God interacting with a fallen world**:

JOB – Job had lived and done righteously, so much so that God ‘bragged’ about him to Satan himself (Job 1:8), prompting a type of cosmic and unseen contest, Satan challenged that Job’s worship and righteousness were based on favorable circumstances, not faith. So God divinely **allowed**, and in so doing was the **cause** and **authority** of Satan’s ability to take everything from Job: In rapid succession, Job lost his wealth, workers, home, and children. Nothing short of devastating. He spent the rest of the book trying to make sense of it all, even being accused by his friend of having some hidden sin. Eventually, when Job even hinted at the fact that God was not good or did not know what He was doing, God answered Job in no uncertain terms (read Job 38-39), to which Job simply answered by saying he would stay silent (40:4-5), confessing he spoke out of ignorance about the Lord and his only recourse was to **“repent in dust and ashes”** (42:6). God went on to hold his friends accountable and restored Job’s life, giving him twice as much as he had before, but that did not *nullify the pain and trauma he went through*.

What Job shows us is that though we do not know the **reasons behind what God is doing**, it is a safe and good spot to refuse to question God and instead remember who He is so that we can rest in the knowledge that He does all things for His own purposes and glory, which will ultimately (but not necessarily temporarily) be for our good.

PAUL – We will refer to Paul again, but for now, we remember that Paul was dogged by a thorn in the flesh, a *“messenger of Satan sent to harass him”*. He prayed multiple times for God to take it away, pleading with God in prayer (2 Cor. 12:8), but God did not answer that prayer the way he hoped. Instead, God allowed it to remain, causing discomfort and pain, in order that Paul’s boasting would not be in himself, but in the **grace of God, and to rejoice in his own weakness, “so that the power of Christ may rest upon me”** (2 Cor. 12:9)

Why do traumatic and hard things happen to good people who did nothing to deserve it? The answer is: we know exactly what God is doing – *He is accomplishing His unique and gracious will in our lives* – but we often have no idea what God is doing – *Job did not get the answer he was looking for, but instead was called to yield by faith to the God of the universe* – although we KNOW God is doing something.

- **God HAS promised His presence continually and a future resolution to every sin tainted effect we experience today** – *What DOES God promise, then?* He promises His continual presence with us (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5), that we will one day see Jesus and be like Him (1 John 3:2), knowing that in His presence is the fullness of joy and pleasures forever (Ps. 16:11). We also know that God is preparing us for an eternal life with Him, so everything that happens is part of that preparation (2 Cor. 4:16-18). We know that we will **suffer** (Rom. 8:17; Phil. 1:29) through **persecution** (2 Tim. 3:12) and experience **trials** (James 1:2-4) NOT because God has forgotten about us or does not care, but because that is exactly how He is preparing for an eternity with Him.

Christians are not gluttons for pain or nihilistic in our view of the world, but we do understand that on this side of eternity, there will be wounds and pain that we will NOT experience in eternity, but may have to bear up under now. The challenge is to connect the **sovereign goodness of God with our suffering and pain**, rather than turning from Him or somehow blaming Him. This is the essence of what our world has identified as mental health, which has everything to do with our immaterial part trying to process and deal with trauma in our material AND immaterial parts.

We will look now at the life of **Tamar**, and ask the question: *what would she have faced after the attack from her brother? How would she have been affected, and how would you counsel her? Is it possible for her to move forward in wholeness, health, and joy?* This is admittedly beyond what the immediate text addresses, but NOT beyond what the Bible addresses. This is also an **extreme case**, and we are not looking for a one-for-one application, but rather a Biblical grid to begin to wrestle through the hard and harsh things we've been through. And remember, though **you may have never had past trauma in your life, you will absolutely have someone in your life who has**. It is important that we are equipped to understand what happens in our mind and heart to be able to address it properly. The church should be a place where **hurting and wounded people can come and find understanding, love, and truth**.

THE RESPONSE TO TRAUMATIC EVENTS

Simply knowing that something is a reality does not make it easier to handle when it comes, it only makes it possible to begin to work through it. Since God does not promise that He'll shield us from all pain, suffering, fear, or anxiety, but offers Himself as a rock, a fortress, as One we can trust who sees and remembers all of our tears (Psalm 56:3-4, 8).

Tamar is presented in 2 Samuel 13 as one who truly was wronged on many levels. She was **faithful** to her God by her commitment to sexual purity (13:2), to her father by responding to his command/request to help her brother (13:7), and to her brother by truly seeking to care for him in his supposed sickness. She was **compassionate** and sought to help her brother in need. She was **wise and gracious**, twice offering her brother an out in the midst of egregious sin ("Don't do this...you will become a fool in Israel and I will bear the shame"; "first talk to our father"; "Do not add wrong upon wrong by sending me away, but do what is right and care for me"). Throughout the whole chapter, Tamar is seen and presented as **righteous**, who did not deserve, ask for, egg on, or participate in the evil deeds of her brother.

Think about how many people let her down. She trusted her brother, only to be aggressively taken advantage of, abused, and violated through strength, only to be cast out and hated like a vile enemy. She was NOT protected by her **father**. Listen to how the text expresses David's response in vv. 20-22:

*And her brother Absalom said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you? Now hold your peace, my sister. He is your brother; do not take this to heart." So Tamar lived, a **desolate woman**, in her brother Absalom's house. 21 **When King David heard of all these things, he was very angry.** 22 But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad, for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had violated his sister*
Tamar

David knew what happened, and he was very angry, which led him to do.....NOTHING! No discipline and course correct for Amnon, no care for Tamar. He was paralyzed in his anger and did not show the same faithfulness and courage in his family that he had in leading an army or ruling a kingdom. *Would this have been a difficult task?* Of course! But so often leadership in any forum is defined by **showing up**, standing in, and being willing to embrace discomfort. David had an opportunity to lead **through** this tragic event, working with his family and children to come to some sort of resolution or restoration. Perhaps David was feeling like a **hypocrite**, as he was guilty of the same kind of sin with Bathsheba. Maybe he felt the sting of **guilt and shame**, knowing that this all was a consequence of his sins of the past. However, simply because you have sinned in a particular way in the past DOES NOT disqualify you from addressing that sin with others, especially in your own family. In fact, a truly **repentant and**

restored person has ground to help someone who has fallen hard, because they know how to get up and keep going.

A quick note to fathers: We do not like to deal in the realm of emotions and feelings, but that is absolutely the area that we can either do damage or be a peace-making comfort. Men would often rather storm a machine gun nest than help their kids work through conflict or deal with the hurt of life. *Why?* Because so often, there is nothing to **fix**, nothing to **solve**, nothing to **make it all better**. No, what fathers can offer is encouragement, presence, and a strong shoulder to bear up under the weight of pain. This may be the most uncomfortable men will ever be, but profoundly necessary. In fact, it was **Abisalom** who demonstrated his inability to actually deal in this realm, by taking care of his sister (good), but letting bitterness and revenge brew (bad), without moving toward a Godly resolution, something we will look at next week.

Where did this leave Tamar? She was in a position where her purity was taken, her future tainted, her life altered. She was a **desolate woman**, a word that also meant “ruined”, or “destroyed”. She was damaged in her **material body**, marked by the attack by her brother, but also severely marked in her **immaterial self**, the area where wounds can remain and reactions continue, far after physical scars form.

What would reasonable, expected, understandable responses be? One would expect in the coming days, weeks, months, and years to deal with: **fear** – from a fear of men, to intimacy, to trusting others; **Anger** – “how could God let this happen? Where was my father? How could my brother do this?”; **Depression** – “now what am I supposed to do” “what is the point of going forward”, “why did I even try to live a righteous or obedient life. Look where it got me!” **Anxiety** – “If this could happen out of nowhere, unprovoked, what else could happen in my life?”; “If God couldn’t stop this from happening, where else can I turn, who else can I trust?” **Deep Sadness** – with feeling hopeless and helpless; **Guilt and shame** – However misplaced, there would be a review of choices and decisions and feeling personally responsible; **Shock/Numbness** – confused, detached, and feeling no joy or happiness.

In our day today, she would be diagnosed with “PTSD”, and would potentially have symptoms of sleeplessness or excessive sleeping, withdrawing from people or places, and losing confidence in self or decision making, or disassociating altogether and becoming brash and overly confident.

So what was Tamar to do? What are we to do when we have similar (but most likely less extreme) **things happen to us? Can we overcome these feelings and symptoms? Are we bound and captive to what was done to us? Are we supposed to lock it away, act like it never happened, put a smile on our face and move forward?**

So here we will pause, because it is worth spending time unpacking what the Bible says about these areas of life, and how the gospel helps restore and redeem pain and trauma in the **immaterial parts of our lives**. This will not be in the realm of simple fixes or “here’s two verses and move on”. It will, however, give us a grid to think through and solutions to our most nagging questions and feelings. So we leave you with a couple of thoughts before next week:

- **If you have had specific trauma, to whatever degree, in your past, you are not alone** – Not only are there other people here who have experienced the same (but not exactly), the Bible is full of examples, from Paul to Martha to Peter, Judas, and Job who experienced hardship and hurt. The Bible does NOT shy away from these issues, but gives us examples to help us.

- **The church is a place to talk, share, and deal with these things** – The church is imperfect because it is made up of imperfect people. That unites us. We are all dealing with something, and the misnomer is that others have somehow reached a level of perfection we have not experienced, since they are all smiling. But since there is often not **fixing** of things that affect our immaterial selves, one of the best opportunities is to talk to a fellow believer, or if you are not a believer, one who can show you the truth. We want to exercise long-suffering, patient, honest, truthful, and empathetic counsel as we walk together through life seeking to glorify God and find our greatest joy in Him. In other words, we must acknowledge the reaction is still happening in our heart so we can take off the Sarcophagus and allow God to help us deal with the pain.
- **We have a Savior who understands** – Here is the essential hope. No matter what, we have a Savior who lived our life and understands our grief. He was and is:

*Isaiah 53:3: He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not*

But He is also a great High Priest:

Hebrews 4:14-16 ¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ **For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses**, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

He knows what it was like to face undeserved pain, but did so to leave us an example to follow:

1 Peter 2:21-25 **For** to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. **22 He committed no sin**, neither was deceit found in his mouth. **23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.** **24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.** **25 For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.**

This is Who we turn to in our greatest grief and sharpest pain, because He not only understands, **HE HEALS.**