

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SCRIPTURE: *Genesis 44*

DATE: *February 25th, 2024*

SERMON: *“The Humility of Judah”*

Good morning everyone. Thanks for coming out to this week’s gathering!

So about a year ago, it was the first Saturday in April, I was at a church conference an hour south of here, and the speaker – throughout his presentation – was sharing various Scripture verses...and at one point this one came up on the screen.

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (Proverbs 3, James 4, I Peter 5).

And I remember sitting there, my attention kind of drifting away from the speaker, instead I was thinking about those words there in front of me...thinking, *“There’s something important here...this is about as straightforward as you can get. Everyone who is serious about following Jesus needs to understand how God views **humility**...more than that, we need to put it into practice. I need to put it into practice.”*

At one point I remember thinking I wanted to tuck this verse away and talk to the rest of the staff to see if this might serve as a good theme verse for Five Forks Church here in 2024. And in the end, that’s exactly where we ended up.

We launched this theme verse back on the first Sunday of the year, when Shaun, Ray and myself had us look closely at a passage found in Philippians 2 that

clearly teaches what humility is, and what it isn't. In this passage where we're told to...

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. (*Philippians 2:3a*)

Selfish Ambition we said, is a spirit of rivalry where **we look to advance ourselves, our family, our church, our group to the detriment of others** (individuals, families, churches or groups). We should expect God to oppose us if we find ourselves doing this. Just as He will be opposed to **Vain Conceit**, which is **having an elevated sense of self, thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought**.

That's what humility isn't, now let's look at what humility is:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (*Philippians 2:3-4*)

Throughout the year we – the pastors, the teachers here at Five Forks Church, and really, we hope *all of us* - will be talking about how to put these words, these concepts into practice.

Now most of you know that last year when Ray and I preached we took turns bringing messages that tied in with the 2023 theme of maturing in Christ.

If you were here last week, you know this year we're doing something similar. Ray and I will be taking nine weeks – spread throughout the year – where we will introduce you to nine different **individuals who displayed humility** in sometimes subtle ways and sometimes in very powerful ways. Last week Ray had us look at **Moses**, and this week we'll be looking at the humility displayed by a man by the name of **Judah**.

We're going to start with **"Who Was Judah?"** What do we know about his life, his background, his character? Then we'll look at a specific event that reveals **The Humility of Judah**. And then I'll ask you to be thoughtful when it comes to **Your Next Step**. In what way is God calling to you put humility into practice this coming week?

So first...

A. WHO WAS JUDAH?

What does the Bible tell us about this man? Some of you would have no trouble pointing to a specific event in his life, because Shaun had us look at this event in great detail a little over two months ago. We'll cover it briefly again this morning, but let's start back at the beginning.

The name of Judah's father was **Jacob**. The patriarchs of Israel are Abraham, his son Isaac, and Isaac's son Jacob. Jacob had **12 sons**, and this is where **Judah** comes in, as he is the fourth born of the 12. Jacob ends up making the mistake that no parent should ever make, and that is showing favoritism towards one of his children. Which one did Jacob favor? Reuban, the first born? Perhaps Judah? After all, he's the one we're talking about this morning. Nope, neither one.

The Bible tells us which of the 12 achieves the status of "most favored son."

Genesis 37:3 Now Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him.

And so this favoritism that **Joseph** receives from his father is strike one in the eyes of Joseph's brothers.

Strike two is when he tells his brothers that he's having these dreams where they're all bowing down to him.

So one day while the brother are out in the field tending to their flocks, they see Joseph approaching in the distance and they quickly hatch this plan to kill Joseph throw his body in a nearby cistern and go back and tell Jacob that a ferocious animal killed him.

Now the Bible doesn't tell us the exact role that Judah played in this. In any group you will find people filling different roles...you will have leaders and you'll have followers. You'll have those led by their emotions and those who are more thoughtful.

We don't know where Judah was on this spectrum, but the long and short of it is, they grabbed him, tore off his colorful coat, *did not kill him* but threw him in the cistern, and then, after they ate, *pulled him out* of the cistern and sold him to a group passing by as part of a caravan on the way to Egypt.

It's what comes next though, that I want you to not just read, not just to visualize, but to feel.

Genesis 37:31 Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood.

We know what Judah and his brothers are up to here, right? They've already talked about the approach they would take with their father. So the boys return home...wouldn't take Jacob long to see that Joseph wasn't with them. Where's Joseph?

"Father, come over here and sit down, we've something to tell you."

Genesis 37:32 They took the ornamented robe back to their father and said, “We found this.”

“We found this.”

Do you think they gave much thought to what kind of impact this would have on their father? He’d recognize the robe, put two and two together and come to the realization that the son that he loved so much had been tragically killed.

Genesis 37:34 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned his son for many days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. “No,” he said, “in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son.” So his father wept for him.

Again, none of us know the exact role that Judah played in all this. What we do know for sure is that Judah went along with and carried out a plan that caused unbearable pain to his father.

Selfish ambition? *(Do nothing out of selfish ambition...)* A spirit of rivalry? You bet.

Looking out for and taking into account the feelings of their father? *(...not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interest of the others.)* Not happening here.

It’s a narrative that we can breeze through if we are so inclined, but we’re talking about real people with real feelings, and Jacob is going to carry this pain around for a long, long time.

The rest of Genesis primarily focuses on the life of Joseph, not Judah...but it’s interesting...before we get to Joseph, we’re given an account of one specific event that transpired in the life of one of Jacob’s 12 sons, and that son just so happens to be Judah.

The event involves **Judah and Tamar**, his daughter in law. Now does that ring a bell? Let me take advantage of this opportunity to say how fortunate we are to have Shaun as our primary preaching pastor here at Five Forks Church.

I've come to see that many of Shaun's messages generate a lot of thoughtful conversation within our church, and perhaps the one that generated the most conversation was from an Advent sermon that Shaun brought in early December when we looked at the geneology of Jesus, of which Judah and Tamar both share a part. And as Shaun pointed out back then, the narrative is somewhat sordid.

Again, real quick...Judah eventually marries and has three sons. Judah's firstborn son marries Tamar, but then he dies before they have children. The second oldest son should step up and marry Tamar so she can have sons will among other things, grow up to help care for Tamar. But he dies also.

The third son is too young to marry Tamar and so Judah promises his daughter-in-law Tamar that she could marry his youngest son when he was of age. But that promise wasn't kept.

Judah's wife eventually passed away and after a time of mourning, he made plans to travel down this road to go shear sheep. Tamar hears that Judah is going to be coming, so she devises a plan where she will disguise herself, take on the attire of a prostitute, go out on the road and make her availability known to Judah when he passes by. Sure enough...

Genesis 38:16b ...he went over to her by the roadside and said, "Come now, let me sleep with you."

Her motivation is to carry on the family line, his motivation is sex. He never recognizes her, she does indeed become pregnant, and Judah, completely

unaware that he's the father, becomes furious with her when he finds out that she's pregnant. He gives instructions that she be burned to death. As Tamar is brought out to be put to death, she brings forth a few of Judah's possessions that he gave her as collateral for her services earlier by the roadside.

Genesis 38:26 Judah recognized them and said, “She is more righteous than I...”

What we have here is an admission...an acknowledgment that he had messed up. He knew what his motivation was when he encountered Tamar there along the road. He also surmised that the reason *she* was there. It was because he failed to follow through on his promise to have his third son marry Tamar once he came of age.

We're not given a lot about Judah in the Bible, but his admission indicates at least a glimmer of humility... an admission of the part he played in all of this.

Much time passes before the Bible has anything more to tell us about Judah. Instead the focus for a while is exclusively on Joseph. Many of you familiar with Joseph's story...after being pulled out of the cistern and sold as a slave, he's taken to Egypt where his life went through a series of incredible highs and incredible lows.

Because God had given Joseph the ability to correctly interpret dreams – including one surrounding an upcoming famine – he eventually was placed in charge of all Egypt. Where he put back much grain in anticipation of the famine that was to come.

When the famine came it was widespread, extending to the land of Canaan...and who's in Canaan? Judah. Along with his father Jacob, his brothers and their families.

The family hears that there is grain in Egypt, and Jacob tells his sons to go there and purchase some grain so they can survive. And so 10 of the 11 brothers head off to Egypt. Which brother didn't go, and why? Well, the Bible tells us:

Genesis 42:4 But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him.

Benjamin, **the 12th and final son** of Jacob, has now assumed the role of "most favored son." Judah and the other brothers are apparently expendable, but Benjamin, who is not, remains behind.

Judah and his brothers arrive in Egypt and come face to face with Joseph. Twenty years have passed, and while Joseph recognizes them, Judah and his brothers no longer recognize him. Joseph accuses them of being spies...they insist that they're not, explaining that they have a father and younger brother who remained behind back in Canaan.

The good news is that the brothers end up receiving the grain, the bad news is that Joseph says one of them has to stay behind, and won't be released until this younger brother that they spoke of is brought back to Egypt. And **Simeon, the second born**, is the one that Joseph said was to remain there until Benjamin was brought.

So Judah and his brothers, minus Simeon, return to Canaan with the grain, and they tell Jacob what this prince back in Egypt had said. Jacob's response? "No way, I'll never send Benjamin back there with you." Simeon? Oh well.

Soon enough, the grain is gone, but the famine continues. They have to go back to Egypt, and Jacob realizes that there is no way the brothers will be given more grain without Benjamin being there with them. And so off they go, this time with Benjamin.

And all of this background has been laying the groundwork for us to now see...

B. THE HUMILITY OF JUDAH

The event is found in Genesis 44. After arriving in Egypt for the second time, Joseph eventually gives them the grain they have come for. He orders his steward to fill each of the brother's sacks with as much food as they can carry, but he then adds this bit of instruction for his steward...

Genesis 44:2 Then put my personal silver cup at the top of the youngest brother's sack...

And so the steward does this without their knowledge. Comes time for Judah and his brothers to mount their donkeys and head back to Canaan. They set off but don't get very far before the steward sets out in pursuit. He comes up along side of them and says, *"Someone has stolen the royal cup!"*

The brothers are incredulous. *"Why would we do something like that?"*

In fact, one of them – Judah? We don't know - is so sure of their innocence that he says, *"Look, if any of us are found to have it, then that person will die, and the rest of us will become your slaves."*

The steward says, *"No, no, that won't be necessary. Here are the terms: Whoever is found to be in possession of the cup will become my slave. The rest of you will be free to continue to make your way back home."*

Genesis 44:12b And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.

And the brothers are just devastated.

Genesis 44:13b-14 Then they loaded their donkeys and returned to the city. Joseph was still in his palace when Judah and his brothers arrived, and they fell to the ground before him.

It's interesting to me that even though Judah is the fourth born, he's the one who is mentioned by name at this point. He seems to have emerged as the leader among the brothers. And he's also the one who speaks next, saying to Joseph, *"All of us...not just the one who was found to have the cup, but all of us, we are your slaves."*

And Joseph says, *"No...no...**This one stays.** The rest of you are free to go."*

It's been fascinating as I've come to see - with the help of others far smarter than me - exactly what God is doing here in the life of Judah. Because what God has done is set up a situation very similar to the one Judah found himself in 20 years prior.

20 years ago he gave up his brother. Now, in order to go home, he just needs to do it again. Only this time instead of Joseph, it'll be Benjamin.

And when he arrives home, and Jacob says, "Where's Benjamin?"...it will fall on Judah to say... *"Father, come over here and sit down, we've something to tell you."*

Then Jacob can tear his clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourn the loss of his son. Just like last time. And Judah will have looked out for his own interests. Just like last time.

And so here is Joseph, pointing to Benjamin, saying, *"This one stays. The rest of you can go."*

It's at this moment that Judah steps forward and in a very moving speech, says to Joseph...

Genesis 44:30-31a, 33 ...I cannot go back to my father without the boy. Our father's life is bound up in the boy's life. If he sees that the boy is not with us, our father will die.

So please, my lord, let me stay here as a slave instead of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers.

I read this, and it takes me back to that passage in Philippians 2 that we read earlier...

Philippians 2:3b-4 Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Twenty years ago, Judah was at a point in his life where within his heart was a spirit of rivalry with his brother. What mattered most were his own interests. If ridding himself of his spoiled brother meant selling him off as a slave, so be it. If it meant lying to and crushing the heart of his father, so be it.

But twenty years have now passed, and Judah is not the same person. In order for Benjamin to return to his father, in order for his father's heart not to be crushed yet again...if it meant remaining in Egypt for the rest of his life as Joseph's slave, so be it. This is a great example of growth and maturity, an incredible example of humility.

And some of you know what followed...Joseph finally revealed himself to his brothers and was reconciled not just to them, but also with his father Jacob. And the turning point for all of this? **The humility of Judah.**

Let's shift our focus off of Judah, and onto ourselves at this point. I said back near the beginning that there would come a point where I would ask you to be thoughtful when it comes to...

C. YOUR NEXT STEP

What aspect of humility might God be asking you to put into practice?

What step or steps – when it comes to humility - might He be asking you to take?

One step that God is urging some to take is...

A. An Initial Step Towards Jesus

One aspect of humility is recognizing that Jesus knows more than we do. It takes humility to acknowledge that.

If you've never taken that first step towards Jesus in order to become one of His followers...If you were able to grasp how Judah offered his life in place of his brother's, I hope you're also able to grasp – possibly for the first time – that Jesus offers His life to you, but in an even greater way. Two ways in fact.

First, Jesus came and lived the life you couldn't live. We want to be kind, patient, compassionate, humble, right? And at times we *do* live this way. But many times we have not, and so Jesus offers us this...He offers *you* this: To live for for, in your place, the life you've failed to live. We *all* needed Him to do this for us.

But you and I, we need more than that. The second offer He makes is to die in our place. To take on Himself the consequences for those times when we are harsh rather than kind, judgmental rather than compassionate. Elevating ourselves, our family, our church, our group to the detriment of others.

Jesus, in an incredible act of humility, has come to us as a servant, steps forward and offers His life and His death for yours.

If you've never taken the initial step towards Jesus, this morning, **God has shown you the humility of Judah in order to point you to the humility of Jesus so that it might bring out the humility in you.**

Jesus has offered His life for yours, will you now offer your life to Him? Can you, in humility, acknowledge that Jesus knows more than you do, and that it's okay to depend on Him? To follow Him? Please reach out to me if you do this or have any questions about any of this.

Now to those of you who have already taken that step and are now following Jesus...what might be the next step that God is asking you to take? As I think back over where God has taken us, I wonder if some of us have...

B. An Admission to Make

Remember the admission on the part of Judah...where, talking about Tamar, he acknowledged that **"She is more righteous than I..."** (*Genesis 38:36*)

One aspect of humility is a willingness to admit that we got something wrong. We're just two months into the year, but I saw early on that this theme of humility was generating some thoughtful conversation among us. I heard others talking about how in today's culture, humility is such a rare thing. A willingness to accept responsibility for our part in any wrong doing, or a willingness to accept responsibility for something we failed to do.

Back on the first Sunday of the year, I said by choosing humility as our theme, the cultural wind is going to be directly in our face this year. As followers of Jesus, we see humility as virtuous, while many seem to view it as a weakness.

In our current culture, rather than humility and admissions of wrong-doing, there seems to be a lot of **Accusations/Blame Shifting** going on. A lot of “I may have done this....**But what about...?** him, her, them.” A lot of playing **The Victim Card**. And none of this is new, we did it as kids, we just get more refined as adults.

In today’s passage, when Judah was confronted with the fact that he was the father of Tamar’s child, he didn’t shift blame, didn’t say, “But what about her, she dressed up like a prostitute...” He didn’t play the victim. He accepted responsibility for part he played, knowing that none of this would have happened if he had kept his promise to Tamar. Instead of saying “**I was wronged**”, he acknowledged, “**I was wrong.**”

Can you recall the last time you looked someone in the eye and said, “You know, I was wrong.” It shouldn’t be that hard, because we get things wrong all the time.

I would just encourage those of us who are followers of Jesus, have we missed an opportunity recently to say to someone, “You know, I was wrong.” It’s not too late to put humility into practice and go that person and say those words.

And then, looking ahead to this week and beyond, let’s be sure we’re doing more than just talking about humility, but are willing to put it into practice and when the time comes, be able to say...“You know, you were right, and I was wrong.” This is an important aspect of humility.

One more suggestion, one step that God will surely be prompting us to take throughout this week and for the rest of our lives...and that is to...

C. Look Out For the Interests of Others

Just as Judah was looking out for the interests of his brother Benjamin and his father Jacob...just as Jesus was and is looking out for your interests...as His followers let's follow His example and be committed to looking out for the interests of others.

And the range of possibilities is many...from a small, simple task that can be done for someone at home, in the church, at the workplace...to something on a far larger scale. You offer them – whether they are aware of it or not – a part of your life for theirs. You look out for their interests and do something that's going to take time, it's going to take effort, but you know that the person you're serving will be incredibly grateful.

And kudos to you if you do any of these things without others knowing it was you. Sometimes it can't be helped, sometimes it's inevitable that others will be aware of what you've done.

The humility of Judah was recorded and it's been passed down and has been read by countless people. But sometimes these things can be done without a lot of fanfare. You see, not caring if other people notice, not caring if other people are aware of your service is another indication of true humility.

We should have plenty of opportunities to put some of this into practice. Is there an admission we need to make for something we've done or something we've not done? If not, you can be sure there will be at some point in the future. **Let's practice humility and be willing to make an admission when called for.**

And let's have our eyes open this week, and look for opportunities where in humility, we can **look out for someone else's interests and in a small way, following the example of Jesus, offer a part of our lives for theirs.**

PRAYER