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God can transform anyone: Judah

Raj Nathaniel; 19 August 2018

1 Corinthians 6:9-12 9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. **11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.** ¹²“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything.

1 John 3:15-16 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 16 By this we know love, that He (Jesus) laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (or brothers and sisters).

It is very common to hear someone say - this is how I am there is nothing to be done about it! Or God made me this way and that's all there is to it. In fact we take pride in teaching our children in school and college be whoever you want to be. Express yourself however you want, after all it is your right to self-determine who you are.

But this is NOT what the bible teaches. Render to Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God that which is God's. We are made in God's image, and we are supposed to belong to Him, but we are marred by sin and therefore cannot belong to God.

The hope of the gospel, as we just read, is that God made a way for us to challenge and change the old status quo of being the same old same old.

Judah, son of Jacob was exactly that. He was sure of who he was and behaved accordingly chasing his dreams. But God had a plan. We are going to look at the life of Judah and follow the transformation process brought about by God and perhaps we can learn a few things from today's study.

The story of Judah's life begins in Genesis 29.

Genesis 29:31-35 ³¹When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. ³²And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, (which means son) for she said, “Because the LORD has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me.”³³She conceived again and bore a son, and said, “Because the LORD has

heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon (**which means heard**) ³⁴Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi (**which means attached**) ³⁵And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she called his name Judah (**which means Praise**). Then she ceased bearing.

All of Leah's first 3 sons were selfies. The first one Reuben which means son, was named because she thought perhaps having a son would turn her husband Jacob's heart toward her to love her...but it didn't. God gave her another son and she named him Simeon meaning God has finally heard about my troubles and has come to help me...but that didn't do anything either. Then she gives birth to her 3rd son, Levi, meaning attached, she was hoping that perhaps Jacob will finally be attached to her. But that didn't work either. Up until this point it was all about her....her plight, her affliction and her discomfort...but what does the bible say about our plight, our affliction and our discomfort?

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

The Christian is to live by faith and not by sight...that is what sets us apart from angels. You see angels live by sight...they see God, they watch Him all the time (although the concept of time in heaven is debatable), the point is that for angels to believe in God is not a big deal, because they see Him....that is why God prepared hell for the angelic beings that reject God even after seeing Him. For a Christian though, we are called to believe in God without first seeing...however, when we are born again, our eyes are opened and we do begin to see God's working in our lives, God's working in other believer's lives and we begin to see God working in the world around us to bring about His plans and purposes.

That's why Paul says here, our life on this earth is so so short compared to eternity and thus the circumstances and seeming troubles in our present life will be insignificant when compared to the life that is to come....did you know that the entire western civilization is built on this one cornerstone? That we have eternity to look forward to. We have a God who has made a way for sinful mankind to be redeemed so that one day we too will be able to stand before God unashamed of our lives, because our old life is hidden in Christ Jesus and the new life we live, we live in the power of God to do

His will, regardless of the circumstances surrounding us. Every human being has an equal opportunity to access salvation and eternity. This is the good news of the gospel that transforms anyone who claims it.

We are not given any more insight into Leah's life at this juncture, but one thing is clear, something happened in her mind that made her stop looking at herself and instead focus on the one above. That's why the bible records that after the birth of her 4th son, she simply exclaimed "this time I will praise the sovereign God of the universe (uppercase LORD)". Judah means Praise.

When was the last time we praised the one true God and LORD? Despite her circumstances, with no reference to her circumstances, with no expectation of circumstances changing, Leah simply praises the Lord. It was all about the LORD...no more selfies.

And God honored her by making her son great. After all what did we get from her sons? A sandwich (Reuben sandwich, get it?!) from the first one, and from her 3rd son some heavy work apparel we call Levi jeans! I'm not sure if anything is named after Simeon...but we have an entire race of peoples named Jews after Judah and an entire societal system of worldview and laws more commonly known to us as the Judeo-Christian culture and worldview.....not only that, the greatest gift to humanity was born in the line of Judah! Jesus.

But Leah could never have even remotely imagined all this could she?

Our light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight in glory. Leah's problems relating to her husband rejecting her might have seemed huge back then, but when we step back now and look at what became of Judah despite her suffering, I am positively sure if Leah were to give an interview today, she might very well exclaim "Praise you LORD, I give you all glory, my problem was nothing compared to how you have glorified your Son through me!". What about us?

Habakkuk 3:17-18 Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, **(in other words, though I am at a complete loss, though I am a total loser)** ¹⁸yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation., **(yet I will Praise you oh LORD)**

1. We must learn to Praise God regardless of our circumstances.

Judah means Praise. But there wasn't much in him to praise God for. It took some time for Judah to live up to the higher call of Jesus Christ.

The next mention we have of Judah occurs in relation to the treachery with Joseph being sold into slavery found in Genesis 37. Joseph was Jacob's favorite son, father gives him the latest designer coat, and Joseph seems a bit cocky with all the attention. Gets to dream a couple of times showing himself to be a star among his brethren and family and gets to brag about the dreams a bit too much. All this gets to the brothers and they loathe him enough to want to kill him and then the opportunity presents itself. Judah plays a prominent role.

The bible records this in Genesis 37:18-28. The brothers see Joseph from afar and conspired to kill him...premeditated murder. First degree felons, the whole bunch of them. It was Reuben who persuades them to spare Joseph's life. But this was only buying time because they were determined to kill Joseph, we will see this later. So they strip him of the designer jacket, dump him in an unused well/pit...and while he is still pleading and crying in the background, they sit down to eat. In verse 25 the bible records that after this they sat down to eat. And later in chapter 42 when they run into Joseph in Egypt we see details of what else happened here at this time of the event.

Genesis 42:18- 23 ¹⁸On the third day (after getting them out of jail) Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God: ¹⁹if you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households, ²⁰and bring your youngest brother to me. So your words will be verified, and you shall not die." And they did so. ²¹Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that **we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen**. That is why this distress has come upon us." ²²And Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood." ²³They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them.

It is clear here that Joseph would have been crying and begging for his life as he did not know what their plans were and would have been assuming the worst. Reuben persuasion delays any action. But they are able to ignore the wails and cries and sit down for their meal. That's when Judah steps in.

Genesis 37:26-27 ²⁶Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? (**so the plan to kill was very much still on despite what Reuben thinks!**) ²⁷Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him.

1 John 3: 15-16 ¹⁵ Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. ¹⁶ By this we know love, that He (Jesus) laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (or brothers and sisters).

Are we any different than Judah? Judah recognized Joseph as a brother, but the hatred blinded him so much that he failed to recognize the image of the creator in his own brother. Not even wailing and crying and pleading changed his position. While Judah may not have personally killed Joseph, his words and actions make it clear that he was hoping the Ishmaelites would do the job instead.

There are pictures of Hitler and his henchmen with their families enjoying lavish meals and listening to music while their Jewish prisoners are all gathered around...it failed to move them. Slave markets here in this country would have been noisy with traders marketing their wares in the midst of their wailing and crying as families are ripped apart. And we wonder how could this be? And what about the countless babies squirming as they are chopped to pieces or sucked into a vacuum machine during the abortion process. We are guilty of the SAME.

When we fail to see the image of the creator in our fellow human beings, or when we quit seeing the image of our God in our fellow human beings WE become like animals ready to devour one another. Their blood is on our heads and cries for justice.

Matthew 12:36 ³⁶I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,

2 Corinthians 5:10 ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. ¹¹Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others (**to live rightly for the Judgment day is coming**).

Here is another pillar of the Judeo-Christian worldview...that there is a coming Judgment day and that we need to live for that day. God's standards

are far above ours. He sees the intent and motive in our hearts. How do we measure up in God's eyes?

2. If we belong to Him, we must live to please the LORD.

Judah was not there quite yet. The next mention of him is in another negative light. Genesis 38.

Genesis 38:1-2 It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. ²There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her and went in to her,

1 John 2:16-17 ¹⁶For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Right from the time of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, there was a conscious effort to avoid marrying the Canaanites or Amorites that lived in the land at that time. God told Abraham that He would bring judgment on the people of Canaan and ever since that time, marriage alliances with Canaanites were forbidden. But here we see Judah “leaving” his brothers and venturing out on his own. Nothing wrong with venturing out on our own. Except that Judah was acting in the flesh. We saw that earlier in the previous chapter with this visceral and fleshly hatred for Joseph and now he makes another blunder by the “lust of the eyes”. A Canaanite girl ‘catches’ his attention. Clearly he pursues her and marries her. No restraint whatsoever. How do we know this?

To cut a long narrative short, Judah has 3 sons by the Canaanite woman, whose name the bible does not mention. He finds a Canaanite woman to marry his oldest son. Her name is mentioned as Tamar. The Bible clearly mentions that the oldest son was evil in the sight of the Lord and God kills him. And according to custom the next son in line, has to marry the widow in order to keep the older son's lineage going. But the second son is also wicked in God's eyes and God does away with him as well. Now Judah, begins to suspect that Tamar has something to do with the death of his 2 older boys. So using the pretext that the last remaining son is too young to get married Judah prevents the 3rd son from marrying Tamar.

Tamar keeps waiting and waiting and watches as the 3rd son is getting up in age. She begins to realize that Judah has no intention of giving her a husband. So she takes matters into her own hands. Dresses up like a prostitute and waits for Judah. Apparently Judah must have a reputation for either visiting prostitutes or for loose immoral behavior otherwise how else would Tamar know that sex was his weakness? Clearly his “lust of the eyes” was a weakness that Tamar exploited. Well he takes the bait hook, line and sinker. And it wasn’t as if he was looking for a good time either. Because he did not even bring money to pay the prostitute. What he saw he wanted. Purely on impulse, driven by the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh. Tamar in disguise demands payment. He has none at the moment so parts with his empty wallet that had his ID card (the bible records it as his personal signet, cord and staff, all identification items). Next thing we know Tamar becomes pregnant by her own father-in-law. What a tragedy. Unprecedented in the family of Abraham. Never did it happen in Jacob’s family either.

One more to go. Lust of the flesh was his hatred of Joseph, check, lust of the eyes was seen in his marriage and adultery with disguised Tamar, check. Now the last one - the pride of life.

Once Tamar was found to be pregnant, while being a widow, the logical conclusion is adultery and the penalty for adultery was death. Judah probably thought “finally we can get rid of this woman that caused the death of my two darling sons (never mind that they were both wicked in God’s eyes, never mind that he himself was not exactly kosher in his behavior either). Tamar was very clever, at the time of their getting together, if we recall she had secured Judah’s ID cards...and now as they were bringing her out to be burned, she shows the IDs. What a shame! Now everyone finds out what a fool Judah has been in his behavior. Judah finally realizes the false pride that he had been living in.

Genesis 38:26 ²⁶Then 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.

What is going on here? What does this tell us? Judah thought himself as very upright and righteous. Funny isn’t it, how sin blinds us and enables us to rationalize our behavior. It deceives us into thinking we are the greatest.

Wasn't that the argument Satan used. You will not die, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil.

All a pack of lies because the moment they ate the forbidden fruit their eyes were opened indeed to the power and control of Sin that eventually blinded them. The bible says their eyes were opened...but then Jesus reminds us that we are nothing but the blind leading the blind into the same pit called hell when we live for the flesh, when we live by our eyes and when we are spiritually proud. His call was repent for the Kingdom of God is near.

Dearly beloved don't you want to be in the Kingdom of God. How are your eyes today?

Judah suddenly came to his senses and saw his raw fleshly living as being so destructive to him and to those around him. She is more righteous than I. Remember the two worshipers Jesus pointed to in the temple? One was self-righteous and condescending towards his neighbor while the other was the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'

Dear friend is that your prayer today?

3. It's never too late to let go and let God take control of our life.

While he failed to see the image of the creator in Joseph, Judah finally sees the image of His creator in Tamar's life and his own life being marred by unrighteousness that leads to terrible consequences in the life of Tamar. This is the turning point in Judah's life because after this instance everything we hear of Judah is always in a positive light.

The next time we see Judah is in Genesis 43. The story so far is that Joseph makes his way up that social ladder in Egypt and is second to none other than Pharaoh. God, through Joseph had prepared food stores to survive the 7 years of famine. The famine is so bad that Jacob's sons are sent to Egypt to buy grain. There is a lot of drama that goes on between Joseph and his brothers. He recognizes them but they don't know Joseph's true identity. He is simply the second highest ruler in all of Egypt to them. When they go back home to Jacob, they find that all their money meant to pay for the grain has been returned to them in their sacks. They are very afraid. Just like we would be if we know we OWE the IRS tens of

thousands of dollars, but instead we get a refund for the same. We know that at any time they can come knocking on our door, they can confiscate our property, garnish our wages or worse send us to prison for embezzlement. Yeah I realize we might be brave Tea Party people here who hate big government, but the truth of the matter is we are terrified of big government. Jacob and his sons were terrified.

Genesis 43:1-5 Now the famine was severe in the land. ²And when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again, buy us a little food." ³But Judah said to him, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' (**Benjamin had not gone down with them in their first trip**). ⁴If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food.⁵But if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.'"

Judah steps up to the plate in the time of crisis. He finally takes responsibility for his actions. Look at verses 8 and 9

Genesis 43:8-9 ⁸And Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. ⁹I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let **me bear the blame forever**."

Judah is willing to pledge his life in place of Benjamin's. In the earlier chapter he was ready to kill Joseph. But now....just like we read earlier ¹¹And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Judah was a changed man, a transformed man. A man who is willing to lay down his life for his brother Benjamin. "If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let **me bear the blame forever**."

Dearly beloved, who else does this remind you of? Who do you think has taken the blame for your sin and mine FOREVER? Jesus Christ.

¹ John 3:16 By this we know love, that He (Jesus) laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (or brothers and sisters).

God transformed Judah into the image of His son Jesus. This same God is at work in your life and mine today. What is the end goal for God working in our lives? He is working to transform each of us into His likeness. God is

working to conform us to His image. Are you willing to be changed into the image of Jesus?

4. We must be willing to be molded by God throughout this life into the image of His son Jesus.

Review:

1. We must learn to Praise God regardless of our circumstances.

2. If we belong to Him, we must live to please the LORD. (Judgment)

3. It's never too late to let go and let God take control of our life.

4. We must be willing to be molded by God throughout this life into the image of His son Jesus.