

FOUNDING FATHERS 4: A STUDY IN THE BOOK GENESIS
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In the summer of 1791, things started to heat up for Alexander Hamilton, quite literally. Alexander's wife and children left on vacation without him to upstate New York. Alexander felt the need to stay in New York City because there was much work to be done in the construction of our country's financial framework, So Alexander stayed alone in the hot city. One night, a young blonde by the name of Maria Reynolds asked Alexander Hamilton for help. Her husband had treated her poorly and abandoned her, and she desperately needed help. Alexander, being the helpful man that he was, offered to give her money, but he did not have any cash on him. So he asked for her address and told her he would bring money by later.

In the hot city, we have a 23-year-old blonde in need, a lonely powerful man who is free from the accountability of a wife and children. We have money in hand and a private house visit. Who knows how this one ends up? It turns out exactly as you think but with a twist. Hamilton and Reynolds began what would become a year-long affair and would become one of the first political sex scandals in our young nation's history. As it turns out, Maria's husband, James, became aware of the affair or maybe was aware of it all along. He began to extort Hamilton to keep quiet. At first, he acted offended and demanded cash, but after awhile, he was okay with the affair and simply asked Hamilton for "loans" from time to time.

So we have a Founding Father cheating on his wife, covering up the mess and then essentially paying for sex to the woman's husband over the course of the year. A few years later, slimy James Reynolds gets caught up in a financial scam and he turns on Hamilton. This eventually leads to rumors and gossip-style news about Hamilton leaking to the public. In the course of this, it becomes evident that Maria and James may have been in on this the whole time. Hamilton was targeted and exploited, but the bottom line remains, cash, sex and power collided in the last decade of the 1700's and it was a mess. Personally,

relationally and politically there was a huge impact. Elizabeth Hamilton was humiliated and furious. Alexander Hamilton was disgraced in many ways and his political aspirations were crushed. It was a mess.

As you probably know, cash, sex and power are the ingredients that can often derail any good story. Somehow we are always surprised by these stories, yet they happen all the time, in every country and in every era. There is nothing new under the sun. Today we will look at the story of Judah and Tamar. Judah was one of the 12 sons of Jacob, one of the twelve tribes of Israel. He has a story with all of the same ingredients that is just as scandalous. The question emerges again. What do you do with a mess like this?

We are in the fourth week of our series, *Founding Fathers*, as we look at the Founding Fathers of our faith. We are reminded that their stories are often heroic and impressive, but when you look a bit closer, they are also messy and broken. They have these great feats of faith that make them seem superhuman, then they have plenty of pitfalls and foibles that make them seem utterly human. We have been tracking with the story of Alexander Hamilton and the musical *Hamilton*, borrowing some of its music. The song today *Say No To This* encapsulates that moment. That hot summer night when the affair began, and it leaves you with that lingering question, "How does this happen again and again?" When you watch the play or you think about the story, you are screaming at Hamilton to say no. Say no to this. You see the events happening like a wreck in slow motion, but somehow he doesn't or somehow he can't.

Each week of this series, we are considering the big question of freedom. How do we find it? How do we own it? How do we keep it? We are asking that question because the sad irony is that the things we think will free us actually enslave us. Egypt often looks like Canaan, and this is especially true for sex. We live in an age where sexuality has this dual distinction of being the thing that equally shocks and intrigues us. The thing we might all be interested in but never talk about. The thing we are obsessed with for ourselves and repulsed by in others. Sex is the ultimate irony. We live in an age of sex and sexuality that is

unparalleled in history. Because we live in the digital age, sex can now be accessible, anonymous and affordable.

Through apps, texting and websites, it has never been easier to obtain sexual material or find willing partners, but problems are emerging. People are beginning to realize that infinite choice and endless accessibility is ruining the very thing that used to be special. What starts off feeling like freedom ends up being slavery, a slavery of never feeling satisfied, never feeling loved and all of this causes a problem in the church. I want to talk about freedom today, freedom from the endless options and freedom from judging others. I want to end our national pastime of obsessing about the sexuality of others.

If you don't think we do, I found something interesting. I took a look at the New York Times most read articles from 2016. These are not the stories they deemed most important or their editors picked as the most groundbreaking or well done. This is the New York Times, a paper that prides itself on top tier journalism on important issues and during an election year. Do you know what were number one and number two? The number one most read article was about marrying the wrong person for you, which inherently includes the topic of sex. Number two was about the leaked emails of disgraced New York politician Anthony Wiener.

No matter the audience or people, we can act like we only read or survey the important stories and issues, but sex seems to draw us all in. Where do we find freedom when it comes to this? What does freedom look like? Let's look at one of the earliest sex scandals in the Bible for some wisdom.

Genesis 38:6-11

As a reminder for you, levirate marriage was practiced in the Bible and was practiced in the region at this time. Levirate marriage was marrying off a widowed woman to one of the deceased husband's brothers. This did two things, it helped further the family name and it helped protect and care for the widowed woman.

As we have talked about before, there is a high premium on having children and passing on the family name. That value paired with the lowly state of women at this time made levirate marriage necessary. Women in this time were largely second-class citizens and not allowed the same legal and civil rights as men, women were always tethered to the men in their lives. In their early days to their fathers, as a young adult to their husbands and even in their latter days to their sons. They were represented and protected by the men in their lives. Because of this reality, it wasn't good for the women in a family to remain widows. They needed to be remarried for the sake of having children to carry on the lineage and to protect and care for them.

Today's story begins with the death of the eldest brother. Tamar is then married to Onan. Onan has no interest in fathering children for his dead brother, so he creatively avoids having children with her. Why is Onan doing this? This is where the recipe of sex, money and power become intertwined. Since the oldest brother has died, Onan is now in line to be the birthright heir unless he fathers a child with Tamar. This would be Er's lineage and Er's son, so the birthright will pass to that son. Onan is enjoying the benefits of sex with none of the responsibility. He doesn't want to lose the double portion of the birthright, so he spills his seed on the floor.

Onan dies as well and that is when Judah gets worried. Two of his sons have died with this woman and now his only remaining son is up to marry her. Some people in this culture believe a woman with more than one deceased husband was cursed or some sort of practitioner of witchcraft, so Judah says, "Wait until my youngest son is of a marrying age."

Genesis 38: 12-19

Tamar realizes Judah never intends to give her his youngest son, so she hatches a plan. She presents herself as a prostitute and sleeps with her father-in-law for a goat. That's the price. It isn't really that steep. Just on a side note regarding the cost of sex, it was revealed in a recent study that couples that share household chores equitably end up having sex

more often and report more satisfaction and intimacy than other couples.¹ Men, you can try to figure out if this is a causal relationship or contest the data or the reporting all day long on this, but if you are smart, you will get the vacuum out when you get home.

Here is the first thing I want you to see today. When it comes to freedom, Judah and Tamar both sought freedom that would satisfy their own agendas. Judah kept his youngest son from Judah, and visited a prostitute while he was out of town. These are both selfish acts. Tamar dressed up as a prostitute and tricked her father-in-law into sex because she wanted a child. This is also a selfish act. Judah and Tamar both did what was right in their own eyes, and they did it to pursue their freedom for their agenda.

I am fairly convinced that freedom in sexuality is rooted in concern for others. That is why the general design of sex is meant to be rooted in marriage. There is no greater laboratory for other-focused living than marriage. Often times when churches discuss sex, it is primarily a don't-ask-don't-tell approach or it is just a don't approach. Rightly so, people pursue their own agendas in sexuality and are usually set up for a lifetime of struggle. This is not a knock on sex in general but in the me-first agenda to sex.

When adolescent males take advantage of adolescent girls through manipulation and peer pressure, it is rooted in selfish motives. When men and women entice each other with lust, the lusting one has selfish purposes and many times so does the one who desires to be lusted after. When men and women seek fulfillment in sex outside of their partners, it is rooted in selfish motives. When husbands or wives withhold sex from their spouses to teach them a lesson, it is rooted in selfish motives. When husbands or wives pursue their own sexual gratification without giving thought to their spouse's needs, it is rooted in selfish motives. The great dance of sexuality is that it is built on reciprocity and trust. The high wire act of sex is that somehow that ancient truth, the more you are others-focused, the better off you will be. Quite frankly, doing unto others as you would have them do to you.

¹https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2014/08/14/couples-who-share-housework-have-the-most-sex-and-best-sex-lives/?utm_term=.8be0943f3c86

This is a message for any of you at any stage of life. It is one of the most basic truths taught by Jesus and it applies to all areas of life, including sex. Loving others is sacrificial, but strangely it is also the most rewarding way of life. At every stage of life and sexuality, other-focused living is key. When your first thought is how it will affect your boyfriend or girlfriend, how it will affect your spouse or future spouse, you are on the right line of thinking. That's where freedom is found. In the inverted Kingdom of God, true freedom is found when you first pursue the benefit of others. It's counterintuitive because we live in a world that says get what you can get while you can. See to your needs because no one else will. The gospel in every area of life is other-focused. It looks like freedom to pursue your own interests with as many people as you can, but true freedom is found in limiting yourself to your spouse and becoming focused on how to serve them well. There is true freedom and joy there. Let's keep reading.

Genesis 38:20-26

Judah has left with this presumed prostitute the equivalent of his driver's license. A signet was how you made your mark, and it was specific to you. These were items personal to Judah. He goes to make the trade, a goat for his goods, and she isn't there. You can tell he is a bit worried. He is trying to cover up his tracks and make the payoff, and she isn't there. So he says, "Let's leave town so we don't get laughed at." He knows there is shame and humiliation, but what he did in secret will stay in secret. Except we know that is almost never true.

The big reveal happens in verse 24 that Tamar is pregnant and self-righteous Judah says she should be put to death. Brief side note, he has no interest in pursuing the man with whom Tamar did this, only Tamar. He states that she should be burned. All death is heinous, but this sounds particularly vengeful and visceral. She should be punished with death and not only that, a painful, agonizing death!

Of course, you heard the big switcheroo moment at the end. Tamar shows Judah that he is the father of the child, and he goes from self-righteous to thoroughly broken in a matter of

mere moments. The important part to focus on is this. He was the same man before and after. It shows a bit of what we talked about last week. Grace for me, justice for you. Life for me, painful death for you. Sexual fulfillment for me, none for you. The problem is our slavery regarding the sexuality of others.

A few years after Hamilton's affair ended and was seemingly in the past, Alexander Hamilton began publicly attacking his political nemesis, Thomas Jefferson. He was mocking Jefferson's epicurean lifestyle in a nod to what many people were at least partially aware of regarding Jefferson's affairs including those with slaves that he owned. Hamilton took the moral high ground. Unbeknownst to Hamilton, Jefferson had procured the letters of James Reynolds and the records of Hamilton's affair with Maria Reynolds.

He took the moral high ground and then immediately got his comeuppance when his affair was revealed. Why did Hamilton feel so willing to take the high ground? Surely he hadn't forgotten what he had done? I'm guessing he had succumbed to the temptation we all face to think if our sins aren't public, they aren't truly on the record, and with that self-righteousness and moral superiority and faux-outrage are sure to follow.

It's what David did when Samuel confronted him about his affair with Bathsheba. It's what the Pharisees and the crowd did when they tried to stone the woman caught in adultery and then Jesus tells whoever has no sin can cast the first stone. It is what dozens of preachers and politicians have done when they preach loudly and angrily about family values and morality only to be caught up in torrid and scandalous affairs. The longer I live and the more I see, I am realizing the loudest and most vociferous on morals rarely have them.

As you know, Hamilton wasn't alone. He is the first of many in a long line of political affairs. Close to a dozen presidents that we know have been exposed for having affairs while in office, and that happened because they are human. I have to tell you that if you are in this room today and you have a pulse that you have at some point been sexually selfish or

sinful. You have fallen short in some form or fashion of God's best for your life. I have to tell you something else, you are still loved. You are still precious in God's sight.

I am not condoning or normalizing sexual sinfulness, but I am hoping to normalize grace in the midst of it. Anytime a celebrity, pastor or politician crashes and burns, we are prone to a bit of schadenfreude, but more often than not, they have only gotten caught at something that's not that dissimilar from our own shortcomings. For some reason, the people of the church are especially alarmed, unforgiving and overall negative when it comes to sex. You know how this story goes, when a subject shall not be named, then it shall not be discussed and if someone in the church is having an issue with a topic that cannot be discussed and a topic that can be named, they either struggle and go deeper into a problem or they make it through life rather unfulfilled. It seems for some Christians, sex is either nothing or everything. We never talk about it or we are obsessed with it. When it's nothing, it's something that belongs to our baser selves and should not be tolerated. That's where we get generations of monks and celibacy advocates. On the other end of the spectrum, sex is everything, which means people write books and sermons about it all day long, or they write articles about how dangerous it is and how to avoid it.

On either end of the spectrum, we forget that it is a gift that flourishes best in the context of a loving marriage relationship. After getting partially exposed, Alexander Hamilton did the unthinkable. He didn't lie and deny it or dig a deeper hole. He didn't ask what the meaning of "is" is. He wrote a 95-page letter admitting what he had done. It was confession. He dragged secrets out into the light. For some of you, that may be healthy today in your relationship, to confess shortcomings. To confess being selfish. To confess to not looking after the needs of your partner. For some of you, it is not necessarily confession, but just a good old fashion conversation. With your teenager, instead of fear or keeping quiet, having an honest conversation. An honest conversation with an accountability partner because you are often finding yourself in the dark corners of the internet. An honest conversation with your spouse about your hopes and dreams. How your wants and needs have changed and discussing once again this gift you have been given.

My encouragement for you today is to say “no” to this. No to shame. No to silence. No to self-righteousness. No to moral superiority. No to only thinking about yourselves. No to staying in the dark. No to hiding. You probably already know this but Judah’s son, Perez was the great (4x) grandfather to Boaz, who married Ruth and who was the great grandfather of David, and out of that same lineage one day came a man, a carpenter out of Nazareth who ends up with many titles including the Lion of Judah. Even out of the mess, God weaves beauty. Even out of scandal, God brings forth hope. Say no to all of that and say yes to a Messiah who loves you and has great plans for every part of your life.