

The Perfect Patience of God's Mercy

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[0 : 00] Good, those are all the key things. Let's turn to our reading for this morning, and we are in the book of Genesis. And if you don't have a Bible with you, we have plenty of visitor Bibles at the side and the back, so please do grab a Bible.

And it's Genesis this morning, chapter 38. Genesis 38. So beginning there at verse 1 of Genesis 38. It happens at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adolamite, whose name was Hira.

There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shua. He took her and went into her, and she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Ur.

She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah. Judah was in Chezeb when she bore him.

[1 : 11] And Judah took a wife for Ur, his firstborn. Her name was Tamar. But Ur, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord put him to death.

Then Judah said to Onan, Go into your brother's wife and perform the duty of her brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother. But Onan knew that his offspring would not be his. So whenever he went in to his brother's wife, he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give her offspring and to give offspring to his brother. And what he did was wicked in the sight of the Lord, And put him to death also.

Then Judah said to Tamar, his daughter-in-law, Remain a widow in your father's house, Till Shelah my son grows up. For he feared that he would die like his brothers.

So Tamar went and remained in his father's house. In the course of time, the wife of Judah, Sheurah's daughter, died.

[2 : 24] When Judah was comforted, he went up to Timnah to his sheep shearers, he and his friend Hira the Adalemite. And when Tamar was told, Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep, she took off her widow's garments and covered herself with a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Anam, which is on the road to Timnah.

For she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage. When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face.

He turned to her at the roadside and said, Come, let me come into you. For he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, What will you give me that you may come into me?

He answered, I will send you a young goat from the flock. And she said, If you give me a pledge until you send it. He said, What pledge shall I give you?

She replied, Your signet and your cord and your staff that is in your hand. So he gave them to her and went into her, and she conceived by him. Then she arose and went away, and taking off her veil, she put on the garments of her widowhood.

[3 : 47] When Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adalamite to take back the pledge from the woman's hand, he did not find her. And he asked the men of the place, Where is the cult prostitute who was at Anam on the roadside?

And they said, No cult prostitute has been here. So he returned to Judah and said, I have not found her. Also the men of the place said, No cult prostitute has been here.

And Judah replied, Let her keep the things as her own, or we shall be laughed at. You see, I sent this young goat, and you did not find her. About three months later, Judah was told, Tamar, your daughter-in-law has been immoral.

Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality. And Judah said, Bring her out, and let her be burned. As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant.

And she said, Please identify who these are, the signets and the cord and the staff. Then Judah identified them and said, She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son, Shelah. [5 : 11] And he did not know her again. When the time of her labor came, there were twins in her womb. And when she was in labor, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on its hand, saying, This one came out first.

But as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out. And she said, What a breach you have made for yourself. Therefore his name was called Perez. Afterward his brother came out with a scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah. Well, amen.

May God bless to us his word this morning. We'll do turn, if you would, to Genesis 38, which is a story really all about the perfect patience of God's mercy.

Now, in stark contrast, really, to threats of violence that some religions will make against any who criticize their prophets, the Bible doesn't cover up the many misdeeds of its key figures in the story. [6 : 30] In fact, it speaks very honestly, very openly, even if that means that we're not spared blushes sometimes in our Bible reading on a Sunday morning. And actually, that fact alone should be something that encourages those who are investigating the Christian faith to see just how real, just how realistic the Bible is.

It's not seeking to seduce the gullible. It's very prepared, indeed, to shock the genteel with real truths about the human heart and human behavior.

That's something, isn't it, that so-called progressives today often want to hide. But this story here is very real, grim as it is.

But why is it here? It seems to interrupt the story of Joseph, doesn't it, between chapter 37 and 39. But of course, remember, as we saw last week, this is not the story of Joseph.

Chapter 37, verse 2 tells us it's the account of Jacob and his whole line. This whole dysfunctional family, and yet one that has been chosen by God to bless the whole world.

[7 : 44] These brothers who massacred the whole town back in chapter 34, who we saw last week, mercilessly sell their own brother into almost certain death.

And now here, in this chapter, we see again all manner of sexual depravity and dishonor and sheer dirt. What a thoroughly nasty lot they really are.

What on earth and who on earth can save them and salvage them so that they can possibly have a place in the purposes of God? Well, that is the answer that chapters 37 to 50 of Genesis tell us.

And the answer is that two men will save them. Joseph, of course, but also Judah. And in fact, Judah becomes the greater of the two as the conduit of their long-term salvation.

And this chapter here this morning tells us how it is that that begins to come about and how he is marked out as the leading heir of this family.

[8 : 54] A truth that will be underlined later on in chapter 49 as Jacob blesses his sons and says that from Judah great rulers will come.

So really, these chapters 37 to the end of Genesis should be called, if anything, the story of Joseph and Judah. And if you read carefully, you'll see that the whole story is bracketed, beginning and end, beginning in chapters 37 and 38 here, and at the end, chapters 48 to 50, with a focus particularly on these two brothers together.

And right at the middle, the central turning point of the story in chapters 44 and 45, they both hinge on Joseph and Judah. Joseph, forgiving, mercifully his brothers when Judah offers himself as a substitute to save his brothers' lives.

So, the story is very much centered on these two characters. And what we have here in chapter 38 and 39 is like a story set on two stages. And we see the unfolding of these two men's life over about two decades or so.

Joseph, we're going to see in Egypt, first of all, as a slave and then as a servant, then in prison, then serving Pharaoh and then getting married and having sons and sons growing up.

[10 : 21] And we'll see that in chapters 39 to 42. But here, in chapter 38, we see Judah back in Canaan over about 20 years as he gets married, as he has sons, and as they grow up.

And they're parallel stories, but very different in character. And yet, God is preparing each of these men for their place of service in his unfolding plan of salvation to become, in different ways, real deliverers of his people.

God uses Joseph, upright, godly, from the start of his life, but he also uses Judah, who most certainly was not. And chapter 38 here shows us just exactly how the Lord works out his purpose to bring deliverance to his people through Judah's seed.

And he begins by bringing deliverance first of all to Judah's soul. And it's a wonderful example of what Paul calls in 1 Timothy chapter 1 the perfect patience of God's mercy that can take, as Paul says, the chief of sinners, a blasphemer, a persecutor, insolent, opponent of God's purpose and can appoint him to God's service to bring about his great salvation from multitudes to eternal life. So let's have a look at the story here and see the light that does, in fact, shine through what seems to be a very dark story indeed. And it is dark. Look at verses 1 to 10. It's a story, first of all, of departure and defiance.

[11 : 58] A sad departure, but one that leads to selfish defiance of God's promise. First one, at that time, that is, the Judah who had just so callously disposed of his brother Joseph for 20 pieces of silver, he now departs altogether from his brothers and from the covenant community.

He went down, we're told, and he turned aside. That is, he allied himself with the Canaanites and with their way of life and with their culture. And there are ominous tones here, aren't there? Echoes of Lot, do you remember, who left Abraham and went down to dwell among the evil cities of the plain, among the Canaanites. And that's what these verses are telling us very clearly. Verses 1 to 5 describe a sad departure from the covenant family. A breaking away, if you like, from the church of God altogether. And now his closest friend and influence is this pagan, Hira. And he sees and he marries a Canaanite woman and he gets children with her. And the whole thing breathes an air of ominous darkness. Look at verses 2 and 3. He saw her, he took her, he went into her.

[13 : 10] It's kind of an overtone, isn't it, of an illicit taking. We've heard many times, Eve saw and took in the garden. In chapter 34, remember, it was Shechem who saw and took Dinah.

and marriage to a Canaanite woman. That was anathema to Abraham and to Isaac and surely it was also great grief to Jacob here.

We're not even told her name, just that she's the daughter of this man, Shur. And certainly when you read the story, you get the distinct impression that to Judah, a woman was just purely for sex and for childbearing, nothing more.

In fact, he wasn't much interested, it seems, in the children either because verse 4, notice, tells us it's the mother who gives names to these boys, not Judah.

That's a stark contrast because we'll see with Joseph later on. He names his sons after his God and Lord. And it's hardly a picture, is it, of a happy home and a healthy family life.

[14 : 15] Certainly when these sons grew up, what we see in verses 6-10 is a portrait of selfish defiance. Er, we're told, is so evil the Lord put him to death, verse 7. We've never come across anything like that yet in Genesis, so these things must have been very bad.

And actually his name is a pun, it's the word evil spelt backwards. You could say R was Ra. And so the Lord put him to death. And then there's more of the same, verse 10, with his brother Onan.

It's pretty grim. We're not told anything about R. We're told nothing about him, but we are told about Onan's crime. So what was it that deserved such severe punishment from God?

What verses 8 and 9 tell us in fairly earthly and explicit terms, frankly? We need to understand what the issue here really is. The sin is not simply that of Onan wasting his semen on the ground.

It's certainly nothing to do with masturbation and Onanism as sometimes it was called nonsense. What's the sin? The sin is that he did it so as not to give offspring to his brother, you see.

[15 : 32] Verse 8 says that was his duty as a brother-in-law to Tamar, his brother's widow. Now that phrase, perform the duty of a brother-in-law, is just a single word in the Hebrew text that indicates it was a technical term.

It was a time-honored custom as it was in those ancient cultures and indeed that custom was honored specifically in God's law. Deuteronomy chapter 25 lays it out there. It was called Leverite Marriage after the Latin word levir, brother-in-law.

And the purpose of it was to honor the family name of the dead man to ensure that his name would live on in the community in legal offspring.

And it also honored the widow, of course, because it meant that she wasn't left without children, without an inheritance, without anyone to care for her. And though it was a custom, Moses' law later insisted on it.

Now why would the law have to insist on it? Well, because it was quite a costly thing for the surviving brother to do. Because it meant that he wouldn't get the extra share of his father's inheritance that he would have got from his brother who had died.

[16:45] Because if his brother had sons legally, if he had children with his sister and all that were legally his brothers, then they would inherit that portion.

And that's what explains Onan's action here in verse 9. You see, he knew that the sons wouldn't be his. That is, they would inherit what would otherwise come to him.

So it was pure greed that drove his actions. He wasn't going to give up the loot that would come to him because of his brother's death. So you see, he's a chip off the old block, isn't he?

Judah sold his living brother for silver, and now Onan, his son, is selling his dead brother also for silver. And actually, it's true to life, isn't it?

Just think of the family disputes that so often erupt over wills when somebody dies. It's grim, isn't it? But that's life.

[17:44] So look at verse 9. Onan was perfectly happy to use and abuse poor Tamar for sex all the time, whenever he went into her. But he denied her the very possibility of offspring, utter selfishness.

not to mention callous cruelty. But of course, there's more to it even than that, isn't there? Because in this family, offspring, offspring are part of a sacred trust way beyond the natural order.

God's promise is all about offspring, isn't it? All about the seed of promise. And in actually opposing and frustrating the continuance of the rightful line of Judah's seed, Onan is defiantly and deliberately opposing God's covenant.

Not only was he selfishly abusing his dead brother's wife, shockingly so, frankly, but he was shaking his fist at God himself.

And God will not be mocked that way. So, verse 10, the Lord put him to death also. Now, you may find all this judgment and capital punishment very harsh, even unacceptable.

[19:07] Certainly, it is a sin against the spirit of our age, as Ralph Davis says. But, just in case you're tempted to think, oh, this is the Old Testament God. We don't want this. This is terrible.

We want the God of the New Testament. Then, perhaps later on, you might like to read, well, Acts chapter 5, for example, or 1 Corinthians 11, where the New Testament God deals just as sumnerly with a Christian couple who told fibs about their giving to the church, pretending they were giving more than they were.

Or to some Christians who were misbehaving at communion by proudly scorning their Christian brethren and displaying their selfishness and pride.

Or you could read the words of Jesus himself, gentle Jesus, meek and mild. He speaks far more terrifying words about judgment than any prophet of the Old Testament.

It's the New Testament that tells us that the real God, the God Jesus spoke about, that he will give people what they want in the end.

[20:14] If what they want is to defy his gracious covenant and score in him and say, get away, I don't want anything to do with this, then he will withdraw himself.

Just as Jesus did from places and from people that rejected him. But since he is life and his presence is life, then his withdrawal is death.

It's the removal of life. Permanently. And that was Onan, you see, the life of God was removed from him.

And poor Tamar, you see, twice bereaved. Although I suppose she must have felt some sense of relief, mustn't she? You can't really blame her. But now, what happens is the poor woman gets abused all over again, this time by her father-in-law, Judah.

Judah. And verses 11 to 26 tell a story of dishonor and deception. A shameful dishonor that then leads to a shaming deception of God's patriarch, Judah.

[21:31] Judah was obviously a man of dignity and substance in the community and he should have cared for Tamar in his home because she'd been wife to both of his sons. And yet again, he was utterly selfish.

And he dishonors Tamar. He sends her back to her father's home. Although, do you notice, he retains control over her life by betrothing her to his youngest son. Wait till he grows up, he says. He's kicking the can well down the road, isn't he? But he has absolutely no intention of ever giving her in marriage to his son because, look at verse 11, he feared that he too would die because he

blames Tamar for his son's death.

Not them and their sins. He says, she's the jinx. That just shows you, doesn't it, how spiritually blind, how totally anesthetized he was.

He could not see God's hand at work at all in any of this. But again, that's very typical, isn't it? Because we're very quick to blame anybody else for our misfortune except our own sin or the sin of our children.

[22 : 39] Sometimes we're even more blind about the sin of our children. And so poor Tamar has made the scapegoat of it here. And time passes, verse 12, and we're told in verse 14 that it becomes clear, you see, that Judah has actually reneged on his pledge.

He's not going to give his son to Tamar as a husband. And so she's left as a widow and yet she's still trapped in this betrothal. She can't marry somebody else.

She's got no husband. She's got no children. She's got no future. And legal redress seems to be quite impossible. It so often is, isn't it, for an ordinary humble person against a powerful man.

So what can she do? Well, verse 12 and following, you see, tells us what she does do. This shamefully dishonored woman engages in a deception that will shame Judah publicly and expose the truth to all about who he really is and who really is the problem in this tragic family.

What was Tamar's motive here? Was it vengeance? I don't think so. That's certainly not what the text focuses on. Rather, what the text confronts us with is an extraordinary contrast between this ignorant pagan Canaanite girl with so little by way of any spiritual privilege in her background, the contrast between her and Judah, the son of Jacob, and his sons, the sons of the covenant, with all the spiritual privilege in their own heritage.

[24 : 18] And yet, they despise, they dishonor the holy and precious covenant purposes of God, while Tamar, by contrast, this pagan Canaanite, she is full of care and concern.

Not only for natural children, not only a natural God-given desire that she should have progeny, but far, far more than that, with the specific desire, it seems, to pursue her rightful role as the matriarch of Judah's eldest son in propagating the covenant seat of promise.

And she's shown to us here as one of the many foreigners throughout the story of the Bible, who see that God, the living God, is with this people. And so she's determined to force her way into this covenant of grace.

She's determined to have a part to play in the ongoing story of God's salvation. And hers is the spirit of a Rahab later on in the book of Joshua, or Ruth.

She will not be denied her place in God's story. And it's true, her strategy may make us blush. And the text doesn't comment on the morality of her actions here, as if to condone what she does.

[25 : 40] It doesn't do that. And in fact, the contrast between this chapter and the sexual chastity that we see in the next chapter, in chapter 39 with Joseph, I think makes it pretty clear that there's a better way of trusting faith.

But nevertheless, there is absolutely no doubt, is there, that Tamar is the hero, the heroine in this story. Her desire is in the right place.

And she took a huge risk doing what she did. She knew that she risked her life. Verse 24 is very plain, isn't it? She risked being killed by burning. But she was determined to win her place in Israel's family, however flawed that family might be.

And so, however flawed her methods were, her endeavor is a daring act of faith. It's a little bit like the woman in chapter 5 of Mark's Gospel, remember, with the issue of blood, who's, it seems, is very confused, very superstitious.

She wants to be healed. She thinks that touching Jesus' cloak will be like a magic talisman that will heal her. And yet, for all her faults and misunderstandings of theology, she knew, she knew the person and place where God's blessing could be found, and she was determined to get there.

[27 : 02] Well, that's Tamar here. Verse 12 tells us that Judah had been bereaved again, this time of his nameless wife. And there seems to be very little mourning for her.

And by the way, there was no mention at all, was there, any grief when both of his sons died, unlike Jacob's great grief for losing his son Joseph. And soon we're told he's off to the sheep shearing with Hira, his pagan chum.

Now, what you have to understand is that that was a great festival time. It was a time marked out not just by sheep shearing, but by an awful lot of drink and an awful lot of promiscuous sex.

You can read a story about it in 1 Samuel 25 with Nabal and Abigail. And the whole story there is explained because Nabal was absolutely plastered with drink. And Canaanite religion, you see, was totally at one with all this kind of revelry.

The more you had sex with all sorts of women, the more that fertility effect would rub off on your crops and on your flocks and make them fertile and make them prosper.

[28 : 11] So you put religion and sex together in the name of the common good of society. No wonder it was so popular. Sexual freedom and swinging and sharing and redefining pornography as art, redefining promiscuity as something that's helpful and healthy and good.

And then, on top of it all, having it blessed in the church, calling it wholesome and spiritual and making a big celebration of it.

Well, no wonder that kind of religion was popular then. And it all sounds very familiar, doesn't it? Because it's ironic that so often people are embracing exactly that kind of sexual liberation along with worship today, calling it progressive.

progressive. But it's not progressive, is it? It's regressive to the ways of primitive paganism. That kind of behavior belongs with people who bow down and worship sticks and totem poles as their gods.

People who burn their children on the altars to bring good luck to them and to ward off evil and so on. But here's Judah, the son of Israel, whose God is the living God of goodness and of purity and of truth and of beauty.

[29 : 37] And Judah is immersed in all of this Canaanite way. So off he goes to worship the gods of wine and women with all his might.

And that, you see, was what gave Tamar her plan because she goes and poses as a cult prostitute. And that's the term that's used by Hyra, you see, in verse 21 and verse 22.

And the footnote tells us literally the word is a sacred woman, a holy woman. It's great, isn't it, when you can pretend sin away by the language that you use.

So you have sex with a holy woman and it turns into a holy act and a worshipful act. But it doesn't fool God because in verse 15 he calls a spade a spade.

He just uses the plain old nasty word prostitute. Because certainly there was nothing holy going on in Judah's mind. And we shouldn't think, should we, that we can turn things that are actually ugly and perverse into something holy either just by changing its name.

[30 : 43] You call something marriage. That is the very opposite of marriage. Well, it doesn't make it holy.

It's just as ugly and unnatural and condemned by God. Well, Judah needs the encouragement, verse 16. It's pretty crass.

But he says, come on, let's do it. Well, what's my pay, she asks. Well, I'll give you a goat, he says. But quite rightly, understandably enough, she wants a credit note, verse 18.

So I want your signet and your cord, that's your personal seal and your staff, which will have your name written on it. So in our language it would be, well, I want your credit card and I want your business card and your contact details.

Okay, okay, here you are, he says. Come on, let's get to it. It might seem hard to believe that a powerful man with such a public position could be so reckless as that to put himself in such a compromising position.

[31 : 49] But it's so true to life, isn't it? Ask Harvey Weinstein. Ask all Jeffrey Epstein's chums. All those billionaires and princes who are now very, very worried, it seems, that their names are going to be exposed as people who regularly visited his islands to do exactly this kind of thing.

Plenty, plenty of powerful men throughout history and in our world today have come a cropper, haven't they? Because they can't control their galloping gonads, just like Judah here.

And the first hint of trouble there is in verse 20, you see, when suddenly there's no sign of this woman when Judah sends his friend higher off with the payment. Seems like Judah's sobered up and he's feeling a bit sheepish, so he doesn't go himself, but he sends his friend, you notice, to go and pay her off.

Strange, isn't it? How keen he was to honor his pledge to the prostitute while totally ignoring any sense of responsibility to his daughter-in-law. But again, that is exactly what men do, isn't it?

So often, utterly warped. Fall over themselves endlessly for an illicit lover whilst shamefully neglecting their wife and their family. But now Judah's worried, verse 23, that he's going to be a

laughing stock.

[33 : 13] And little did he know just how great a laughing stock he was going to be. Verse 24 tells us that three months have passed, that Judah's forgotten everything, but now the inevitable happens and Tamar is exposed as pregnant.

And Judah, it seems with no investigation at all, demands that she's going to be punished by death. He's very quick. It's almost as if he's kind of thrilled with this chance of getting rid of this irritation from his life.

And the hypocrisy really stinks, doesn't it? The double standard. The sanctimony of it. But so often it is sinners, isn't it, who are so hard on other sinners.

William still comments on this very perceptively and says that it's people who know that they themselves have been purified only by grace. There's people like that who are much more loath to condemn sins in others.

But there's none of that in Judah here, is there? Nothing but sanctimonious hypocrisy. But then, verse 25, Tamar plays her trump card.

[34 : 30] It's just like the story with Nathan the prophet and David, isn't it? Judah is confronted. You are the man. You are the man. I wonder if you've ever had that sudden thud, cramping nausea that hits you in the stomach when you're yourself exposed, humiliated, shamed.

And that was Judah in verse 26. He's floored, isn't he? And his words sum up the truth, both about Tamar and about himself. Literally, he says, she is righteous, not I.

She is righteous, not I. Her desire, her determination has been noble and good and faithful, despite her deception. But his, utterly selfish and shameful and unfaithful.

But those words, it seems, do mark a turning point in Judah's life. God's grace, through his humiliation and his shame, God's grace touches him and changes him.

I think there's a mark of that in the last line in verse 26. He did not know her again. It's a change of ways. And it is a very, very different Judah that we're going to see later on in chapter 43 and 44.

[35 : 58] I can't help thinking about people like Jonathan Aitken, the former cabinet minister. Or Chuck Colson, Richard Nixon's hatchet man. It was through disgrace, wasn't it?

Public humiliation. That these two powerful men came to experience the amazing grace of God changing their lives. And so often, so often it is so for proud men, people of influence, people of stature.

And maybe there's no other way sometimes for people like that. And that's certainly the story here. God's grace was in Judah's disgrace.

And it was a means of deliverance for his soul. And also for a much, much greater deliverance to come. And that's the significance if you look at these last few verses, 27 to 30, which are so vital. All about a delivery, but also about a great deliverance. A surprising delivery that reminds us of the sovereign deliverance of God's plan.

[37 : 05] The twins, verse 27, are surely a gift of God's kindness and mercy to Tamar, so abused in life. And yet who desired above all to bear the rightful heir of Judah.

And she has two sons, despite losing two husbands. The Lord is kind, isn't he? But also it was a sign of God's grace to Judah that God had not abandoned him.

And indeed, in his wonderful, rich mercy, he would make the blessing promised to Abraham flow through Judah's own family line.

And that's certainly the significance of the attention that is drawn here to this surprising delivery. It's so clearly history repeating itself. Do you see? Remember the twins, Esau and Jacob, and that struggle in the womb back in chapter 25.

Also it is here. Zerah is technically the firstborn. He gets a red cord to mark him out as the heir. It's funny, isn't it, the association with Esau, the red.

[38 : 07] But then he's overtaken by the younger one, by Perez. And again, such a clear sign of God's pattern of electing grace in Genesis. It overturns the natural way of man.

It's Abel, not Cain. It's Isaac, not Ishmael. It's Jacob, not Esau. And it's Perez here, not Zerah. And it's underlined also in the name Perez.

The footnote says it can mean breach, but it's the very word that God used right back in chapter 28, verse 14, when he made his promise to Jacob and said, your offspring will be as the dust of the earth and you shall Perez.

You shall spread abroad. You shall increase abundantly, east and west, north and south. And through your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

Moses' hearers wouldn't miss the significance of that word Perez. They knew also that in his old age, Jacob had singled out Judah in his blessing as the royal line.

[39 : 11] The scepter will not depart from Judah until he comes to whom it belongs. And so they would understand immediately that what God is saying in an astonishing way at the end of this awful chapter of sordid mess, God is saying his covenant purpose is not hindered.

Indeed, even through this, it's being fulfilled. His sovereign purpose will not be stopped. And of course, later, as the rites knew, didn't they?

When they read the book of Ruth and the kings and the chronicles that ten generations on from this child Perez's time would come none other than David.

The anointed king of God's people. And of course, we know that all the years later from that, from his seed, came at last the anointed one, the Lord Jesus Christ, the great deliverer, the great rescuer.

Not only the rescuer of this family from all their sin and shame, but from those of every family on the earth who trust in him likewise for salvation, despite all their sin and their shame and their sadness.

[40 : 25] In other words, what Moses is teaching his people here and teaching us also in telling us this story that's so grim, that's so grimy, he's telling us that despite all the mess and the sordidness and the shamefulness of this story, despite all the wicked men and the weak men and all that they mean for evil, God meant it for good.

for the deliverance of many, many shameful people from their mess and their sin and their shame. And friends, if God can work into his wonderful story of grace and mercy and saving glory, even the people like these in this dark chapter, then there can't be any darkness, can there?

There can't be any darkness where his grace can't do the same. Even amid the darkest chapters of our world today.

So let me finish just with three things here by way of conclusion. First of all, we don't say, we don't say because of a chapter like this that human sin doesn't matter among the people who claim the name of God, the covenant God.

We don't say, oh well, shall we continue to sin then so that grace may abound? No, that would be completely wrong as Paul says, although sometimes it does seem to be the attitude of many in the professing church today.

[42 : 01] Judah is not an example to follow. The severity of God's judgment in verses 1 to 10 alone ought to tell us that sin is always wrong. Let alone the warning of the great humiliation that happened to Judah.

Be sure your sin will find you out, Moses said to his people later on. And we need to hear Christ's apostle, don't we, in the letter to the Hebrews where he says to us, no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed.

God sees and knows all of our private acts, all of our private thoughts. That's why we're warned, worship him with reverence and with awe because our God, our God is a consuming fire.

Now we don't say that sin doesn't matter, but we can say that no human sin or opposition can ever, ever derail God's amazing grace.

God is not dependent on or at the mercy of his people. What a great comfort that should be to all of us. But secondly, this story also tells us that no human sinners are beyond God's grace.

[43 : 19] if they will be humbled by his grace and turn again to him for mercy. Nor are they beyond a place of fruitful service in his kingdom and future. God gets his servants in different ways.

Joseph, as he said, was upright from the start and he learns the cost of obedience over 20 years in Egypt being trained by grace to harden him for God's service and for his role in God's plan.

But Judah, by contrast, was a rebel and yet he learns the cost of disobedience over these 20 years and is transformed by grace, a grace that humbles him to serve his role in God's plan.

And what a change there was wrought in him to become the man that we're going to see later on in chapter 44. Martin Luther, the great reformer, comments that God's spirit permitted this shameful story to be written for us.

He says, that no one should be proud of his own righteousness and wisdom and again, that no one should despair on account of his sins.

[44 : 26] It was Martin Luther that also said that God made the world out of nothing and often he has to bring us to nothing in order to make something out of us again for him and for his glory.

And that was Judah here. That was the Apostle Paul, wasn't it? I was a blasphemer, he says, a persecutor, insolent opponent, the chief of sinners. But I received mercy, mercy, that in me, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example of those who were to believe on him for eternal life.

And maybe that's you. Certainly there are many, many men who have been like Judah or like Paul for decades, decades in their lives.

And often it does take, as I said, a humiliating shock to bring someone like that to them. It might take public shame. It might even take public prison. But if that is you, then this chapter says to you it's not too late.

It's not too late to be saved by the grace of God nor to begin to serve God's gracious kingdom purposes in your life if you will be humbled so that God may lift you up as he lifted up Judah.

[45 : 49] Put your life together again. God can do that. He did it here. He's done it many, many, many times. But thirdly and finally, this story reminds us that God's grace and mercy truly is extended to every, every family of the earth.

That doesn't just mean every kind of national family, but also from those of every kind of family, even disaster families. Disaster families of which today there are so many, aren't there?

The glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the glorious gospel of him is that there is forgiveness, there is belonging, there is meaning, there is purpose, and there's even glory for the discarded outsider, for the abused, for the misused, for the downtrodden, for the messed up, for the ignorant.

Those who are utterly ignorant and in the dark like Tamar, and yet who desperately are seeking as best as they know how, stumbling along in the light of the promise of God, seeking the promise of God among the people of God, the church of Jesus Christ.

Tamar was a complete pagan from a spiritually barren background. She had a terrible marriage to an evil man. She then had an abusive, awful semi-marriage to address this awful man.

[47 : 17] She was used as a chattel. Her whole family was a total disaster. She herself was hardly a model of morality. And yet this woman was touched by the promise of God's saving grace, wasn't she?

Just like Rahab, the prostitute. Just like Ruth, the pagan Moabitess. And she was taken up to become a carrier of the very seed of the world's salvation.

She played a unique role. A unique role in the bringing of the forgiveness of sins, the bringing of life everlasting through the seed of Judah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And her name is recorded, isn't it? Forever. Not just here, but when you get to the New Testament and open Matthew's Gospel in the very first chapter, she is one, isn't she, of the four women who are mentioned in the very genealogy of Jesus Christ.

And you know what? Each one of them, Tamar and Rahab and Ruth and Bathsheba, each one of them came from outside Israel, pagan foreigners, and each one of them was involved in highly suspect and even scandalous sexual relationships.

[48 : 31] But God's grace reaches into every kind of family, every kind of relationship, every kind of life, and brings deliverance.

Wonderful, full, free, liberating. So that what men and sometimes women meant for evil, God is able to turn utterly on its head and bring lives of transformation and tremendous fruitfulness for His great name's sake.

So let's praise Him for the perfect patience of His wonderful mercy which is offered to all who will heed Him, all who will heed Him in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Amen. This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost.

But I receive mercy for this reason that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display His perfect patience as a pattern to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life.

[50 : 07] To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.