

God's people saved by grace to live holy lives

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Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] Phil is going to come and read to us from Genesis 38 and 39. A long story. Well, it's the two stories, but as we'll see, two stories that speak of the same story of salvation.

It can be found on page 42 of the Church Bibles.

At that time, Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adah named Hirah. There, Judah met the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua.

He married her and lay with her. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son who was named Er. She conceived again and gave birth to a son and named him Onan.

She gave birth to still another son and named him Shelah. It was at Kazib that she gave birth to him. Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar.

[1 : 19] But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the Lord's sight, so the Lord put him to death. Then Judah said to Onan, Lie with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to produce offspring for your brother.

But Onan knew that his offspring would not be his. So whenever he lay with his brother's wife, he spilt his semen on the ground to keep from producing offspring for his brother.

What he did was wicked in the Lord's sight, so he put him to death also. Judah then said to his daughter-in-law, Tamar, Live as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up, for he thought he may die too, just like his brothers.

So Tamar went to live in her father's house. After a long time, Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah to the men who were shearing his sheep, and his friend Hirah the Adahmite went with him.

When Tamar was told, Your father-in-law is on his way to Timnah to his sheep, she took off her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance to Anayim, which is on the road to Timnah.

[2 : 46] For she saw that though Shelah had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife. When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face.

Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, he went over to her by the roadside and said, Come now, let me sleep with you. And what will you give me to sleep with you?

She asked, I'll send you a young goat from my flock, he said. Will you give me something as a pledge until you send it? She asked. He said, What pledge should I give you?

Your seal and its cord, and the staff in your hand, she answered. So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she became pregnant by him. After she left, she took off her veil and put on her widow's clothes again.

Meanwhile, Judah sent the young goat by his friend, the Adahmite, in order to get his pledge back from the woman, but he did not find her. When he asked the men who lived there, Where is the shrine prostitute who was beside the road at Anayim?

[3 : 57] They said, There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here, they said. So he went back to Judah and said, I didn't find her. Besides, the men who lived there said, There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here.

Then Judah said, Let her keep what she has, or we will become a laughing stock. After all, I did send her this young goat, but you didn't find her.

About three months later, Judah was told, Your daughter-in-law, Tamar, is guilty of prostitution, and as a result, she is now pregnant. Judah said, Bring her out and have her burned to death.

As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. I am pregnant by the man who owns these, she said. And she added, See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are.

Judah recognized them and said, She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah, and he did not sleep with her again. When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb, and as she was giving birth, one of them put out his hand.

[5 : 11] So the midwife took a scarlet thread and tied it onto his wrist and said, This one came out first. But when he drew back his hand, his brother came out, and she said, So this is how you have broken out.

And he was named Perez. Then his brother, who had the scarlet thread on his wrist, came out, and he was given the name Zerah. Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt.

Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. The Lord was with Joseph, and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.

When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant.

Potiphar put him in charge of his household and entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph.

[6 : 20] The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So he left in Joseph's care everything he had. With Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well built and handsome, and after a while, his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, come to bed with me. But he refused.

With me in charge, he told her, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house. Everything he owns, he is entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am.

My master has withheld nothing from me except you because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?

And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even to be with her. One day, he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside.

[7 : 28] She caught him by his cloak and said, come to bed with me. But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called out to her household servants, look, she said to them, this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us.

He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house. She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home.

Then she told him this story. That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.

When his master heard the story, his wife told him, saying, this is how your slave treated me, he burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him. He showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison and he was made responsible for all that was done there.

[8 : 46] The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did. Now, can you turn back with me to those chapters that Phil read for us?

Genesis 38 and 39. I want us to think this morning from God's word of the reality that God's people are those who are saved by grace in order to live holy lives, to see how the stories of Judah and Joseph help us to get to that truth.

Now, I guess some of us will have noticed that it's Oscar season in Hollywood. One of the movies that people are talking about is the film 1917 because it was filmed in a single take, something new, both in terms of direction and cinematography.

I find Moses' storytelling is so interesting and compelling as you get into the details of Genesis. Here he is writing the story of salvation. And what's Moses' cinematography?

How does he lay out the story? Well, here in chapters 38 and 39, we have these two brothers. We have Judah and Joseph. We have two journeys, both going down.

[10 : 06] So in one sense, we can think about it as a sort of split screen, these two diverging stories, but they also come together. There are contrasts, but they both help us to understand the big idea of God's salvation that Moses wants to share with the people then and with us today.

So on one level, we can read them, and we will in a sense read them as negative and positive example stories, but much more than that, they're helping us to see the story of salvation, to learn new things about God's grace and about how God's people are to live.

So as always, when we come to God's Word and to these stories, we're going to see how they relate to the wider story of salvation, how we can draw applications to our own lives, and principally, we want to see Jesus as the great hero of this story of salvation always.

So two stories of similarity and contrast. Maybe one question we should ask at the beginning, we've seen that Moses is writing the story of Jacob's family, and he's focused from the beginning on one of the sons called Joseph.

So then we need to ask ourselves, well, why is Genesis 38 here? Why does it seem like there's this page break and into the story of Joseph comes Judah?

[11 : 38] Well, one of the things as we see the whole story, and we'll get there in a few weeks, we'll understand that Judah too is on a spiritual journey. We're going to see that God is going to choose him to be the line through which God's King Jesus will come, and so we're going to see his spiritual transformation, and we'll think about that in part today.

But I think that's why this story is here. But it's also here because it helps to provide a number of points of connection and contrast with the Joseph story.

So we'll begin thinking about journeys. Both of them, we're told, at the beginning of each chapter, went down. Look at chapter 38, verse 1. At that time, Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adullam.

And then chapter 39 begins, now Joseph had been taken down. So we see Judah's journey is a free choice. Here is Judah walking away from his family.

His father is mourning, and Judah walks away, and in so doing is also separating himself from Jacob, his father, who had received the promises of God.

[12 : 53] There is something shocking in Judah separating himself from the family. The nation has dealt with a minor shock of Harry and Meghan walking away from the royal family.

Here is a much more significant departure. And he's gone there, and he will marry a Canaanite woman. Abraham had said, I don't want my son to marry a Canaanite.

Isaac had said, I don't want my son to marry a Canaanite. But Judah decides that's exactly what he's going to do. So that's the beginning of Judah's journey, whereas Joseph, we see, he has been sold into slavery.

We saw this last week. So Judah came up with the idea to sell Joseph into the hands of these traders, and he will become a slave in Egypt.

So we have this contrast. We have one son, disobedient son, Judah. He's living in the promised land, and we find Joseph, the obedient son, he's living in the land of oppression and slavery, a land dominated by the anti-God of the Pharaohs.

[14 : 04] But one is walking with God. One is walking away. The imagery of journey is important. And I wonder today, as we find ourselves in church, would we describe our spiritual journey as one of walking towards God and walking with God?

Or like Judah, are we walking away from God? What are the measures that we use to look at which direction our spiritual journey is?

Perhaps you can think about your connection to the Word of God. Do you find yourself reading the Bible regularly and enjoying that time to enjoy fellowship with your Father in heaven?

Perhaps we can think about your connection to church. Are you glad to be able to have the privilege of worshipping your God? Are we making the most of fellowship with God's people?

What is our connection to Jesus, the Son of God? Is He someone we're intrigued by? Or is He more than that?

[15 : 17] Is He someone we are trusting in as our Lord and our Savior? It's important for us to think about our direction, our spiritual journey.

In these chapters, another similarity, another contrast, we find God's verdict on their lives at this point. One, we see judgment.

The other, Joseph, we see receives blessing. So we can perhaps remind ourselves of Judah's story and his family's story. Chapter 38, we can read it verse 7.

Ere, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the Lord's sight, so the Lord put him to death. Onan, verses 9 and 10, is also wicked in his actions in the Lord's sight, so he put him to death also.

And Judah, too, is guilty of unrighteousness. His leaving, his father leaving those promises behind was unrighteous. His marriage to a Canaanite woman was unrighteous.

[16 : 22] His failure to keep his promise to his daughter-in-law, Tamar, was unrighteous. His seeking out a prostitute was unrighteous. And one of the wonderful things about the story of Judah is we see that this unrighteous man will receive mercy from God.

He'll receive a place in the family of God. He stands for us as an object lesson in the mercy and the grace of God. We see Ere and Onan, these two sons, are both unrighteous.

Ere is simply described as wicked, whereas Onan's actions, as a lawbreaker, failing to fulfill his duties, he, too, is wicked and God judges them.

And that reminds us that God's justice is real. Something perhaps we don't like to think about, but it's something the Bible never hides from us. The justice and the judgment of God is intended to be an alarm to us, a wake-up call to be right with our God.

In this story, we see God's justice is real and sometimes that judgment comes immediately. Here he is judging Ere and Onan for their wickedness.

- [17 : 36] Other times, because of the patience of God, that judgment comes after death on wickedness. But we need to be clear that the penalty for God's broken law always comes because God is just.

What about the verdict on Joseph's life? We see repeating, verse 2 as an example, that the Lord was with Joseph.

Verse 5, we see from the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph.

In Genesis 12, a promise had been made to Abraham. God said to Abraham, I will bless you and those who bless you, I will bless. Others will be blessed because of Abraham.

And here we see this coming true in the life of another family member, in the life of Joseph. Even while he is a servant in Egypt, the Lord is with him and the Lord is blessing him and those around him.

- [18 : 42] Even when he finds himself in the prison cell, the Lord is with him and the Lord shows his favor to him and provides blessing to those around him.

And so we have this wonderful comfort that even when providence and circumstance are hard and Joseph had a hard path to walk, yet for the people of God, we know that God is still with us and he is still for us.

But again, as we look on the different verdicts that God makes on these lives, if we were to examine ourselves in our standing before God today, what verdict would God issue on my life, on your life?

One of the wonderful things that we find in the Bible is the gospel. And there we find at the heart of the message of the gospel, the good news of what God has done in Jesus is that Jesus goes to the cross not because of any wrong that he has done, but he goes to the cross taking on himself the sins of his people.

Jesus will take the curse of God for covenant breaking on behalf of his people. The just will die for the unjust so that we might receive the blessing of God.

- [20 : 13] that's not what we deserve. But by God's grace in Jesus, that's what we might receive. As our stories continue, as Moses retells them, another similarity and contrast, we see it in terms of temptation and sexual ethics.

So look with me at chapter 38 in verse 15 and 16. Notice too that the Bible never hides just how mixed up and sinful people can be.

When Judah saw her, he thought his daughter-in-law was a prostitute for she had covered her face. Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, he went over to her by the roadside and said, come now, let me sleep with you.

So here is Judah looking for comfort but deliberately walking into adultery. Here is Judah with no thought of God, no thought of God's standards, no thought of consequences.

Here he is walking eyes wide open into temptation. Contrast that with Joseph chapter 39 over our page verse 7 end of verse 6 into verse 7.

- [21 : 35] Now Joseph was well built and handsome and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, come to bed with me. And notice as Joseph speaks to Potiphar's wife, he makes clear both that he wants to honour Potiphar, his master, but he wants to honour God as his greater master.

Look at the end of verse 9. How then could I do such a wicked thing sin and sin against God? And we find in verse 12 as she tries again and again in verse 12 she caught Joseph by his cloak and said, come to bed with me, but he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

He runs from temptation. He maintains his commitment to God's values while in hostile Egypt. And in these two stories there would be a really important lesson for the nation of Israel.

And if you know the Old Testament you'll know this reality that one of the great temptations for them was to look at the lifestyle, the culture of the people around them, and especially around the subject of worship, other religious practices connected worship and prostitution.

there was this temptation to the nation of Israel to follow the pagan sexual practices of the surrounding nations. And that continues to be a challenge to God's church today.

[23 : 12] How will we respond to the voices and the temptations of our own culture? Will we as a church resist following the sexual ethic that our culture promotes?

Will we lovingly challenge the culture with God's ideal? Where sex is recognized as a gift of God reserved for marriage?

And that would be so important to the nation of Israel as part of their witness to the fact that they were a different kind of community. As the story continues we see another point of similarity and contrast and it's in the way that there is evidence that is produced at critical moments in the story.

So again let's begin with Judah. So if you remember Judah's daughter-in-law becomes pregnant by him. Word comes that she has been guilty of adultery.

Judah announces that she should die. And then in verse 25 and 26 as she was being brought out she sent a message to her father-in-law I am pregnant by the man who owns these.

[24 : 34] See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are. Judah recognized them and said she is more righteous than I. In Judah's case the evidence presented convicts him and he is honest enough to say she's more righteous than I am.

But what about in the story of Joseph chapter 39 verse 13 onwards when Potiphar's wife saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house she called her household servants look this Hebrew has been brought in to us to make sport of us.

He came in here to sleep with me but I screamed when he heard me scream for help he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house. False evidence is presented.

Joseph is wrongly accused and wrongly convicted and sent to prison but he is righteous and God's continued presence with him is testimony to that.

God's continued favor on his life is evidence of that. So Moses here as the salvation storyteller has got these two contrasting stories.

[25 : 51] There's these key themes that run through both but their stories are going along different tracks at the moment but as we take in mind that the bigger story of salvation we'll see how both of them fit.

So we're going to zoom out a little and we're going to see how chapters 38 and 39 fit into God's big picture. First thing we want to see the emphasis from the story of Judah as it continues is that God saves his people by grace alone.

In a few weeks we will discover Judah as someone who is spiritually transformed, as someone who will plead for his brother, one who is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of his family.

He is a key player in restoring this family of God and as his father reaches his point where he's going to die and he wants to bless his sons, Judah is identified as the chosen tribe.

He's described as the lion of Judah and kings would come from him. Jesus would come from Judah's family but at this point, Judah is guilty of sin and Judah needs the grace of forgiveness.

[27 : 09] Moses, in recording salvation history is so helpful to us as readers because he never attempts to gloss over the terrible mistakes, the wickedness of Judah and other characters and in so doing he presents hope for us all.

What have we learned of Judah in the last couple of weeks? He's somebody who hated his brother, somebody who sold his brother into slavery. He is one who abandoned his family, who walked away from God's promises and walking away from his father as someone who walked into sexual sin.

I wonder if as we pause we can identify with Judah. I wonder if there is a time or many times perhaps when we've lost our temper and wished ill on someone else.

Perhaps as we look at our own story we see times where we have failed to honour our parents, where we have fallen into the trap of sibling rivalry and jealousy.

Maybe we're here today and we've rejected the path of our parents because we've rejected their faith. We've said no to God to go our own way. Perhaps in our story we too have satisfied sexual desires in harmful, unbiblical ways.

[28 : 38] If our conscience says to us that we are guilty then we need repentance and we need faith in the Lord Jesus and we need God's grace that comes to us through Jesus just as much as Judah.

Grace, God's loving kindness to those who don't deserve it and who can never earn it. That grace that comes to us freely in the sending of Jesus to be our substitute, to be our sacrifice, to be our savior.

And in Jesus we see one who will live perfectly. We see one who will at all points resist temptation. We see one who will honor his father.

One who regardless of circumstance will walk in obedience the path that God had set for him and Jesus will die for lawbreaker.

When we look at the cross we recognize the justice of God. That while God's people deserve punishment, deserve death, deserve hell, Jesus to satisfy God's justice takes the penalty there on the cross.

[29 : 57] And at the same time as justice is served so we see love is extended and we are invited to receive that love ourselves in receiving Jesus as our savior.

We are invited to believe in him and to be saved. When we think about Judah's story we see one who is a prodigal son, one who needs to be restored by grace.

perhaps many of us know Jesus' famous story of a young son who walked away from his father who said I want my share of the inheritance now and then he goes away to enjoy his life, wild living, making sinful choices but enjoying freedom as he thought it.

But then he finds himself penniless and homeless. He finds famine comes to him and it's that famine, it's that desperation that makes him come to his senses, makes him return home.

That's the path towards spiritual restoration. And we can see and we will see those features in the story of Judah.

[31 : 13] And it's a wonderful thing that though Judah has fallen far away from God at this stage, that God will welcome him into his family.

And God gives to Judah a key place and part in the story of salvation through his family line. Indeed, Judah's family tree highlights God's grace.

Judah, this sinner from whom God's king will come, we find Tamar, who's in the family line of Jesus.

We find Perez, this child born of sexual sin, who is in Jesus' family tree. There is grace even in the story of Judah because of the greatness of our God.

And so there is hope for us if our lives have followed a similar track to that of Judah. If we have made choices that have taken us to shameful places perhaps, if we have lived a wild life with no thought of God, if we have deliberately turned our back on God in order to go our own way, the message of the Bible is that grace is offered to you in Jesus.

[32 : 39] There is forgiveness for sin in him, that we can be declared righteous in God's sight because of Jesus. We can have new birth and become new creations in Christ Jesus.

We can be adopted into the family of God, not because of who we are but because of who God is and the gift he has given us in Jesus. This is also hope for us if we find ourselves praying for prodigal sons and daughters in our own lives.

if we carry on our hearts that burden of those who have walked away from the faith, those who we have sought to teach and to train and to love and to pray for.

The story of Judah is one of those stories that reminds us to keep trusting and to keep praying and to keep asking for God's grace to open people's eyes.

So Judah teaches us that God's people are saved by grace alone. The story of Joseph reminds us that God's people are saved by grace in order to live holy lives.

[33 : 52] So Moses has been recording these stories and it's that same Moses who recorded the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. And the Ten Commandments begins with a preface and that preface says, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of slavery.

The Ten Commandments are introduced from this standpoint that God was their redeemer, God was their rescuer, God had ended their slavery so that they might become his, then that they might obey.

In response, you shall have no other gods before me. And on it goes. And that's always the truth. God saves his people.

God acts in power so that slavery is broken. For us, it's not political or physical slavery, but there is a slavery to our idols where there are things that we put in a more important place than God in our lives.

There are things that we live for, even good things that take the place on the throne of our hearts that belongs to God. And only God can remove that slavery so that we can have things in their proper place.

[35 : 10] It's God who breaks the slavery to our sinful rebellion. We are slaves to sin and we are powerless to do anything about that, but God in his grace and by his spirit and through his son can break that power and can give us freedom in Christ.

And God saves his people so that we might be adopted as God's children. So we might live knowing that's our new identity and that we might gladly respond in obedience that as adopted children we would take on our father's family values and live for him.

One of the things that's clear in the way that Moses writes the story of salvation history in the early books of the Bible is that the people of God are intended to be like a light to the nations that in their worship, in their lifestyle, in their pursuit of justice and mercy, in their sexual ethics, they were to draw other people out from their darkness because there's this new community and it's attractive.

And Joseph, he's a pattern of that kind of life. He lives with obedience to God. He lives with integrity. He works hard and he works well and he lives for the glory of God even in Egypt.

Surrounded by unbelief and other gods, he remains faithful. When he's tempted into sexual sin, he remains obedient and he honors God. When he's facing hard providence and it would have been easy to be bitter, to grumble, we don't see anything of that in Joseph.

[36 : 52] I was reminded this week of the early church. I was reading an article that was asking the question, why did anyone become a Christian in the first three centuries of the Roman Empire?

When the whole power of the Roman Empire was putting the squeeze on the Christian church, when it was throwing people in prison, when people being removed from their jobs and were losing everything and were being killed, why did anyone become Christians?

Why did anyone become a Christian church? Larry Hurtado, a New Testament scholar, talks about the Christian unique social project as one of those compelling factors towards people becoming Christian.

That here was a new community and they put others first. They weren't self-centered. There was care for the poor, there was care for the suffering and that was attractive and it was good.

It was a community of peace and welcome. It was a community that didn't put up barriers and dividing lines in a very divided society and that was seen as good and attractive.

[38 : 07] They were a people marked by forgiveness and wanting reconciliation rather than seeking out revenge, attacking, hating, killing.

And that was striking and that was good. And they saw sex as a gift of God to be reserved for marriage. They didn't use it for power.

They didn't regard it as just an appetite and that was seen as attractive and good. Like Joseph, the church has always been called to live as strangers in a land not our own.

We're citizens of heaven and we are to represent God and to live for the glory of God in a way that attracts others towards the God who we love and serve.

So as we close, let me ask, have you seen how good God is? And have you seen how good God's story of salvation is?

[39 : 15] Going back to films, my brother is one of those who whenever he goes and sees a movie and he likes it, he'll always come back. Have you seen the movie? Well, you need to. His natural response is to recommend.

That's something I think we all need to learn when we see the goodness of God and his story of salvation. Though we don't stand on the side and be like critics, perhaps.

Standing in judgment over God's word and God's salvation story. Standing in judgment over Jesus, his savior. Rather, let God's word stand in judgment over us. Don't remain impartial and unmoved by this, the greatest story ever told.

Rather, enter into this story as we are invited to. First of all, to see the darkness in our own hearts. To see the needs in our own lives of being reconciled to God.

Consider carefully the light and the love that God extends into the world. Especially in the sending of Jesus, the savior. That we would believe in him.

[40 : 24] We would trust in him. We'd turn from sin and turn towards God through faith in Jesus. To become part of this great story ourselves. And then, that we would live to share this story with others.

It's one of the reasons as a church why we're excited about Christianity Explored. It gives us a chance to share the good news of Jesus with others. Let me encourage you to dig deep into the wonderful story that we have in the Bible.

To be gripped by God's love and his grace extended to us. So that we would then want to recommend Jesus to others.

We would want to share him with others. To do that, we need to always be viewing that great story of God's love and grace every day in our own lives.

Let's leave it there and let's pray together. Let's pray together.

[41 : 37] Okay. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Okay. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.