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The Grace of God in Christ Jesus

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: Romans 3; Matt. 1:1-6.

The connection between these two passages is not immediately obvious, but I trust you will see shortly that there is that here which is a marvellous manifestation of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. There is a realm of grace here. There is here the perfect marvel and wonder of what grace does through faith and this is a matter upon which our hearts should continuously rest and meditate for we owe everything to the grace of God. And it is always a very safe thing to have a lively and hearty and large appreciation and enjoyment of the grace of God. Now, why have I read these six verses?

I have underlined four names of those mentioned in these first six verses in Matthew's gospel. They are the names of four women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bath-sheba. You see, the object which is in view in writing this chapter is to establish the link between the Lord Jesus after the flesh, and David and Abraham. The first verse makes the declaration "the son of David, the son of Abraham". "Now we are going", in effect, says the writer, "to trace that out and establish that link; the Lord Jesus after the flesh is joined with David and with Abraham." And then he proceeds to establish that link and the striking thing about it is this: that He introduces some names which are altogether unnecessary and leaves out many of the names which you and I most certainly would have put in.

Would you not have put in Sarah? I am sure you would. If you wanted to trace back and put women's names in in establishing the connection, you certainly would not have missed Sarah. Would you not have put Rebekah in? I am quite sure I should have. And Leah, yes, and other names of women; these would have been included in our list, but they are not mentioned here.

And the very last people in all history, perhaps, which we would have put in, are at least two, perhaps three or four of these names mentioned. We would have shunned them as we would have shunned a leper. We would have closed our minds and padlocked them to the consideration of some of the other names. They are quite unnecessary to establish the link, and naturally quite unthinkable in this connection to establish the genealogy of the Lord Jesus. What is more, they are naturally, completely offensive in that realm. And if we could establish our end in any conceivable way by omitting them, that is exactly what we should have done. But here the Holy Spirit is in charge and how different are the Lord's ways from ours, for He does not blush to bring in these names as we should have done. He does not hesitate to bring forward a name that suggests a most sordid story, a most unlovely thing, a thing which the opponents of the inspiration of the Bible have sought for generations to have cut right out of the Bible. No, the Holy Spirit does not hesitate, although it seems unnecessary and running great risks of offending susceptibilities, and going out of his way to do it.

He does not hesitate to lay hold of these names and make them the first four women's names in the New Testament. What is He after? Why this? Well, Romans 3 is the answer. Those verses that we have read in that chapter are the explanation. I am not going to ask you to read up these stories again in full; I just call attention to them with one object in view. If only men read their Bibles with the right object, they would never find anything they would like to cut out; it is the mind that reads, the standpoint of the reader that matters.

Tamar

Her story is in Genesis 38. Read it from the standpoint of Romans 3. Read what I have to say and some other time you will be able to read that terrible story aright. There are few, if any stories in the Bible more terrible than the story of Tamar. There is not one redemptive feature in Tamar. You look in vain for something you can say to her credit. There is none. It is a sordid, ghastly, unclean story without a redemptive element in it and you want to leave that chapter out if you are reading it as a matter of reading your Bible, and get past it. That story, with some other parts of the Scripture, have made men infidels, and opponents of the Word of God hurl these charges at the Bible - that it is a book unfit to be read. From their standpoint that is quite true and yet it is here, and the marvel is that Tamar is the first woman mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, that Jesus Christ came through Tamar. He took the seed of a woman.

That says two things to me that I hope will strike home to you with the same force that they strike home to me. As to the Person of the Lord Jesus; what a wonder, a marvellous thing the Holy Spirit did when He cut in between the Son of God and the earthly inheritance and produced "that Holy thing". What a work of severance from sin to produce a sinless One through the flesh!

I am not talking about Mary as being immaculate, I am talking about that cutting in between Mary and the Son of God which is something more. If you simply put it all down to Mary, you are missing the point - no, God did something. He was begotten of the Holy Spirit and there was that cutting in between the Tamar stream, the Rahab stream and all the other streams in the flesh, cutting clean in and bringing even out of the cradle of the flesh, a sinless One; that, for the Person of the Lord Jesus, God's miracle. Linked with that, there is that in you and me, if we have been begotten of the Holy Spirit, which has no natural link with the old Adam, which is of Christ, of God. There is that deeper than this natural life, more inward than this with which we are so familiar after the flesh, which is of God, of which the writer of the Hebrew letter speaks when he says, "the Father of our spirits". "We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence, how much more the Father of our spirits". Yes, that is where there is hope for us. It is there that everything for eternity

hangs for us, "A new creation in Christ Jesus". It is that that God watches over and seeks to nourish and cherish and build up, but those two things are one.

There is the second thing this says to my heart. Tamar, without any redeeming element, sin without a ray of light, Tamar - Jesus Christ. Oh, what grace for Tamar! She might have lived her sordid life and passed out and men would have been called to forget her. If her name happened to be mentioned it would have been immediately, "Shush, do not mention it!" The Holy Spirit brings it up in connection with the Lord Jesus; the first name of a woman in connection with the Lord Jesus; what grace for Tamar. What was it that brought Tamar into this living union with the Lord Jesus? It was her sin. You say, well it ought to be argued the other way, it ought to put her out of the reckoning. It is true of you and me. What was it that brought us into living relationship with the Lord Jesus? Not our goodness, but our sin.

And the very first touch, element, and feature of any true, living relationship with the Lord Jesus is this: that the situation is hopeless naturally, that there is not a redeeming feature, that we have come to the place where we recognise that we are altogether undone; there is nothing to be said for us. God has to bring us there and we never come into a sufficient appreciation of the grace of God until we have come there. It may take years for believers to get there, but God sees to it that grace is the one note that is the true expression of the believer's heart. It was the grace of God that did it. It is the grace of God that does it. It will always be the grace of God. We have nothing else. It is the very fact of our dire sinfulness that has brought us to Christ, and you try to get to Christ any other way, on any other ground and you will always find a space between; you never come on any other ground.

The Lord brings us to the place where we cannot throw any stones at Tamar. We may not have sinned in the same way, but what is the difference? If it is only the matter of the *kind* of sin, what matters if the final verdict is the same? We are all as an unclean thing and all our righteousness is as filthy rags; there is no soundness in us. It is not a matter of the kind of sin, it is a matter of the *fact* of sin and it is a tremendous thing to get there. It is important to realise that our salvation does not depend upon our being convicted of sins, or upon our confessing of sins. There is a movement going round the world now which is claiming to produce changed lives upon the one plank of the open confession of sins and in the meetings men openly, publicly confess this sin and that sin. There is a result; there are changes in lives, but that is not the criterion. It never was, you can produce changes by psychological methods, but the ground of this movement is the confession of sins publicly and that is an inadequate basis for regeneration. It is not a matter of being convicted of sins, it is being convicted of SIN.

Sins do not necessarily bring us directly into relation with the work of Christ but sin does. It is the fact of sin, utter, complete, which the race in Adam is - not that it is guilty of different kinds of sins, but that it *is* sin. That brings us into vital relationship with the Lord Jesus and His work, who was "made sin for us" before He could take our sins. Made sin for us. You have to get down to the deeper depths of this sin matter. It is not that our sin has not been so bad as Tamar. No, you and I are just as bad a sinner in the sight of God as Tamar although we have never committed Tamar's sin. Out of Christ sin is sin and there is no redeeming feature. It is encircling all the world, Jew and Gentile, enlightened and unenlightened, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It is not a matter of the number of sins or the kinds of sins, but it is the sin matter. Until we come down there, there is no vital, living relationship with the Lord Jesus in salvation, but when we come there, then the grace of God is magnified.

What grace that the first woman's name in connection with the Lord Jesus here on this earth as to His genealogy is the name of one who was brought in without a redeeming feature. Why did He do it? Why unnecessarily reach out and bring in poor Tamar from her hiding? She has lived her life and died. Why bring her here into the most conspicuous of places? To magnify the grace of God in Jesus Christ. It is her sin that does it, not her goodness.

Rahab

Hebrews 11:31: "By faith Rahab the harlot..." Christ came of Rahab the harlot. Another story full of darkness. An accursed woman of a cursed race; the Canaanites were cursed and she in the midst of a cursed race was one of the members of that race. Christ was born of Rahab. She is brought in as the second name, although it is not necessary to mention her at all. It was her sin that brought her in.

Ah, but we are moving now in the construction of the basis of salvation. Sin to begin with. "By faith Rahab the harlot..." that is Romans 3, we have read it, "Now we conclude (reckon) that a man is justified by faith" (Rom. 5:1). "Being therefore justified by faith we have peace with God". An accursed member of an accursed race, at peace with God. There is grace working through faith! Faith brings us into the position of being justified with God.

We have all got to learn that lesson even though we have been saved a long time. It means that here I come, by nature I am clothed in a garment of sackcloth (and a ragged one at that) and full of holes and stains and blots and there is an infinitely perfect, holy, righteous God whose eyes are too pure to behold iniquity or evil. And the greatest question of my whole eternity is how can I come into His presence and be happy and never feel that those eyes are looking at my garment, taking account of the holes and the blots? Until that question is answered I have no rest, no peace, I am an exile, I wander, an eternally distressed soul.

There comes One and takes away my ragged, filthy, coarse garment and gives me a beautiful robe, and says, "I have purchased this for you at great cost. It is the robe of acceptance with God in which you can go freely into His presence and be happy and He will always look upon you with great pleasure. It is the robe of My righteousness which makes anyone able to be in the presence of a Holy God without having a moment's fear." I say thank you and hang it up in my cupboard and come back in my old sack again, still worried, still miserable. How can I get away from this awful sense of condemnation? And the One who gave me the robe comes along: "What was that you were saying?" "I am so distressed about this matter of enjoying the presence of God..." "Did not I give you a robe?" "Yes, I like to think about it. Being justified is a lovely doctrine. I like to talk about it. I have hung it up, this justification doctrine is a lovely thing to contemplate, to walk round and gaze upon". Why don't we wear it, put it on, and go right in, being justified by faith and let us have peace with God? We are not letting ourselves have peace with God. We do not, in a practical way, appropriate His provision. There is no need to stand outside and ask, "Will He receive me?" for we have been accepted in the Beloved One. We are justified by faith. In that justification God's eye sees no sin in us; we are clothed with the garment of His own Son as Righteousness and yet we will not wear it. We prefer our old sack, we hang the garment up and too often are under condemnation, miserable, hanging about outside, not drawing near.

The Word says, "In full assurance of faith"; coming in His righteousness we shall never be refused. Rahab had a garment. What a garment it was, but she is brought in here in relationship to the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit is not afraid; He seems glad to bring her there; He goes out of His way to bring her there. Surely it is a wrong thing to link these two together, Rahab the harlot and Jesus

Christ, but the Holy Spirit does not blush to make that link. "By faith Rahab" - see what faith brings us into in Christ; see what grace operating through faith can do! We will sing presently,
"All these once were sinners defiled in His sight
Now arrayed in pure garments in praise they unite."

It is grace, but faith is the link between the sinner and the Saviour.

Ruth

All we need to say about Ruth is this. So far, as Ruth's personal character was concerned there was nothing against her. She was terribly unfortunate, and had great sorrows. Her husband, who died, had forsaken his country under pressure; there may be some dishonour in that and this had brought suffering upon his family. But there is nothing to say against Ruth morally; she was a beautiful character. But she was a Moabitess and if you look in Deut. 23:3 you will see that the Ammonite and Moabite may not come into the congregation of the Lord. There is judgment upon the Ammonite and Moabite because they withstood the purpose of God in His elect people and the law was pronounced against them, the law was constructed as a barrier between the Moabite and the congregation of the Lord. But Ruth is here linked with the Lord Jesus. "Free from the law, O blessed condition." Grace gets over the law which is against every one of us.

If you try to live under the law you will find you have no fellowship with the Lord Jesus. The law condemns at every turn. It says obey it, live up to it to 99.9% and if you fail in 0.1%, you are responsible for all the rest and guilty of a breach. Can you stand up to that? And the law is not just the ten commandments; it is something more than that. Blessed be God, this One who came in here, the Lord Jesus, He has fulfilled the law to its very last fraction. He has set it aside by fulfilling it. He has brought in grace and delivered us from the law so that the law is no longer against us because Christ is for us. And Ruth the Moabitess against whom there was a law, comes into the most living relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Bath-sheba

Bath-sheba; her name is not mentioned, but the very way in which it is put is most striking: "David begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Uriah." This brings in a sad story. It is not Bath-sheba that is to blame. It is not Bath-sheba we are going to talk about, but she brings up the whole story by the very way in which the Lord has had it written. Why bring all that up? Why not just mention Bath-sheba and pass over all the other? No, the Holy Spirit is saying there is a man after God's own heart involved in this, a man who knew the Lord, whom God blessed, whom God used, whom God strengthened; the sweet singer of Israel comes into this. He failed and he suffered for it. For what we sow we reap; "they that sow to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption". But that whole thing is taken hold of by God in grace, sad as it is, and introduced into a realm where God realises His supreme purpose. We ought to take warning from this. We may be the Lord's, yes, but being the Lord's we may fail. God may have blessed and used us and yet there may be a terrible failure; we shall suffer for it, but that is not the end of the story. While the story may be sad and terrible and in the first instance the result may be exceedingly painful and we may suffer, grace takes hold of the failures of those whose hearts are right before God and gets something good out of them, gets something for the glory of God.

It is a terribly dark gospel that has no note for the one who has sinned and failed God and no note that says that very thing can be turned to good account; that it is left in its dire hopelessness,

nothing can come out of that for God. That is Buddhism; you have sinned, you will suffer for it, there is no redeeming element, it will all be against you for time and eternity.

No one should take this, of course, as liberty to sin, no one will presume upon the grace of God nor think lightly of this if there is some dark chapter in our history that we would like to have scored out, we have suffered, and we have seen that that is a desolate patch where nothing grows. David begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon had two names; one meant beloved of the Lord, the other meant peaceful. We may suffer and be chastised for wrong and "no chastisement for the present seems to be joyous but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby". Solomon built the House of the Lord and Solomon exemplified all that Christ in glory is, as no other king, and Solomon was God's wonderfully gracious overruling of a dark thing.

Do not let us do evil that good may come, but as a matter of hope let us remember that if we fail, it is true we will suffer. Sin is sin, we will reap, but God comes in and in grace and in providence turns our very failures to His glory. It is grace. You see the progress of grace in these four names and perhaps it ought to be said that even this last one shows how even the man after God's own heart is dependent upon God and dare not be off his guard, he is only kept by the power of God. If he forgets that for a moment, there will be disaster. "Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

All this is meant to glorify the grace of God and to show how we are justified by grace through faith, and how God justifies the ungodly. It is not of works, says this Word, not Tamar's works, not Rahab's works, not Ruth's works, not Bath-sheba's works, but the grace of God. And of course we ought to see how in this wonderful link with the Lord Jesus the Gentiles are brought in. Probably all four of these women were Gentiles; at least three of them were. The Gentiles were excluded from the covenant and in the Person of the Lord Jesus both Jew and Gentile have their place. That is the Body of Christ introduced by the very birth of Jesus Christ.