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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“HOPE FOR US” ~ Matthew 1:1-16

The world is falling apart, and with it many American Christians. I have never seen so many believers wallowing in despair before now, not even in the days after 9/11.

? *Is our God able to give us hope?*

○ {1 Pe 1:3} Many of us will immediately answer, ‘Yes!’ **“The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” “has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”**

? Still, we are ordinary people, easily dismissed by the world as inconsequential. Can our hope serve a greater purpose than personal comfort? *Can God use us to bring a real and living hope to the world?*

▣ Please turn with me to Matthew 1:1-16.

This is the human genealogy of Jesus. At first glance, it does not even begin to address our questions.

But there is more here than meets the eye.

■ Matthew 1:2-3: **“Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar...”**

○ {Ge 38:6} We meet Tamar in Genesis 38, when Judah arranges a marriage between her and his firstborn son, Er.

{Ge 38:7} In Tamar’s world a woman is defined by her relationships with males. Her most fervent hopes depend on marriage and motherhood. But Er is a wicked man, and so YHWH slays him.

{Ge 38:8} In keeping with tradition, Judah commissions his second son (Onan) to impregnate Tamar. As distasteful as that is to us, it is an effective way to provide for the widow, carry on the dead man’s name, and keep his assets in the family.

{Ge 38:9-10} Onan gladly uses Tamar, but selfishly practices a simple form of birth control to prevent conception. YHWH puts him to death.

{Ge 38:11} Judah is obligated to give his third son Shelah to Tamar, but he is worried that **“He may die too.”** He fearfully withholds Shelah from Tamar.

Her hope fades. What man would want to take a reputedly barren husband-killer as his wife?

{Ge 38:12-16} Years later Judah goes on a journey. Tamar learns of it, disguises herself as a prostitute and sits in wait for him beside the road that he must take.

Are we inclined to feel superior? Tamar is an unwanted, childless, two-time widow. Not only is she aging by the minute, her earthly fate rests in the hands of men who are weak, selfish, and corrupt. Hers is the desperate act of a desperate woman.

When Judah comes along he does not see his daughter-in-law; he sees sex for sale. **“Come now,”** he says **“let me sleep with you.”**

{38:17-23} Judah offers a goat in payment but he does not have one on him, so he gives her his seal and his staff in pledge. He keeps his word and sends the goat, but by then she is gone – and with her Judah’s seal and staff.

{38:24} Three months later Tamar’s pregnancy is showing. When Judah hears that his **“daughter-in-**

law ... is guilty of prostitution” he is enraged. He demands that she be **“burned to death!”**

{38:25-26} At the crucial moment Tamar pulls out his seal and staff. Judah cries out, **“She is more righteous than I!”**

{38:27-30} Judah gives himself to Tamar as her husband. Six months later, she gives birth to twin boys. Her honor is restored, her suffering is redeemed, and her nearly dead hope is gloriously revived.

■ The blessing is not limited to one woman. Among her descendants is Israel’s greatest king, David, and Joseph the adoptive father of **“Jesus who is called the Messiah”** (Matthew 1:16).

★ If Sovereign God can give true hope to a neglected, exploited, childless widow from such a dysfunctional family, can he not give hope to you and me? If the LORD can bring hope to the world through Tamar, can he not bring it through us?

■ Next, Matthew 1:5a: **“Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab.”**

○ Rahab is an innkeeper in Jericho, and (so says tradition) a prostitute. Israel is camped on the east bank of the Jordan River, waiting to seize the land.

In the long run, Rahab’s best hope for survival is to join them. But why would they accept her? She is a Canaanite, an idolater, a prostitute.

{Josh 2:1-3, 8-11} Then two Israelite spies show up at her door. The king of Jericho gets wind of this and commands Rahab to hand them over.

He will not hesitate to execute Rahab for treason. In the short run, her best hope for survival is to comply with his demands.

{2:4-16} But YHWH infuses Rahab with hope beyond hope. She disregards the king, misdirects his soldiers, and provides the spies with crucial information.

{6:22-23} Weeks later, as the city collapses, her hope begins to be fulfilled. The Israelites spare Rahab and her family from death.

She marries Salmon and they have a son named Boaz. Rahab is the great-great-grandmother of King David, and the ancestor of Joseph the husband of Mary, the mother of **“Jesus who is called the Messiah.”**

★ If Sovereign God is able to give true hope to a Canaanite idolater who used to be a prostitute, can he not give hope to you and me? If the LORD can bring hope to the world through Rahab, can he not bring it through us?

■ Matthew 1:5a-b: **“Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth...”**

○ {1:3-5} We have already heard parts of her story today, so I will stick to the major events. Ten years into Ruth’s marriage her father and father-in-law and husband and brother-in-law are all dead. She has no children.

{1:6-22} In an amazing display of loyalty, Ruth relocates to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law. It

means leaving behind her homeland, her people, and her sister-in-law.

Besides her good character, all Ruth has left is her bitter mother-in-law and her poverty. She is defined by what she has lost and what she has never had.

Then events take a surprising turn: Ruth marries Rahab's son Boaz. Together, they have a son named Obed, the grandfather of King David. Messiah will trace his human lineage back to Ruth.

★ If Sovereign God is able to give true hope to a woman who is all loss and no possibility, can he not give hope to you and me? If the LORD can bring hope to the world through Ruth, can he not bring it through us?

■ That brings us to Matthew 1:6: **“David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife”** (a woman by the name of Bathsheba).

○ {II Sam 11:2-4} We meet Bathsheba when King David catches sight of her from the palace roof. He gazes on her, lusts after her, and orders her brought to him. Both are already married to other people.

Is this encounter fully consensual? Is it the charming seduction of a hesitant partner? Is it an intimidating demand on a reluctant woman? Is it an out-and-out assault? We are not told.

What is certain is this: David is a mighty king. He reigns over Israel. Bathsheba, on the other hand, is a woman, the wife of a man of Gentile descent who serves in David's army. The power-differential between the two is considerable.

{11:5-17; 12:1-18} Bathsheba gets pregnant, and David tries to cover it up. When that fails, he has her husband Uriah murdered. He eventually repents and is forgiven by God; but the baby boy dies at the age of seven days.

Adultery, murder, and the loss of a child is a hopeless way to start a marriage. Yet the couple has four more sons, including King Solomon. Even better, Bathsheba is a vital link in Messiah's human lineage.

★ If Sovereign God is able to give hope to a victimized and/or adulteress woman, can he not give hope to you and me? If the LORD can bring hope to the world through Bathsheba, can he not bring it through us?

Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba are so-called “hopeless cases,” trapped in seemingly hopeless situations. Yet God gives hope to each one.

■ And in God's wisdom, mercy, and startling providence, each becomes his instrument to bring the greatest hope to humanity, and indeed the whole Creation. For each of these women contributes her physical and spiritual DNA to the family line that culminates in the birth of **“Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ”** (Matthew 1:16).

And while Joseph is not Messiah's *biological* father, he fills two absolutely essential roles: husband to Mary and adoptive father to Jesus. He does so admirably well, with faith, courage, and devotion, qualities which reflect his family heritage.

? *Is God able to give us hope?*

These women say “Yes!” His intervention on their behalf proves it.

? ***Can God use us to bring hope to the world?***

Once again, the answer is a resounding “Yes!” We cannot contribute biological DNA to Messiah’s line. But we can share the hope of Jesus.

We share Christ’s hope by telling the story of his life, and our life in him.

We share Christ’s hope by speaking, behaving, and relating in the ways he did during his Incarnation.

{Ro 8:29} We share Christ’s hope by resembling him from the inside out, being “**conformed to [his] image**” by the Word of God and his indwelling Spirit.

The world is falling apart, but despair is neither necessary nor inescapable. God is more than able to give us hope! His Son Jesus is our hope!

And this hope has a greater purpose than personal comfort. God is more than able to use us to bring hope to the world! His Son Jesus is our hope!

Matthew 1:1-16 is the Word of the Lord.