

## AN UNTIMELY DEATH

As hopefully directed in a small measure to attempt to declare the unsearchable riches of Christ, Eph.3:8, we would like to take a few minutes to consider an oft neglected, not much discussed and even 'swept under the carpet' portion of Holy Writ, illustrating what might be termed the good, the bad & the ugly aspect of human behaviour as seen in the lives of such whose sins, though exceedingly wicked and inexcusable in the eyes of the Lord, Prov.15:3, are nevertheless sovereignly governed in such a meticulous and holy manner as to fulfill all the Lord's good pleasure, and render unto Him alone, the glory that is due unto his name. Psalm 29:2.

Let's turn our attention to the Old Testament, where we find our 'victim,' who went by the name of Onan. "And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. And **the thing which he did displeased the LORD; wherefore he slew him.**" Gen.38:9-10. Without further comment, let's just say - very odd; especially if we approach this from a casual or faithless perspective!

Untimely death? Is there such a thing? Only in relation to **our** estimation of things, as we know and understand by the Scriptures that our "times" are entirely at the Lord's disposal. Psal.31:15. "I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand." Deut.32:39. "The LORD killeth, and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up." I Sam.2:6.

In relation to Onan, we will have to consider Tamar, who is the ancestress of much of the tribe of Judah, and, in particular, of the house of David. Her story can be found in Genesis chapter 38. Tamar is first mentioned as being the wife of Judah's oldest son, Er. "And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, whose name was Tamar." Gen.38:6. However, Judah's firstborn "was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD slew him." Gen.38:7.

When Er dies, Judah, {in accordance with Jewish inheritance customs,} gives Tamar to his second son, Onan, who is to act as a surrogate for his dead brother, in order to continue Er's lineage, so that the family line would advance, and his inheritance be secured. "And Judah said unto Onan, go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother." Gen.38:8.

Instead of performing his marriage vows in an appropriate manner, he pulls out at the last second, and his sperm/seed spills to the ground. In Latin, one might call this act a "coitus interruptus"? "And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother." Gen.38:9.

OK, this will be our focal point, although I do want to continue this most interesting narrative, with a few further details. Consequently, Judah is depicted as seeing Tamar as somehow cursed and is therefore now reluctant to give her his only remaining and youngest son Shelah. Rather, he tells Tamar to go to her own father's house, and continue there, keeping herself in an unmarried state, until that time when Shelah would call for her. "Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter in law, remain a widow at thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown; for he said, lest peradventure he die

also, as his brethren did. And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house." Gen.38:11. However, even after Shelah has grown up, Judah still does not give Tamar to him in marriage, at which some point Tamar becomes anxious about her future state.

Years past, and Judah's wife dies, Gen.38:12, and Judah becomes a widower. The rest of this strange narrative can be summed up thus, as found in Genesis 38:13-30. After learning that Judah was planning a trip to Timnath to tend his flock, Tamar plots to disguise herself as a prostitute, in order that she might trick Judah into laying with her, hoping to become pregnant from this encounter, so that she might carry a child in Judah's line after all, especially since she had been denied Judah's son Shelah. In order to proposition him, she bargains her 'services' for a goat, upon which Judah in a pledge gives her his signet seal ring, bracelets & staff, in hopes to retrieve them once they are exchanged for the goat. When Judah was later able to have a goat sent to her, in order to collect his staff and seal, Tamar was nowhere to be found. A few months later as her pregnancy began to show, Tamar {who had anticipated this moment} is accused of 'playing the harlot,' Gen.38:24, and upon hearing the news that she has forsaken her vows of chastity, Judah, as the head of the family, acts swiftly to restore his honor, demanding that she be burned to death. Lev.21:9.

Upon hearing this grave news, Tamar displays Judah's personalized items, with a message stating that the owner of these items was the man who had impregnated her. Now Judah recognizing these personal possessions as his own, immediately frees her from this death sentence, and shamefully acknowledges that she had been more righteous than him; because he gave her not to Shelah his son, and never again sought to know her in an intimate way. "And it came to pass in the time of her travail, that, behold, twins were in her womb," Gen.38:27, which were named Perez and Zerah, establishing her place in the family, as well amongst Judah's descendants.

Having opened that, we return to this particular sin of Onan, for its chiefly this sin and its mortal consequences which engaged my thoughts, as I trust that I received a little understanding of what transpired here. If Onan and his sin are mentioned at all by our 'prophets' of the day, it is usually in a context that seeks to broadcast the dangers of sexual impurity, {which is not denied,} or as the Papists, who point to this as a proof text against birth control, although I can say authoritatively without any reservation that this has absolutely nothing to do with either one of these conclusions!

So why was Onan destroyed by the Lord, and why was all this even recorded in God's Word? "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham," Matt.1:1, tells us. "And Judas {Judah} begat Phares {Perez} and Zara {Zerah} of Thamar {Tamar,} and Phares begat Esrom ... who begat Jesse; and Jesse begat David the king." Matt.1:3-6. Christ, according to the flesh, was the son of David, Rom.1:3, and as all of the historical facts of the Scriptures must be interpreted based on the whole of its main testimony regarding Christ, we realize that Onan was killed because, {like Esau before him,} he despised the grace of God in Christ, did not believe in the promised Redeemer, and refused to become a vessel through which these promises, or rather this one promise was being fulfilled through the loins of Judah, from whom Christ, according to the flesh, would arise.

This becomes more apparent as the New Testament Scripture unfolds before us, and we are brought to the joyful acknowledgement that Christ is the key to all of Scripture, as only in HIM are its treasures unfolded. "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." Rev.3:7. Our Lord informed the Jews on one occasion, that all their study of the scriptures was to no avail, if Christ was not seen as the material substance thereof! "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and **they are they which testify of me.**" John 5:39. As two of the disciples were travelling to a village called Emmaus, the {resurrected} Lord himself drew near to them, "and **beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.**" Luke 24:27. A few verses later, and Christ tells them, "these are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that **all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.** Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures." Luke 24:44-45. When Philip found Nathanael, he greeted him with these words, "we have found **him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write,** Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." John 1:45. A few verses later, and our Lord says to Nathanael, "verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and **the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man,**" John 1:51, that is, the angels as representative of all true Gospel Ministers in every age, who in all their messages, and all their attempts to proclaim the glad tidings of an accomplished salvation, begin {ascend} and end {descend} in the Lord Jesus Christ, {the Alpha & Omega,} who alone is "**the faithful witness.**" Rev.1:5. Note, Christ is not "a" but "the faithful witness," and also "**that prophet**" whom we must hear in all things, as destruction awaits every soul which refuses to do so. "For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people." Acts 3:22-23. Again, Peter preaching to the Gentiles in Acts 10:43, says in regards to Christ, "**to him give all the prophets witness,** that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Acts 10:43. These scriptures, along with many others, so clearly set forth the truth contended for in this paragraph, which is that everything recorded in the Old & New Testament Scripture has some relation to the Person & Work of the Lord Jesus Christ; in fact, all of creation exists for this very thing, and a failure to grasp this essential truth, will inevitably result in much confusion concerning heavenly things. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." Rev.4:11.

We would even go as far as to say that the death of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross is the pinnacle moment of all of creation. Luther, in his Table Talk, compared Christ to the "star and kernel" of Holy Scripture, describing him as "the center part of the circle" around which everything else revolves. On another occasion Luther compared certain biblical texts to "hard nuts" which would not crack and confessed that he had to throw these texts against the rock {Christ} so that they would yield

their "delicious fruit," a lively illustration proven true on many occasions, whilst searching the Scriptures.

Again, in the Book of Revelation, {the revelation & unveiling of Jesus Christ being the central and all-engaging theme of this prophecy, and not some 'end time' delusionary scribble,} we read, "worship God, for **the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy**," Rev.19:10, that is, the testimony of Jesus, or the Gospel which embodies that testimony is the very spirit, life, and soul of the prophecy of this entire book, for as all the prophets bore witness to Christ, so does the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Truth, as he is referred to in John 15:26-27, "testify of" Christ, and guide us "into all truth." "He shall glorify me, {saith our Lord,} for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." John 16:14.

Which brings me to briefly consider the unity and oneness of that book which we call the Bible, and also the uniqueness of the message which it from cover to cover sets forth, both testifying to our consciences, and to the rejoicing of our hearts that "we have not followed cunningly devised fables," II Pet.1:16, for unto such as are efficaciously called, Christ is the "power of God, and the wisdom of God." I Cor.1:24.

The sheer goodness of the Lord in granting his children seasons of delighting in the contemplation of God's Word, as their hearts are opened, like Lydia's – Acts 16:14, to understand and behold such a sacred and beautiful harmony in all of Holy Scripture, which absolute oneness – **God's Word is one** – to me, amongst many other infallible truths displays the wonderment of Divine Inspiration. Think of it! There was literally over a thousand years between Moses {Old Testament} and Christ {New Testament} and its truth remains substantiated unto this day – our day! "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." John 1:17. Think again! A book that was written over a period of more than a thousand years, in three different languages, {Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek,} by more than forty different authors, with various degrees of intelligence, multiple personalities, various lifestyles and even nationalities; some being kings, priests, prophets, soldiers, fishermen, and even tentmakers; many suffering great hardships in proclaiming its truth; many mocked, some imprisoned, tortured, and most entirely forsaken by the world; portions were written in palaces, some in prisons, dens, shepherds fields and other obscure places; in times of war and times of peace, times of prosperity and times of famine, times of life and times of death, yet with all these foreign factors and various circumstances, {as it were,} working against each other, there is a sacred thread which binds them all together, as meticulously intertwined in one pure revelation of God – one book – otherwise known as the sacred scriptures of the Old & New Testament – the unchangeable word of God. The Bible is God's voice to his elect, and the authority of Scripture is total.

As we marvel at the diversity, yet oneness of holy scripture, we are also reminded of the plan or method of salvation, which along with this beautiful and perfect oneness, proclaims to our minds the majesty and divine origin of our Bible. A salvation that is so absolutely unique to anything that could have ever been conceived by man, and opposite to all world religion which in some form or another proclaim salvation by works, that is, by man's own efforts to commend himself or make himself acceptable

in God's sight; whereas the Bible alone declares from cover to cover that salvation is of the Lord; {as I've often said, religion is babel; or, nothing more than man's attempt to reach a god of his own imagination, Genesis 11:4,} and emphatically asserts that, if the LORD does not save a man, he cannot be saved. This message is foolishness to a religious world that is perishing, {who amongst other things, condition salvation on some conversion experience, as opposed to the finished work of Christ,} but to those that are saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, it is the power of God, I Cor.1:18, in its wonderful display of that power so disagreeable to the wisdom of men. Think of it, an election in eternity, a creation in time, the 'fall' of man, a promised salvation, {in the form of a seed,} a time of preparation, an incarnation, {God manifest in the flesh,} a perfect representative life, a substitutionary death, redemption accomplished, resurrection secured, the Spirit promised, the Gospel sealed, redemption applied, salvation secured, and heaven opened, John 1:51, and all of God, all of grace, all so wondrously revealed to such for whom it is intended. "And he said, **unto you it is given to know** the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand." Luke 8:10. Could such a work be the product of the uninspired minds of men? Impossible! This Book is the pure revelation of God.

Prize the Scriptures! If we are true believers, and all of only one spiritual household – the body of Christ {comprising of all saints from the dawning of civilization unto our present day} then I would say to you that there were those whom the world has always despised – because of their singularity and obstinacy in declaring one truth – one way of salvation – one and only one glorious Redeemer – our Lord Jesus Christ; indeed, such were those who are your nearest relations, {far closer than any earthly ties that will end in this life,} yes, your brothers and sisters in Christ, {"of whom the world was not worthy,"} many of which in fact lost everything on account of this book, many suffering unspeakable humiliation and even death, for the sake of this book that we call the Bible, which I sincerely hope you hold in your hand often, and hide its words in your heart, {as Mary, which "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart," Luke 2:19,} with some degree of reverence, awe and deep thankfulness for the truth it sets forth, and the **ONE** whom it reveals.

Oh, what a vast treasure are the Scriptures of Truth, and what a mercy, if the Lord grants us grace to bow before their absolute authority, as he speaks in his Word, with hearts made willing to be taught of God, ever mindful of the fact that this Book is of Divine Origin, and so too our understanding of it must be by the grace of God. "O send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles," Psalm 43:3, is the heart yearning of every believer. Sadly, most are not interested one bit in the Lord teaching them his way, as they just want something – like religion – that will make their lives better! How to be happy is the quintessential message of fallen Christianity! But I sincerely hope that every time we open its sacred contents, it is with a desire to be taught by the same spirit of Truth, that inspired and moved upon holy men of God to formulate its pages, II Pet.1:21, and that he might open our understandings and cause us to know and love the Scriptures.

MPJ October 31, 2020