



SERIES: MY LIFE WITH GOD

Mercy and Truth – A Strange Pair

Life Reference: Matthew 1:1-6

"Mercy and truth are met together" (Psalm 85:10).

Mercy and truth—what a strange pair. Yet they are linked together numerous times in the Bible. Mercy is a melancholy and truth is a choleric. Mercy is emotional and truth is practical. Mercy is flexible and truth is absolute.

In the wilderness God told Moses, "Build an ark of shittim wood and overlay it with gold."

- **"And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee" (Exodus 25:21).**

Inside the ark Moses put the tables of stone with the law written on them—cold, hard, and unchangeable. Truth was in the ark, and mercy was right there, too, above it. The mercy seat with the cherubim's wings spread above the ark covered the law.

- **"For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds" (Psalm 57:10).**

Look up. What is higher than the clouds? What covers the clouds like a canopy? The heavens. Truth reaches to the clouds, but mercy reaches unto the heavens. Mercy, the canopy that covers truth.



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Life Reflection:

Are you facing facts so hard and cold that you feel you cannot bear it? A child on drugs? A divorce? A pregnant unwed daughter? Rejection? Abuse?

Have you tried to change the truth? To ignore it? To hide it? To run from it?

The hard, cold facts stare you in the face, and nothing can change them. But don't stop here. Mercy is not far away, for mercy and truth travel together.

Look up. See the canopy of mercy? It does not change truth, but covers it—not to hide it, but to make it bearable.

Matthew 1 is not exactly enjoyable reading, but it contains some important illustrations of truth and mercy. It is worth reading a few *begots* to find them.

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers.

Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram.

Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon.

Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse,

And Jesse begot David the king.

David the king begot Solomon by her *who had been the wife of Uriah.*

(New King James Version)



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Of special interest to women are the four women, the only women, named in the genealogy of Jesus Christ—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, she “who had been the wife of Uriah.” Of all the women on Jesus’ family tree (for there was a woman for every man, you know), why were these four named? Let’s look closer.

- **Tamar—married to Judah’s eldest son.**

This guy was so wicked that God zapped him, leaving Tamar widowed and childless. But better off than she was with that jerk. So, according to the custom, she was given in marriage to Judah’s middle son—another deadbeat. At least he was dead after God got through with him. Twice widowed and still childless, Tamar had one more chance to preserve the family name and provide for herself—the youngest son of Judah. But her father-in-law was not too eager to give his last son to her. What if this son ended up like the other two?

So Judah gave Tamar a false promise, sent her back to her father’s house (a disgrace in those days), and conveniently forgot her. But Tamar was a survivor. When she saw that she was not going to be Judah’s daughter-in-law for the third time, she devised a plan that leaves us in shock.

She planned a masquerade ball for two—Judah and *guess who*. She went as a prostitute. Judah came as a broken-hearted man (after all, he had lost two sons and his wife), seeking a bit of grief-recovery therapy. (You can read the details in Genesis 38.) Out of this one night stand came twins. By her bold and brazen act, Tamar preserved the tribe of Judah, from which came the Messiah. What a bazaar twisted branch on Jesus’ family tree.

- **Rahab—owner and operator of a house of prostitution.**

As she listened to the gossip that swirled around the city wall, she heard amazing stories about the God of the Israelites. She believed, and her faith sent fear crawling up her spine. How could she save her family from the destruction that was sure to come to Jericho?

One day two spies knocked on her door and the solution unfolded. She hid the spies. She lied to her countrymen. She obtained a promise, placed a red cord in her window, gathered her family into her house, and waited. (Read this story in Joshua 2 and 6.) When the walls of Jericho fell, Rahab and everyone in her house survived for Rahab the harlot was a believer. Later she married an Israelite and found her place on a branch of Jesus’ family tree.

- **Ruth—a Moabite idol worshiper.**

The Moabites’ roots sprang from Lot’s incestuous affair with his daughter. This was Ruth’s heritage, but she dreamed of leaving her children something better.





She married an Israelite whose family had moved to Moab to escape the famine in their country. For a time all was well. Then tragedy struck. Her husband, her father-in-law, and her brother-in-law died, leaving three widows. Penniless and grief-stricken, Ruth's mother-in-law said, "I'm going home to Bethlehem."

Ruth, the seeker, stood at the crossroad. She could return to her old lifestyle and worship with her family in the temples of their pagan gods, or she could turn her back on all that was familiar and follow her mother-in-law to a foreign land where they worshiped the one true God. Ruth chose the high road and found her way to Bethlehem, where years later her grandson David and her great (*x-times*) grandson Jesus Christ was born. When Ruth the seeker turned toward the one true God, little did she realize that she was choosing for herself a place on Jesus' family tree. (Read this story in the Book of Ruth.)

- **Bathsheba—“*she who had been the wife of Uriah.*”**

Beautiful Bathsheba had everything going for her. She was the granddaughter of King David's pastor, the daughter of one of the king's mighty men, and the wife of another.

One call, one night, and Bathsheba became a *had been*. She had been admired and adored. She had been faithful and favored. It doesn't take long to fall from a pedestal. One moment of passion. One fling.

An affair. A pregnancy. A murder. A cover-up. A scandal. All Jerusalem counted on their fingers. "Premature baby?" "No baby is *that* premature!" "Dead? The baby is dead? Well, she's just getting what she deserves."

Strange isn't it that the son of Bathsheba was chosen to follow his father on the throne of Israel? Why wasn't the next king the son of wise, kind, beautiful Abigail? Why wasn't she chosen to be the great-*(x-times)* grandmother of Jesus Christ? Her life was filled with exclamation marks, while Bathsheba was surrounded by question marks. Why Bathsheba, the adulteress? Or was Bathsheba a victim? Did she have a choice in the matter? The Bible doesn't tell us, and mercy doesn't ask.





Life Response:

Truth said, "Tamar is a harlot, a conniver, a deceiver—not worth saving."

Mercy said, "True, but she is also a survivor, a mix of good and bad, a right motive, a bad act. She is well worth saving."

Truth said, "Rahab is a heathen, a harlot, and a liar."

Mercy said, "True, but she is also a believer. I have a place for her."

Truth said, "Ruth is an idol worshiper."

Mercy said, "True, but Ruth is a seeker. I will help her find the way."

Truth said, "Bathsheba is a *has been*."

Mercy said, "True, but she is also a *can be*."

We are well acquainted with truth. We stand on truth, we live by truth, we glorify truth, and so we should. Truth must be faced and dealt with. Truth cannot be changed, hidden, ran from, or ignored.

For some truth is . . . "I've had an abortion." "I was unfaithful to my husband and now I have AIDS." "I've been on drugs." "I've embezzled from my employer." "I've practiced homosexuality." Oh yes, we know the truth . . . about ourselves and about everybody else (we think).

But we are not as well acquainted with mercy as we should be. Read the words of the Savior.

- **"I will have mercy and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners [the Tamars, the Rahabs, the Ruths, the Bathshebas] to repentance" (Matthew 9:13, inserts the author's).**

Truth points out the prostitutes, the adulteresses, the idol worshipers, the drug addicts, the lesbians. Mercy calls them to repentance.

- **"By mercy and truth iniquity is purged" (Proverbs16:6).**



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Not by mercy alone, not by truth alone, but by mercy and truth together iniquity is purged. It takes team work.

So why did God inspire Matthew to name these four women when he recorded the ancestry of Jesus Christ? Because He wants us to understand the magnificence of His mercy.

Life Reflection:

Are the hard, cold facts of what you have been or done overwhelming you? Face the truth, and then call out for mercy. Let God spread His canopy of mercy over you.

Have you been drawing back from doing what God is calling you to do because of what you *have been*? If God chose to place Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba in the bloodline of His Son, He can use you. Whatever the truth of your past, it need not stop you from being used by God. Get under the canopy of mercy today.

My Prayer:

Lord Jesus, the truth is breaking my heart, squeezing my lungs, and tightening my stomach. I would do anything to change it, but it cannot be changed. What is done is done. There is no going back. Help me remember that Your canopy of mercy is spread over me, so I can relax and regain my sanity. Thank You for the warmth of Your presence that covers me like a comforter on a cold winter night. Thank You for the strength to accept the truth and claim Your mercy for myself and those I love. In Jesus' name. Amen.



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More Life with God References:

Psalm 18:28
Psalm 118
Psalm 136
Proverbs 3:3

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