

# The God who Redeems Messy Families

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Preacher: Dylan Marais

- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Hello, everyone. Well, I often wonder what it's like for non-Christians coming to church. Maybe you've got a mom and a dad and their kids quite often.
- Sadly enough, you often just get the mom coming and maybe the dad isn't there or not interested or maybe he's just not around. And she comes in with her kids and typically the kids are a little bit unruly, especially if there's no dad at home and she's got various issues and stresses and maybe she's stressed.
- And then she looks around her church and sees these quote-unquote perfect families, moms and dads together, everyone being nice and sweet, obedient kids.
- And I wonder what they think to themselves. Whether they want that and say, oh gosh, look at this. It's unbelievable. You can actually have good families.
- Or whether they feel judged and think, oh, what are they going to think of me and my family? And maybe they won't come back. Maybe they're scared. Well, our stories in the Bible today deal with families and the brokenness and dysfunction that we find there.
- [ 1 : 1 2 ] But they speak also to the redemption and the offer of hope that is in them as well that God brings to these situations. And so our stories today deal with the God who redeems the messiness of families.
- We will find out that God uses complex and real messy, sinful, broken situations, real dysfunction, to bring about and to continue his covenant purposes.
- We've been dealing with the story of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob over the last few months. And we've seen that there is so much brokenness and fighting and infighting in these families. And unfortunately, that story continues in the story of Joseph.
- Just want to look at that idea of what are God's covenant purposes? If God does work through the messiness and brokenness of the world, and specifically of his covenant people, what are his covenant purposes?
- Is it not to build a family on earth that reflects the family relationships that he has in heaven? Look at God's original purposes in Eden, male and female.
- [ 2 : 2 8 ] Living with purpose, fill the earth and subdue it, develop the land, and living in family. Adam was incomplete until God gave him a helper.
- The two will become one flesh. What sin does it come in and disrupts and breaks down. It foils, it spoils God's original plan.
- But the whole purpose of covenant and redemption is to fix that broken situation. That's why he calls a family, Abraham, and a nation into existence, to be the kind of people that he originally wanted in the world.
- Obviously, the history of the Old Testament is a history of failure, how God's people weren't able to do that. But because God is a God of redemption, and the covenant he sets up precisely to bring about redemption, redemption here means to fix that which is broken.
- Not to leave it broken and to escape out of the brokenness. Yes, there is escape from the brokenness in a sense, but it's not just left there. God actually fixes it.

[ 3 : 39 ] Redemption is not about escape, but about fixing the brokenness. And so what we'll do is look for little silver linings of redemption and hope in our stories today.

They are there, you just need to look for them. This goes on to tell us that redemption itself is a little bit messy. It can and does take a long time for redemption to take place, especially in family situations, especially when we're dealing with the pain of past broken relationships.

Redemption doesn't act like a magic fairy wand. It's more subtle, but it is real and authentic and whole. Now, if there's failure of God's people in the Old Testament, we should expect the opposite of that of God's people in the New Testament, of restoration and redemption of broken people, so that good family relationships can flow and grow.

And of course, that's what God wants from his covenant families today. He wants covenant families to be a place of relational safety and security, of stability and wholeness.

And he wants them to be places of love and forgiveness and grace. But what if it's not? What if your experience is of anything but love and kindness?

[ 4 : 59 ] What if you've received nothing but abuse and ugliness and you're dealing with pain and shame? How do we get to a place of love and kindness?

Well, our stories today will help us understand a few things that we'll be able to help. So the first thing we're going to look at is that messiness is a covenant reality.

Messiness in covenant families is a reality. If you're hoping that the story of God's covenant people would have taken a turn for the better after we've dealt with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, going to get your hopes dashed, I'm afraid, it doesn't seem like there's a happy ending in our stories today.

If anything, the dysfunction gets worse. And so let's look at Genesis chapter 37. It's a well-known story to us. But we need to highlight just how bad the situation gets in Jacob's family.

First of all, you've got Joseph. Verse 2, he's a little tattletale. Joseph, a young man of 17, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bila and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

[ 6 : 20 ] So it kind of kicks off with Joseph, one of the younger sons. You'll remember Jacob's got 12 sons, and they're kind of grown up. Joseph's the youngest at 17. And he's already causing problems, telling on his older brothers to his father.

And no one wants that. Jacob makes the matters worse. He's got his favorite son. Verse 3. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age.

And he made him a richly ornamented robe for him. Okay. So Jacob shows favoritism towards Joseph, maybe being a bit tone deaf towards his brothers.

Here I have this lovely, beautiful coat. There's indications that that's a royal coat. You know, it's the famous coat from Joseph and his Technicolor Dreamcoat. I just have to put that out there.

And so it's an interesting word used in the Hebrew. We don't know if it's a colorful coat or if it's a long-sleeved coat. But there's indications that it was maybe a royal robe.

[ 7 : 21 ] It is used in the Old Testament in that context. And that makes sense, because the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are to produce kings and rulers.

And so this is an indication by Jacob that he thinks Joseph is the one. And you can imagine what the older brothers are thinking about this. Of course, they hate him because of their father's love to him.

Verse 4. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. So there you go.

Their response to seeing this is to hate him even more and not to find and not to seek reconciliation or even just plain old forgiveness. Joseph, of course, compounds the problem by having a dream and then telling everyone about it.

Verse 5. Joseph had a dream. And when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. And he said, listen, we were binding sheaves of corn and when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright while yours gathered round mine and bowed down to it.

[ 8 : 30 ] Okay, we all know about those dreams. And his brothers get even more angry. Hey, are we going to bow down to you, you little pipsqueak? Of course, they hate him all the more. Joseph has another dream.

He's tone deaf. He doesn't realize what's going on. And then he tells his father and mother. And now they get upset with him. Maybe there's a slight arrogance to Joseph here.

I mean, who speak to their mom and dad like that? Telling them that one day they're going to bow down to me. It's a hugely thing that you don't do, especially in those times in that kind of culture.

The brothers, of course, can't stand this and hatch the famous plan to have Joseph killed. They're so full of hate and anger.

And they just want revenge. Or they've got a plan of just removing him out of the way. Now think about the deep dysfunction of a family that is thinking like that. You've got 12 brothers, and this is God's planned family for the world.

[ 9 : 35 ] And here they are plotting to kill each other. It seems like the people of the world haven't learned anything all the way back from the time of Cain and Abel all those years ago, where they're giving in to their anger and their hatred.

They hatch their plot. There's a half-hearted attempt by Reuben and Judah to save the situation.

Reuben says, well, look, let's not kill him. Let's throw him into a well, and we'll tear up his clothes and tell his dad that a wild animal got him. Judah says something very similar. He says, well, let's sell them into slavery.

You know, that's really only a half-baked solution. There's still so much hatred there. And anyway, being thrown into a pit, you could die there, number one. And secondly, being sold into slavery, that's also often a fate worse than death.

But also think about that. You're going to sell your own brother into slavery. What is the result of all this sin and this dysfunction? Well, it splits the family apart.

[ 10 : 41 ] Have a look at verse 30. Reuben, verse 29. When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes.

He went back to his brothers and said, the boy isn't there. Where can I turn now? And there's a sense where Reuben is, he can't go back to his father. He's alienated from his dad. He's alienated from his brothers because he tried to stop them.

And now he's all on his own. Jacob, of course, is totally inconsolable and wants nothing to do with his sons. Verse 34.

Jacob tore his clothes, put on his sackcloth, mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. No, he said. In mourning will I go down to the grave to my son.

And so his father wept for him. Now, this story only gets worse in the next chapter. We didn't read it because we don't have the time. But the story of Joseph takes over the rest of the Old Testament from chapter 37 up to the end, up to chapter 50.

[ 11 : 45 ] And there's this little chapter 38 about Judah stuck in the middle of that. Sort of seems out of place until he realized that it really is telling us how bad the dysfunction in this family is.

Just a word about dysfunction and messiness. I'm kind of using these words, words that we understand, to cover a whole multitude of sins in the Bible.

And mostly because moms and dads who might have our kiddies listening. And there's some really dark stories, especially in this next chapter. And so when I say messiness and dysfunction, I'm covering quite a wide range of abuse and sin.

And we'll know what we mean when I say these words. I'm not going to read chapter 38, but it does form part of our story to understand how deep and dark the dysfunction goes.

In chapter 38, Judah goes off to marry some Canaanite woman. And he has three sons. The first of whom is so wicked, God just kills him straight out.

[ 12 : 49 ] It's just one little verse. He was so wicked, so God killed him. This is God's covenant people, remember? God's family on earth that are going to carry his name and bring about redemption. So how is that working out for them?

That son married a woman called Tamar, also a Canaanite. And in keeping with custom at the time, Judah gives her to his second son, Onan, so that she can have children with him and continue the family line.

Now in the story, Onan was naughty and didn't fulfill his obligation to Tamar. And because of that, God kills him. So Judah's got three sons and two are dead.

He's got one more son and he's too scared to give him to Tamar in case something goes wrong. And so he sends Tamar off packing. Tamar then hatches a plan to have offspring from the line of Judah.

She obviously realizes that something important is happening here. But the plan she hatches is a terrible plan. She dresses up like a prostitute. She puts a veil on and waits by the side of the road knowing that Judah is going to walk past.

[ 13 : 54 ] And Judah, walking past one day, sees her and says, Hey, how are you doing? And so Judah's got broken, dysfunctional things in his life as well.

Why is he walking along a road seeing a prostitute and saying, and just like that, he would like to go and sleep with her. Anyway, she's successful, but she becomes pregnant.

Judah, of course, doesn't know that it's Tamar, his daughter-in-law. And he gives her, he says he'll promise to pay her and he gives her a pledge because he can't pay her at the time.

And he gives her his own personal items, a seal with his name on it and his staff. And then she goes off and keeps those with her. Later on, Judah hears that there's a report.

Tamar's turned to prostitution. Judah is outraged, not knowing, of course, it's her. But there's this hypocrisy coming in. What do you mean? How can he be outraged? He's the one that went and slept with a prostitute.

[ 14 : 54 ] He calls her to him, has a big public meeting, calls her out and says, You need to be burned to death because of your sin. Tamar produces the goods that Judah has given her.

And here we come to the first timer, the smallest silver lining. Judah realizes he's done something wrong. And he says this, Judah identified the items and said, She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son, Shelah.

And he did not know her again. Well, what? But what a mess. Can God do anything with this kind of dysfunction?

Jealous brothers vying for position and authority to get the rewards? Deeply dysfunctional sexual relations between fathers and daughters-in-law?

Hatred and discord? Murder? Can anything good come out of that? Can God do anything with this? Well, the short answer is, yes.

[ 16 : 01 ] God can and God does. So, the first point is, there is messiness in covenant families. Messiness in covenant families is a reality. The second point, we serve a God who works behind the scenes, in the messiness, to bring about his covenant purposes.

It shouldn't be a surprise for us by now. That's how God has been working with his covenant people the whole time. And if you think about it, how God has to work with sin, he's got to work with the messiness of sin.

Yes, God judges the sin. He never condones it. But if God came up straight against sin, and judged it with all of his justice, there wouldn't be a single sinner left on planet Earth.

In fact, there wouldn't be a planet Earth. And so for God to deal with sin in the world, and to bring about a covenant people that serves him, his original purpose in the world with Adam and Eve, he's got to deal with it, not confrontationally, but almost in a sense behind the scenes, knowing, working with the messiness of sin, if that makes sense.

God has a plan for the messiness. We've got the slimmest of silver linings, of mercy and redemption in both of these stories.

[ 17 : 23 ] And they both come in the end of each chapter. In chapter 37, it says this. Joseph has been sold. Off he goes into slavery.

Jacob is mourning. And the end of chapter 37, verse 36, it says, Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

Now we know the story of Joseph so well. And so that's just one little hint that the end of the story hasn't come. That God is still busy with his covenant family and with Joseph.

And we know how the story of Joseph goes, all those ups and downs with both with the captain of the guard, Potiphar, and how he gets thrown into jail.

So there's a couple of spoilers here. And how God redeems him from that. And Joseph ends up at the second in command in Egypt. We know that the outcome of this story is both reconciliation with his brothers and salvation for his family.

[ 18 : 33 ] Now this is important because it tells us that God knows how sinful his covenant family is, but that he uses their sin.

God used the sin of the brothers to bring about their redemption and reconciliation. Right at the end of Genesis, Joseph says these famous words, You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

What about the second story in chapter 38? What is the silver lining there? It seems like such a bad and a dark and an ugly story. And it obviously is. We'll have a look at what happens from verse 27 in chapter 38.

When the time came for her, that is Tamar, to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. As she was giving birth, one of them put out his hand.

So the midwife took a scarlet thread and tied it on his wrist and said, This one came out first. But when he drew back his hand, his brother came out and he said, So this is how you have broken out. And he was named Perez.

[ 19 : 37 ] Then his brother, who had the scarlet thread on his wrist, came out and he was given the name Zerah. So here in this dark story, redemption comes from the fact that Tamar and her two sons are born directly from Judah.

Although they're born directly from deception and lust and secrecy and forbidden sin, out of these two twins comes the line of David and ultimately the great redeemer, Jesus Christ.

The ultimate son of God and our ultimate redeemer. Out of sin comes salvation and redemption. If you look at the two genealogies in the New Testament, we won't have time to do that now, but the one is in Matthew and the other one is Luke.

Both genealogies mention Tamar and Perez and Zerah. And they include it also in the Old Testament in the genealogy of David.

So that's an indication that God knew this was going to happen and that he included them in the covenant line of Jesus Christ. So when God is involved, when he's in covenant with his people, he's able to redeem deep dysfunction, deep family conflict, deep division, and bring about wholeness and salvation and redemption.

[ 21 : 09 ] Now two things for us to think of there. Number one, God does have a plan for the messiness. Just look at Joseph and Judah.

He is a God who redeems and who has a plan of sin to fix it and bring life and hope out of very dark places. As Isaiah says later on, he says to bring beauty out of ashes, to bring comfort and healing to his people.

God doesn't let go of the messiness and turn his back on the messiness of the world. He actually works in the messiness to bring about redemption. But a warning, the messiness is real and the messiness is painful and the messiness takes time to work itself out.

God is working in the background of covenant families who have gone or are going through deep conflict. Just think of Joseph.

There's no ways he could have known that God is working with him at that time. If he had had faith, yes. And if he could see the future, neither of which we don't know if he had. In fact, it took 20 years, about 20, 25 years, for that whole Joseph situation to be resolved with his brothers.

[ 22 : 28 ] In the case of Tamar and Zerah and Perez, it took about 20 centuries to be included in the line of Jesus and for him to bring ultimate redemption.

So it does take time. Messiness really hurts. Messiness is really real. God really has a plan with it and he works through it.

But sometimes when we go through it, it seems like that's all there is. It can't take time to fix the messiness of broken families. But is that all we can expect?

The slimmest of silver linings? Or can we expect substantial healing and change? The last point to make today is that those slim silver linings of the Old Testament, of glimpses of hope, are completely stopped around in the New Testament.

In Christ, you can have real substantial healing so that the silver lining of hope and the big dark cloud of pain and dysfunction gets turned completely around so that the dark cloud and the silver lining are swapped and that thin silver lining becomes a huge part of your life.

[ 23 : 41 ] Yes, the dark cloud remains and there can still be pain and regret and turmoil, but it does get swapped around. There is substantial and real authentic healing in Christ.

Two things. Oh, so our last point then. So the first point is messiness is a real part of covenant families. The second point is that God works through the messiness to bring about his plans for his people.

He brings about salvation and redemption. And our third point is that messiness is ultimately redeemed in Christ. Just look at the person of Christ when he did his earthly ministry.

Do you remember the story of the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4? He wasn't even meant to speak to her. She had so many sexual partners. In fact, she was living... And she lied to him when she met him.

Yes, I've got a husband. No, he says, you don't have a husband. The person you've got now is not your husband. But he dealt with her so well. And he wanted to offer her salvation.

[ 24 : 47 ] In fact, the story ends like this. John chapter 4 and from verse 39. Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony.

He told me everything I ever did. So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with him. And he stayed two days. Because of his words, many more became believers. They said to the woman, we no longer believe just because of what you said.

Now we have heard for ourselves and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world. So you've got a picture of Christ coming to a very broken situation and a very broken woman and bringing salvation and healing.

And that's not the only time he does that. There's another account in Luke chapter 7. Jesus is eating with his disciples and a woman comes in, presumably a prostitute.

It's not known, but that's what most of the commentators say. And she's in tears and she's crying. She casts herself at Jesus' feet and she takes a jar of alabaster, a very expensive jar, and pours oil on his feet and then washes her tears off with her hair.

[ 25 : 58 ] And the disciples, and God says, oh, get this woman out of here. Jesus says, no, no, no. In Luke chapter 7, Jesus says this, Jesus said to the woman, because you believed, you are saved from your sins.

Go in peace. Your faith has saved you. Another account of Jesus and another woman, this time broken by sickness and obviously outcast from her family and society, she touches him.

A famous story where she touches him on his cloak and he looks around and says, who's done this? And eventually they find her. And he's not angry with her and he speaks these very soft and sweet words to her. Daughter, be of good comfort.

Your faith has made you whole. Go in peace. So then we've got a person in Christ who brings wholeness and healing to broken situations.

The place that he does that is the cross. And so what can we do with the brokenness of our own families? You know, none of us comes from a perfect family.

[ 27 : 08 ] We all come from families that are broken in some sense. It's just not possible to come from the perfect family. If you've got sins in your path that are still bugging you, your sins that you've committed, or maybe sins that your parents or your family members have committed against and you're still feeling that knot of being disappointed and anguish and anger and wanting revenge, what do you need to do?

Take all of those sins. They may be your sins. They may be the sins of others. Take them to Jesus and put it with him on the cross. It's there that forgiveness of sins, both yours and of others, are dealt with.

Guilt and shame and not letting go of the past and holding on to the pain, you can let it all go with Jesus at the cross.

That's what it's intended for, for our healing and our redemption and our salvation. We don't just have to take our sins, but we can take our pain and our hurt and our disappointment and our regrets and our shame and give it to him and he will take it away for us.

I don't know where you are. Maybe you need to be forgiven. Maybe you need to be forgiven and maybe you need to forgive others that have hurt you. Just take it to Jesus.

[ 28 : 37 ] Let's turn to Colossians chapter 3 to see a few things there that can help us in getting a handle on what Christ, of the redemption that Christ gives us. So let's end our time quickly in Colossians chapter 3.

Just reading from the first verse. Paul says, Since then, he's talking to the Christians, Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts from things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. Don't keep your mind controlled by what's happened in your past, either what you've done or what others have done to you. Take it to Jesus and remind yourself that Christ has dealt with him on the cross and that he pours out a new life available to you to deal with it in a wholesome and healthy way.

He says this in the next verse, You can do this. Put your minds with Christ because, for you have died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. So there's a sense where Jesus is hiding you, he's holding you, almost like a cosmic hug.

[ 29 : 49 ] I know it's not quite the imagery, but he's protecting you, he's got you covered. And so you can take your problems and your pain to him and he can deal with it there.

Verse 5, it says, So we can kill it. We've got power over it now. We don't need to have power over, it doesn't have to have power over us.

It includes everything that we could have done in our past. Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed. You can take care of it in Christ, you can let it go, it can stay in your past and it doesn't have to be alive and control you anymore.

Later on in verse 9, it says, Don't lie to each other since you've taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in the knowledge and the image of its creator.

And so there's a new you now in Christ and you can take off that old stuff almost like dirty, yucky clothes that you don't want anymore. Don't keep them with you, just let it go and Christ will deal with it.

[ 31 : 03 ] And that's not all. In verse 12, Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

We can have all these lovely, good, wholesome things in our life. We just have to put on Jesus and put on these new things. We remind ourselves of who we are and what we've got available to us in Christ.

Verse 13, Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. So there's a promise that you can let go of the pain and anguish of the past, of whatever brokenness and dysfunction you come from.

And we've seen in our stories today that the Bible is aware. God and Jesus are both aware. They know of the depth of human depravity. They know of the pain that past broken relationships has caused and can cause.

You can take it to Him there and He can heal it. Verse 15, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. And you will have that if you have forgiveness.

[ 32 : 15 ] And so maybe one of the key things here is to forgive the past. If you need forgiveness then you've got to come to Christ to get that. Don't just forgive yourself. You know, that's a modern mantra.

You need to be forgiven in Christ. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts since as members of one body you will call to peace. And the body here really is what's called the family of God.

And so when you become a Christian you join a whole new family. God lets you heal your family and heal your past hurts. And He lets you become part of a new family that can help you with healing as well.



And lastly, that's why we ended our reading Rules for Christian Households is the heading in my Bible and it says Wives, submit to your husbands as fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and don't be harsh with them.

Children, obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children or they will become discouraged. So friends, we've got these huge promises in the New Testament that God can substantially fix and renew and replace past brokenness and dysfunction and replace it with good habits and wholesomeness and wholeness.

[ 33 : 29 ] We go back to that lady that walks into the church with her maybe dysfunctional past and background, her messy background and she sees Christians who are whole and solid and good and wants that.

We need to be the people that offers that to a broken world. You know, it would be strange if a sick person goes to a hospital and the hospital says, no, we don't want you, you're too sick for us.

we need to be the place where people who are full of brokenness and pain can come and find healing so people who have been healed and received healing themselves can offer it to a broken world.

So we've seen that messiness in covenant families is a reality. It's a sad reality but God knows about it because God works behind the scenes to bring about redemption and wholeness.

God works behind the scenes in the messiness and with the messiness to bring about his covenant purposes and ultimately all of our messiness is redeemed, solved, dissolved, fixed, saved in Christ.

[ 34 : 45 ] Well, let's pray now and ask God to help us with these things. Heavenly Father, thank you for your love in Jesus. Thank you for your promise of salvation and redemption and that no matter how deep and dark our messiness, you help us and you love us and you forgive all of these things in Jesus Christ and not only that but did you help us to replace him with good attitudes and good patterns of behavior.

Send us your Holy Spirit, Lord, and make us ever more like Jesus and more loving and more forgiving. In Christ's name, Amen.