

The Power of Returning

I want to begin today by taking a few minutes and telling you the awful story of Genesis 34.

Then for the majority of our time we will focus on the interaction that occurs between Jacob and God.

In the last verses of Genesis 33 we read that Jacob camped near the city of Shechem and bought a piece of land for 100 pieces of silver.

There in that city Jacob's daughter Dinah found some new friends.

... with those new friends she was introduced new and exciting temptations.

... one of those exciting temptations was a handsome young prince

Parents, one of the greatest challenges you will ever encounter in life is "those people" your children date.

... especially when you are trying to convince them that his/her friend is not a good person.

[Dad, you are just too judgmental! Mom, you don't see him the way I do!]

... and that's true because as a parent you aren't looking at their appearance, you are looking at their character.

Anyway ... Dinah found a handsome young prince among her new friends in the city of Shechem.

... and that handsome young prince raped her.

He wasn't a follower of the true God. ... He was a pagan ... an unbeliever, and he raped her.

... and as sick as this sounds the Bible says the rapist fell in love with Dinah and wanted to marry her.

Now the bible says that when Jacob heard that his daughter had been raped he initially did nothing about it.

... her brothers however were furious!

Well, this prince and his father (Hamor) go to Jacob and his sons (making no apologies for the rape) and ask them to let Dinah marry this rapist ... I mean prince.

... and although Dinah's brothers were **extremely angry** they played pretty ... or as the text says, they talked deceitfully ...

... first they tell Shechem and Hamor that the families can't be joined in marriage because the men of the city were uncircumcised.

... BUT, if all the men of the city would get circumcised then they would allow Dinah to marry the prince.

... Hamor agrees and all the males of the city are circumcised—all of them.

... but then the third day—when all the men are sore from the surgery

... Simeon and Levi showed up and they killed every man in the city,

... looted the city

... stole all their cattle

... and even took the women and children into captivity.

- Two guys did all of that.

Now you are probably thinking, “way to go!” **But according to Jacob** you would be thinking wrong.

³⁰ Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and my men being few in number, they will gather together against me and attack me and I will be destroyed, I and my household." ³¹ But they said, "Should he treat our sister as a harlot?" (Gen. 34:30-31)

I imagine that all of us understand the brother’s perspective ... but what is Jacob thinking.

... Why was Jacob against what Simeon and Levi had done?

Simply because the punishment did not fit the crime.

... In Genesis 49 when Jacob was on his deathbed, in his dying words to his family, he said:

"Simeon and Levi are brothers; Their swords are implements of violence. ... Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; And their wrath, for it is cruel..."

I believe Jacob’s point is that certainly the prince should have paid for his crime ... but the rest of the citizens were innocent.

- Should all of the husbands have to die, and all the women and children taken into captivity.
- It was too cruel, too violent ... too much.

Of course, these brothers tried to argue their case with their father Jacob, *“should we have let him he treat our sister like a prostitute?”*

At the end of Genesis 34 we see Jacob standing before his family surrounded by stolen cattle, the captured women and children

... and his 2 sons with their hands dripping wet with the blood of innocent men.

... and a daughter defiled, humiliated and broken—what is he to do.

You see, can work hard, pay your bills, do the right thing most of the time and still wake up one day and find yourself in a mess ...

... a family divided, wounded, confused, broken, in turmoil

What do you do then? How do you move forward?

Here in Genesis 35 we are going to see exactly what happened in Jacob's life and how God makes all of the difference in the world.

Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and live there, and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." (Gen. 35:1)

When everything turns upside down:

1. There is an invitation to answer (v.1)

Genesis 28 was the first time Jacob had ever been at Bethel.

There he dreamed of a ladder going from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending on it ...

... and the Lord God stood above the ladder

When Jacob awoke, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it."

"How awesome is this place, it is none other than the house of God." ... and Jacob named that place Bethel.

... there Jacob declared God to be his God.

Then, last week, Justin took you through **Genesis 33**, the second time that Jacob was at Bethel.

There, through the night, Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the Lord and Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

And so, then God changed Jacob's name to Israel—which means “he who wrestles with God.”

When the morning, instead of calling the place “Bethel” Jacob said, “I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been preserved” and he called it “Peniel.”

In Genesis 28 we see Jacob's profession of faith in the true God.

In Genesis 33 we see Jacob's consecration to God.

... and now when Jacob's life and family is in turmoil God invites Jacob to back to Bethel.

Our God is an infinite, miracle working, righteous, holy God ... and we are sinners born in sin.

Those two things: Holy faithful God and unholy faithless man are diametrically opposed to each other.

Anyone whom God saves, anyone whom God sets free is eternally saved and free indeed.

... but it is possible for an **eternally saved, free indeed** person to find themselves drifting away from the Lord

... their relationship with God can become cold, lifeless, and without vibrancy

There is no one decision that you make that will achieve for you on this earth sinless perfection.

Here is a hard truth:

Spiritual complacency is the consequence of not abiding.

Here me today:

If there was a time in your life when you loved Jesus more than you do right now ...

... a time when prayer was more precious and God more real to you ...

... then you are drifting BUT God and His word is inviting you to return.

Return to what?

God's invitation is for you to look back and draw from the remembrance of those past blessings, spiritual awakenings, those divine callings ...

... to draw upon what God did for you then and find healing for your soul today.

The book of Psalms is filled with this very thing ... it is the word ZAKAR

... to remember, recall, to bring to mind, to make a memorial

This word is used 51 times in Psalms.

- *All the ends of the earth will **remember** and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations will worship before You. (Ps. 22:27)*
- *These things I remember, and I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go along with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God, (Ps. 42:4)*
- *I shall remember the deeds of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will meditate on all Your work And muse on Your deeds. Your way, O God, is holy; What god is great like our God? (Ps. 77:11-13)*
- *And they remembered that God was their rock, And the Most High God their Redeemer. (Ps. 78:35)*
- *I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your doings; I muse on the work of Your hands. I stretch out my hands to You; My soul longs for You, as a parched land. Selah. (Ps. 143:5-6)*

This invitation to “go back to Bethel” is a CLEAR REMINDER that our God is the God of new beginnings and 2nd chances.

- Moses at the burning bush
- Sampson in Dagon's temple
- Peter weeping over his betrayal and then on the southern steps in Acts 2

Dear friend hear me today: The God who says to Jacob, “go back to Bethel” is saying to you ...

All is not Lost!

All is not hopeless!!

Return, return, return!

There is an invitation to answer.

² So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods which are among you, and purify yourselves and change your garments; ³ and let us arise and go up to Bethel, and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone." ⁴ So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which they had and the rings which were in their ears, and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem. (Gen. 35:2-4)

2. There is a determination to make.

God says to Jacob:

Put away the foreign gods... Chose God and put God first over everything in your life.

... and what did Jacob do? He took those false gods and buried them under a tree.

... in other words, he considered them as good as dead.

Purify yourselves ... this goes one step further, it means put away anything that is defiling you, your thoughts, your heart, your emotions.

Change your garments ... this has nothing to do with what is in your closet BUT this has everything to do with the “habits” of your life. [That’s the word in the old KJV]

Change the **places you go** the **people in your life** ... the **things you are doing** with your free time ...

Let me make it as simple as possible ... if the way you are living is destroying your life,
STOP IT

... if friends are drawing you away from God ... **STOP HAVING THOSE FRIENDS**

I was studying this part of the text on Wednesday and a thought came to me and I posted this on social media.



Eph. 4:27 says, “DO NOT give the devil an opportunity.”

You and I need to make the determination to stop giving the devil ... stop arming the devil, with the weapons of our own destruction.

Did you know this is a lot of what CR is about?

Getting together and encouraging each other to **put away, purify, and change.**

... And I'll make you a promise today

... if you'll answer the invitation and make the determination you will discover that
...

3. Our God is God who preserves His people

... I want you to see exactly how God preserves.

As they journeyed, there was a great terror upon the cities which were around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. (Gen. 35:5)

Remember the story ... 2 of Jacob's sons had killed, looted, and taken into captivity the city of Shechem.

... and there were several other cities in that region

... everyone knew what had happened

... it was likely that one of the other cities would go on the offensive and attack Jacob's family.

... maybe even some relatives seeking vengeance for what Simon and Levi had done.

However, you look at it, those nations stayed away because God put fear into their hearts

- **God is fearful**

The writer of Hebrews say that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

... and you would be wise to fear God ... that is the beginning of wisdom.

God's very person and presence in invested in the preservation of the true believer!

The New Testament goes so far to say that we are sealed by the very person of the Holy Spirit.

Hear me today: Satan is not afraid of you; Satan doesn't tremble at your word; Hell doesn't pause in fear when you wake up in the morning ...

...But that is quite alright ... because Satan is terrified of our God!

The bible says the demons believe and tremble!!!

⁶ So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. ⁷ He built an altar there, and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed Himself to him when he fled from his brother. (Gen. 35:6-7)

Jacob has called this place Bethel and Peniel but now he calls it El-Bethel.

Not just the house of God but THE MIGHTY GOD OF THE HOUSE OF GOD!

This thing isn't about a religion ... this is about a person.

- **God is a person (v. 7-10)**

Listen to me: El-Bethel (ultimately) is not a place ... IT IS JESUS CHRIST!

The one who loves us ... the one who calls us unto Himself ... the one who keeps us is none other than ...

... GOD IN THREE PERSONS BLESSED TRINITY!!!!

¹¹ God also said to him, "I am God Almighty; Be fruitful and multiply; A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, And kings shall come forth from you. ¹² "The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, And I will give the land to your descendants after you." (Gen. 35:11-12)

- **God is a promise-keeper (v. 11-15)**

God says to Jacob, I'm not going to just preserve and keep you ... I'm going to keep every promise I have made to you.

... and look at Jacob's response to all of this.

¹⁴ Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He had spoken with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. (Gen. 35:14)

Jacob builds an altar and he pours 2 things on that altar: oil and a drink offering.

The stone pillar represents Jesus Christ who is the chief cornerstone, and the oil poured on it foretells that Jesus Christ would be the “anointed one” of God, the Messiah.

But what is this drink offering?

Later in the Levitical law after a sacrifice was made a drink offering was poured upon the burning sacrifice and the heat and flames would vaporize it ...

... and if the drink offering was poured onto the ground the soil would absorb all of it.

The drink offering pictures a: Life Poured Out

Listen to what Paul writes to the Philippian church

¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. (Phil. 2:17)

The Apostle Paul was saying

“Upon the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ I am pouring out my life!”

... no holds barred

... no conditions required

... no strings attached

My friend this is the place where the Lord Jesus Christ is trying to bring every one of us.

Where we lay ourselves prostrate before our Holy God and we say it and mean it:

“Upon the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ I am pouring out my life!”