

Unconscionable Behavior

Genesis 34:1-31

I could hardly wait to read what my one commentator would write about this chapter, the one who has so frequently suggested that many of the passages we have studied in Genesis are unsuitable material for preaching. His verse by verse comments are always very helpful, even when he puts in his disclaimers at the end of the chapter against preaching on what he has just explained. I could certainly imagine what he would have to say about this one.

Not surprisingly, it is quite a disclaimer. “We may well wonder if any man who had proper discernment ever drew a text from this chapter. As a rule, the Sunday school scholars do not even hear of this event in the life of Jacob...As a whole, it is valueless sidelight on the lives of the patriarchs.”

Well, since I disagree, I fall under his judgment of lacking proper discernment, but his words are very understandable, for this chapter describes a very unfortunate occasion. And that is, of course, to put it politely. And since I don't even want to be content with that word unfortunate because it is too often used to downplay the severity of some situation or other, when we identify horrible behavior simply as “inappropriate.” I would use a much stronger word. Unconscionable comes to me. What is described in this chapter is unimaginably and outrageously wrong on every possible level. It was horrific. And because of the nature of these horribly sinful actions, I don't intend to lead you through a detailed verse by verse explanation of them. The plain words of the text speak for themselves. These are horribly sinful actions. If you have a sense of embarrassment or some level of uncomfortability with the verses, then that is good. There should be that sense. Proper modesty and innocence would almost require such a

reaction. These are embarrassing and shameful events, offensive in every possible way.

So my point is not to make you meditate upon the intricate details of what actually happened. However, God inspired the writing of this chapter and directed it to be included in Scripture. So we can hardly say, therefore, that it is not profitable for us to study. Thus with great sensitivity and appropriate soberness, I believe that this chapter can be preached for your edification. And to do so, I want to focus on the godly values that are so blatantly ignored in this chapter. I don't want you to teach you about sin this morning, but rather about the godliness that sin contradicts. That godliness will include three virtues, namely, integrity, moral purity, and spiritual purity. First, integrity.

I. GOD PLACES A HIGH VALUE ON THE VIRTUE OF INTEGRITY.

Integrity means being morally or ethically sound, being whole or complete. Unfortunately, the players in our story today lacked that integrity. None of them display godliness or virtue. And we should learn from that. Let me address first of all the deceitfulness of the plan devised by Jacob's sons. The Scriptures specifically evaluate their plan. They are specifically charged with being deceitful.

v.13

A number of times in recent chapters, we've had difficulty identifying and evaluating motives. We've seen actions described with no reference to motives. As a result, I've often tried to give people the benefit of the doubt, and offer criticism only when Scripture specifically offers it or when the context clearly requires it. Here, we have that criticism spelled out. Jacob's sons are deceitful. They are using treacherous speech, they are guilty of false statements. And that Hebrew word for deceitful cannot be

interpreted in any positive way.

A. The deceitfulness of Jacob's sons was sinful.

Their action was not justified, despite how wicked and horrible was Shechem's sin, and we will get to that in a minute. But two wrongs don't make a right. The proper response to one sin is not to commit another sin. The reaction to a violation of the seventh commandment ought not to be a violation of the eighth commandment.

Let me read again the plan which they devised. Shechem wanted to marry Dinah, and obviously would do must about anything to get her father's permission. Jacob's sons, in Jacob's absence, refused to grant that permission, but gave a false and deceitful reason why.

v.14

The reason for that response is obvious.

v.15

And they even sweetened the pot, to make the offer much more attractive not only to Shechem, but to all his fellow men in that city, for the plan of Jacob's sons would require that every man submit to circumcision.

v.16-17

The response was favorable.

v.18-19

Now, in a certain sense, that is pretty understandable, realizing how badly Shechem wanted to marry Dinah, although it still seems to me that it was pretty reckless agreement. But amazingly, testifying to Shechem's power and popularity, all the men of the city go along.

v.20-23

Wow. What a bunch of men will do for the hope of economic prosperity and for the opportunity to choose a wife from a greater number women.

v.24

Talk about influence. But, of course, the whole plan was bogus. Jacob's sons had no intention of granting what they promised. They had no intention of giving Dinah to be Shechem's wife, let alone to intermarry with the whole city and become one people with them. It was deceitful, sinfully, wickedly, deceitful.

I should ask, the, what should they have done? And the simply answer—the truth. They should have spoken the truth. They should have acted with honor and dignity! They should have trusted the Lord to deliver them out of that evil city and away from the influence of that evil king. Instead, taking the matter into their own hands, deceiving Shechem with their plan, they plotted revenge. They would get even. They would vindicate Dinah's honor by killing the men of Shechem. And that,

B. Vindictiveness of Jacob's sons was unlawful.

v.25-29

Now, what Shechem had done was horrible. But vengeance belongs to the Lord, and is to be carried out among men only through the God-ordained agents of the civil government. Jacob's sons had no such authority, thus their vindictiveness was unlawful. Personal vindictiveness, old and new testaments, is contrary to his law, even in such an egregious circumstance as this.

But where was Jacob in all this? Well, we know that when

Jacob first heard what happened, he kept quiet.

v.5

It's hard to evaluate that, when it was the quietness of righteous anger and shame, or the passive quietness of a man too weak to confront sin. Either way, when Shechem's father, Hamor, first came to him to seek Dinah's hand in marriage for his son, Jacob's sons joined in the conversation quickly.

v.6-7a

But the response came only from Jacob's sons. Jacob was conspicuously absent. And he doesn't reappear until after the killing has been accomplished. He appears to criticize two of his sons, though only for practical reasons of threatening his own safety and security, more concerned about peace than honor.

v.30

And as far as the record goes in Scripture, their answer silenced Jacob.

v.31

It seems that Jacob only wishes to appease the Shechemites, to avoid making the confrontation worse. In fact, no objections are made to Dinah remaining at the home of Shechem. Jacob certainly failed in the leadership of his family, a failure even going back to his failure to protect Dinah in the first place, for we could well ask, what was an attractive, unattached young girl doing out on her own in that city? So I believe we are justified in saying that,

C. The passiveness of Jacob was blameworthy.

He should have much more actively involved, protecting Dinah in the first place, working to retrieve her from Shechem's home after she had been defiled, and then working legally and

legitimately to bring about justice and to make preparations for his family to leave that ungodly city. He did none of those things, and merely criticized his sons for jeopardizing his security.

So we see two improper responses to wickedness. The impulsive vindictiveness of the sons and the passive appeasement of the father. Both responses fail to demonstrate proper, biblical, godly moral outrage. Both lack integrity. God places a high value on the virtue of integrity.

Secondly, to address the specific event,

II. GOD PLACES A HIGH VALUE ON THE VIRTUE OF MORAL PURITY.

In our day, we are losing any and all sense of moral outrage at such immorality. It has become so commonplace, so normal. No customary. So acceptable. The messages of sexual immorality bombard our senses, including the very wicked and salacious elements of pornography, public lewdness and filthy language. Everywhere you turn, whether it is in our news or our entertainment, you get descriptions and presentations of sexual immorality.

And the result of that bombardment is that we lose our moral sensitivity to what is good and pure. We lose our moral outrage at what is evil and impure. And sadly, those of us who believe that God has designed the physical, marital relationship of a husband and wife to be fulfill a mutually faithful, lifelong relationship of marriage between one man and one woman are often maligned, ridiculed and marginalized. Ignored!

Yet the truth is this, that we are not merely reproducing animals. Rather, we are creatures created in the image of God to be able to enjoy the most intimate of all relationships, the one

God uses as an example of the relationship between Christ and his church. And in the enjoyment of that relationship of marriage, we are to become one flesh. It's a glorious, glorious thing. And how the world in which we live has ruined the glory of it all. The world has sought to deny and ruin the virtue of moral purity, with the acceptance of adultery, which is relations which violate an existing marriage, and fornication, which refers intimate relations before marriage. To say nothing of public lewdness, pornographic images, and the virtual destruction of any sense of propriety, modesty, dignity and honor when it comes to clothing and speech.

And in this regard, too often the church is beginning to look just like the world. Adultery and fornication abound in the church of Jesus Christ. Even abuse, even rape. Lustful thoughts, indulgence in pornography and displays of indecency abound in the church of Jesus Christ. If you get nothing else from this passage, then be renewed in the truth that,

A. Sexual immorality is a grievous and shameful thing.

Look at how it is described in these verses.

v.2 "He violated her."

Literally, it is "he lay down with her and humbled her." Or, "he lay down with her by forcing her to submission." Violation is a good word to describe that. It is a violation of her very body.

v.7 "A disgraceful thing." "A thing which ought not to be done."

v.13 "He had defiled Dinah their sister."

That word is repeated in,

v.27

You get the point. And then the most vivid description,

v.31

Sexual immorality is a grievous and shameful thing. Sexual intimacy in any context other than a husband and a wife enjoying one another in that lifelong marriage covenant, is shameful and grievous. Even impure thoughts. Even impure desires. Even impure words. Everything. Everything that contradicts the beauty of God's original design, a design in which a man and woman were naked and were not ashamed.

We must regain the sense of moral purity. In that regard,

B. Sexual immorality must be avoided at all costs.

Again, the first fault in this event is found in Jacob's failure to protect Dinah. Simply put, Dinah, perhaps as old as 15, should not have been out alone visiting the women of the land! This situation never should have had the chance to happen.

v.1-2

Nor can you downplay the offense of this circumstance to Dinah. The words do not describe anything consensual at all, but rather indicate a measure of force and violence. We rightly call it rape. Yet, it was such a common thing, that no one gave it a second thought. The perpetrator could actually declare his love, and actually go and seek the girl's hand in marriage. So common, so ordinary, was such a conquest, there was no attempt to hide what happened or even to apologize for it. Shechem even sought to pursue Dinah to be his wife, as if he had that right. He even proclaims his love for her, even after he violated her.

v.3-4

Shechem's father, Hamor, even interceded for his son.

v.8

The whole situation is just horrific! The men of Shechem had obviously been trained to think that any unattached young woman

was fair game. And promiscuity was not only common, but actually often a part of the religious system itself, as it is with some of the religious fringes and cults in our day. In this event, Shechem even kept Dinah in his own house while he negotiated for her marriage, and Jacob's sons don't even put an end to that.

v.17

Only after they killed all the men did they take Dinah from the house,

v.26

What a horrible thing this is, that Shechem and these men of Shechem could consider a young woman fair game to be violated, even in the pursuit of a marriage! What a horrible thing it is that they could act out so grievously in response to their own desires at that sight of this young woman. They think they can violate her in the worst imaginable way, and claim to express their love for her. That isn't love, it is evil. And as we look back upon this event here in Genesis 34, I wish simply to stress that sexual immorality must be avoided at all costs. In the words of the apostle Paul,

1 Cor. 6:18 "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

Let me end on a slightly different, but very much related, point. And that is spiritual purity. Moral purity, especially sexual purity, is very much related to spiritual purity. One is connected inseparably with the other. And in a real sense, spiritual purity is even a higher value than moral purity. That is to say, our morality

should reflect our spirituality. Our moral purity should be a reflection of our spiritual purity. Protecting of our bodies from immorality should be done in the name of protecting our souls from idolatry.

To prove that point, I could read any number of very graphic passages in Scripture that describe spiritual idolatry in terms of physical immorality. I won't do that this morning, so as not to attack your sensitivities any further. But the point of that is to emphasize that what lies behind this event in Genesis 34 is the need for spiritual purity.

III. GOD PLACES A HIGH VALUE ON THE VIRTUE OF SPIRITUAL PURITY.

Specifically, and I will start with the most obvious and practical application of that,

A. God's people should resist the temptation to intermarry with unbelievers.

Jacob's sons were right in one sense, even though they were so deceptive. They were right in realizing that they were not free to intermarry with Canaanites. So the offer was rightly rejected.

v.8-10

v.14

Indeed it would. And that principle continues in the New Testament. God's covenant people ought not to marry unbelievers.

2Cor. 6:14 "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers."

The reason is obvious.

2 Cor.6:14 "For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15

And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.”

Spiritual purity means that the closest bonds of fellowship are to be between fellow Christians, especially the bond of marriage. It would certainly apply even to other very extremely close human relationships. The warning is clear. “For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”

Spiritual purity is a very practical thing. It addresses our relationships with other people, and with the people of this world. We are to maintain our witness to the people of this world, and we are to live among them, but we are not to love them as we love the people of God. Our love for the people of the world is to be the love of a missionary. By contrast, our love for the people of God is to be the love of a brother or sister. And further, in this context of spiritual purity,

B. God’s people should resist the temptation to love the things of this world.

Notice what appeal Shechem’s father Hamor used with Jacob and his sons. It was an appeal to the love of the things of this world.

v.8-10

Land, trade, and property. Give Dinah to be Shechem’s wife, and you’ll be able to have land, trade, and property. Shechem made an even stronger appeal.

v.11-12

Anything you want. It’s yours. “I’ll pay whatever you ask me.” This was a blatant appeal to the love of mammon, the love of the things of this world. That temptation is real, and real to all of us in one way or another. But the exhortation of Scripture is plain and clear.

1John 2:15 “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

And so as you read through this sobering account and as we study it together today, let the Scripture speak clearly. Recognize that God places a high value on the virtue of integrity. He places a high value on the virtue of moral purity. And he places a high value on the virtue of spiritual purity. Thus Paul declares to us,

1 Cor. 6:16 “For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.” 17 Therefore “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.” 18 “I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.”