



Sermon – 10/29/2023
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered

Genesis 34:1 - 31

Romans 2:28 - 29

Let me invite you to open your Bibles with me. We're going to spend our time back in Genesis this morning. Genesis chapter 34. Genesis 34. And if you're a guest with us this morning, welcome home. I also want you to know that next Sunday is our next New Member Workshop. And so, if you're ready to take a step to unite to our faith family, come on down and start that process after the service during the response song. We'd love to have you welcomed into our family during that time. Now, Genesis 34 is a tough one. If I had to look across Genesis and say, "What are five of the most difficult passages to preach in this whole book?" This would be in the top 5. And why is that? It's because this is a messy story. You see, a powerful man forced himself on a helpless woman. You see angry brothers use cunning deception to carry out a revenge killing, not just against that man but an entire tribe. It seems as if God is nowhere to be found. In fact, if you're to look all the way through Genesis 34, you won't see the name of God mentioned once. So, what's the purpose of a passage like this and how in the world does it relate to those of us living in this cultural moment today? Well, what if I told you that perhaps our culture is a lot more like what we see here in Genesis 34 than it might appear on first glance? And why do I say that? Well, just think about it. Do we live in a culture that ever exploits or objectifies women? Yes. Do we live in a culture that is far too often characterized by people watching injustice against the vulnerable happening and standing by passively doing nothing about it? Yeah. Do we find ourselves in a cultural moment in which the rivalries or challenges we have are amplified by a tribalism that divides us and compounds our problems what rather than resolve them? Yeah. So, in many ways, what we are experiencing today is in parallel to what this story is walking us through here. And so, if we can see how God is at work even in the mess in that time period, then, perhaps, it will give us a greater window into how He's at work today. So, the key question that we need to wrestle with coming through Genesis 34 this morning is, where is Jesus when life is messy? And we'll see that starting in verse 1 of Genesis 34 if you want to follow along with me. Here's how the passage begins.

¹Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land. ²And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humiliated her. ³And his soul was drawn

to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. ⁴So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this girl for my wife."

Now my first date with Cami was Halloween night in 2002. And I was not a very creative guy taking her out on dates in college. We just did dinner and a movie. And I, for some reason, thought it'd be a good idea since it was Halloween to take her to a horror film. And about 10 minutes into that, I realized this may not be the best decision I've ever made. Now, we never signed any prenuptial agreements, but I'm sure if there was one that no scary movies would have been part of the if she was going to say yes to me. And for the last 21 years, I've never seen another scary movie with her. But even though I've never been to the theater to see that fear-inducing horror, I've come face to face with evil more times than I want to count in recent years. So, many of you know that before I came here as pastor, I worked at a national level Southern Baptist Organization. And for the last few years before the Lord brought me here, our organization worked tirelessly to advocate for reform, for churches to get things right on the subject of abuse. I heard story after story of men and women who turn to the church as a safe place that instead found it not as a place of safety but one where their trust was broken. Their bodies were shattered. Their lives were upended. I heard story after story just like the one we see here with Dinah. Where one moment, one turning point, upended and changed everything. And how do we process through stories like those, stories like the ones we see here in Genesis 34? What I know is that Genesis 34 brings us face to face with our brokenness. But it also brings us face to face with our Savior who was broken for us. So, think about what's happening here in the text. We saw last time in Genesis 33 this great reconciliation moment between Jacob and Esau, and you wish they could just roll the credits at the end of the show and live happily ever after. But instead, a nightmare comes to Jacob's family. We're introduced to his daughter, Dinah. His daughter born from Leah. And this takes place all 20 miles from where Jacob had promised God he was going to go in Bethel. He was going to return back to the place of his father, but he stopped short. It'd be like heading to College Station and stopping in Caldwell. And when he steps away from God's destination, we see the story step away from God's design and brokenness and pain follows. And what happens in this moment is something we see playing out over and over again in our own time period today.

So, what we're going to find in Genesis 34 is this, that when we live in a way that's outside of God's design, three consequences often follow. But even as we see those consequences unfold, we see an undercurrent of hope in the midst of that brokenness. So, notice this first consequence that comes starting in verse 1, that consequence is disgrace. We see disgrace overtaking this moment. This man, Shechem looks out in the field. He sees, he sees Dinah walking to see the women. And we don't know why she's out there looking for them, but we know why he's looking for her. He sees her. He desires her. He takes her. He entirely upends the way that Genesis has laid out a picture of marriage for us where you see, you fall in love, you pursue, you unite as one flesh, and then you enjoy the benefits of that together. Instead, he reverses that. He sees and he robs her of the benefits of marriage without the commitment. And after that, his heart in this strange way longs for her. He wants to make her his own. So that not just he can have her one time, but he can have her as a wife. And in this period of time, we see what happens. When our sinful desires take us outside of God's design, far too often disgrace comes with it. When you look back at verse 2 at the end of it, and you see what happens, it says, he seized her. He laid with her. He humiliated her. There is this humiliation that comes upon Dinah in that moment. And in the aftermath, it's not just that her body's been broken but her soul as well. She feels that pain. She feels that disgrace. And what happens as a result of that is everything is destroyed in her life. All

of it's upended by the disgrace that she feels. Which takes us to what happens in the aftermath of this moment. Shechem desires her but now in verse 5, what we're going to see is that his passions led to her disgrace. Now, we're going to see how Jacob's passivity feeds that race. So, notice what verse 7 says there.

⁵Now Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah. But his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came. ⁶And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. ⁷The sons of Jacob had come in from the field as soon as they heard of it, and the men were indignant and very angry, because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing must not be done.

Now all you dads out there, if this was your daughter and you heard about what had just happened, how would you react? What would you do? I had a friend when they came across a story like this, he said, if that happen to someone in my family, one of us would be leaving in handcuffs and the other a body bag. That's the type of way we often find ourselves reacting. This desire to protect. And instead, what we find in Jacob's response is not a desire to protect. Instead of protection, he responds with passivity. Look back at what it says there in verse 5 at the end. It says, Jacob held his peace. His daughter's lost her peace and yet he holds on to it. He stands back in fear rather than stepping forward in faith in the moment. He looks at her injustice and he doesn't respond as a loving father; you would expect them to respond in protection. He responds with that type of passivity. So, think about this moment here. You see, Dinah has been treated like by Shechem as a product to be consumed. He's now treated by Shechem's father, Hamor as a prize to be won. And now, he's she's treated by her own father, Jacob, as a problem to be managed. Everyone has turned their back on her. And we find that right after that beginning in verse 7, Jacob's sons come back from the field, and they hear of this, and their reaction is very different. They don't keep the peace. Notice what it says at the end of verse 7. It tells us the men were indignant and very angry because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter for such a thing must not be done. While their dad was filled with peace, they are filled with rage. This anger and indignation. In fact, the way that Moses writes about here in Genesis, he's agreeing with the brothers. He's saying, this thing must not be done. But you see her challenge only gets worse from here. Because what we find starting down in verse 8 is that if sinful passions led to her disgrace and passivity fed her disgrace, the third thing we see here is that politics deepens her disgrace. So, notice these tribal politics that play out beginning in verse 8.

⁸But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to be his wife. ⁹Make marriages with us. Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. ¹⁰You shall dwell with us, and the land shall be open to you. Dwell and trade in it, get property in it." ¹¹Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give. ¹²Ask me for as great a bride-price and gift as you will, and I will give whatever you say to me. Only give me the young woman to be my wife."

So, notice what's happening here is it's not just that Shechem is trying to make Dinah one flesh with him. His father, Hamor, is trying to take the tribes of Israel and make them one tribe with them. There's a greater politics involved. He comes to him with this great offer. Let's intermarry. We can be mutually beneficial to one another. And at the core of what's taking place here is

Shechem and his father are not just trying to tempt Israel but trying to adopt them. To bring them into their tribe to become one with them. And that pattern is not something that only happens here with Jacob. We see it showing up in Matthew 4 with the new and better Jacob in Jesus. If you think about the way that the wilderness temptations of the serpent comes and he brings Jesus in that third one to the top of the mountains and he shows Him all kingdoms of the world and says, these can be yours if you'll just bow down and worship me. He's not just trying to attempt, to tempt Jesus but to adopt Him. To show Him that there's a shortcut to receiving the promises of God. And if Jacob and Israel in Genesis 34 cave, the promises of God are shattered. If Jesus as the greater Jacob caves in Matthew chapter 4, the promises of God are shattered. There is more on the line here than it seems at first glance. You see, satan is working under it all. Trying to disrupt God's movement to preserve that seed of the woman who would one day come and to crush his head. But even though we don't see that in the text, we see somebody else who's crushed. This woman, Dinah. Her life destroyed. Look, when I look around this room, I have no doubt in my mind that I'm looking into the eyes of others of you that have been through unspeakable things. You face the turning point moment just like this. Where your life was joyful and good, and you've been robbed of it since then. You felt the deep wounds and scars of the pain of your past. You played that moment over and over again in your mind wondering if there's anything else different you could have done. How much of it is your fault? You find yourself in this moment just like her. And what you need to know, it's not your fault. God hasn't given up on you. We want to walk with you in that pain. There's a hope that can be found only in Jesus. The one who was wounded so He could walk with the wounded. The one who was broken so He could bind up the broken wants to go on this journey with you. So, don't lose heart.

You see, the consequences of our sin when we're outside of God's design, it begins with disgrace, but it doesn't stay there in this passage. Notice with me down beginning in verse 13, there's a second consequence that emerges here. It's deception. Deception. We'll see what this deception looks like beginning in verse 13. When it says

¹³The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah. ¹⁴They said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us. ¹⁵Only on this condition will we agree with you - that you will become as we are by every male among you being circumcised. ¹⁶Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to ourselves, and we will dwell with you and become one people. ¹⁷But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter, and we will be gone."

So, here we are, it's Halloween season. We got our Fall Festival tonight. I can't wait and I'm confident that when we show up and enjoy that time together here that I'll walk out there and we're going to see something that normally doesn't happen the rest of the year. We're going to see kids dressed up as adults, adults dressed up as kids. It's that one time a year we kind of lean into that moment. And the whole heartbeat behind it is you become something you're not to receive something that you don't have. And there's a sense in which it's a good and good natured type of deception that takes place which is far different from the deception that Dinah's brothers are plotting right here in Genesis 34. They see what's taken place to their daughter. They know they probably don't have the power to defeat this tribe on their own, so they come up with the plan. And as a result of that plan, the disgrace that Dinah experiences, the consequences of sin is now

compounded by the deception of the moment. And this deception plays out in ways that we don't want you to miss. So, the two brothers at the center of this are Simeon and Levi. And what we find in verse 14 is there is a kernel of truth at the foundation of this deception that they perpetrate. You see what it says there in the verse 14,

¹⁴“We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us.

So, that's right. They're appealing to God's design for their people. The fact that they're called not to intermarry. The fact that all the men of the tribe should be circumcised, to be marked out as those who have received the covenant. And they are rightly pointing to the fact that unless those things are true, marriage is not an option. But what that means is that if this is going to take place, then things are going to have to change for the tribe of Shechem. And that's what we see unfolding beginning in verse 18. You see how Hamor and Shechem now go, and they bring this deception to all the men of the city when it says there in verse 18,

¹⁸Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem. ¹⁹And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most honored of all his father's house. ²⁰So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying, ²¹“These men are at peace with us; let them dwell in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them. And let us take their daughters as wives, and let us give them our daughters.

So, we see here Shechem is all in on this agreement and he immediately goes to the city gate, the place where people were likely to gather. He calls all the men together. And you notice the way he starts here. He starts with the good news. With the positive pieces. He says, look at the economic benefits that this will bring. Look at the marriage and family benefits that this will bring. He points out to them all the ways that they will benefit from this not missing, not realizing that that entire time, he is incubating that deception right into the hearts of his people. And don't miss this irony. Think about it. Shechem sees Dinah in a field, and he doesn't bother to get his consent until, her consent until he forces himself on her. But now, he comes to the city gate to these men whom his father as the chief of that tribe has authority over, and even though he didn't seek her consent, he now seeks their consent to perpetrate this inner marriage with the people of Israel. Do you see how backward this is? The deception takes root. And now in verse 22, we find the way the people respond. It tells us there,

²²Only on this condition will the men agree to dwell with us to become one people - when every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised. ²³Will not their livestock, their property and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us.” ²⁴And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

So, here comes the fine print on the advertisement. This is like the part of the end of the medication commercial on TV where the guy starts talking really fast about all the ways that you might die if you take this. This is that kind of moment. He says, “Hey, it's going to be so great but oh by the way, there's just this one thing we gotta do.” I don't know about you guys, how you would respond, but if I were standing there in the gate, I might be quoting that one hit wonder by meatloaf saying,

I will do anything for love, but I won't do that. I'm just saying. I'm out on that one. But they look at this. They hear Hamor and Shechem and they say, "Yes." And all the men that are there they take on the sign of the covenant even though they haven't taken on the heart of the covenant. And therein lies the root problem of this deception. And at the core of it is this covenant sign of circumcision. Remember, this was given to Abraham back in Genesis 17 as a sign of the covenant. Why? It's because it points to the promise all the way back in Genesis 3:15 that one day, God would raise up a deliverer, a Messiah, a Savior for God's people through the offspring of a woman. And every time a person, a man was marked out in this way, it was a reminder of that promise of God. But what happens here with this tribe is that they take on the external trappings of religion without embracing the God of faith, the God of the covenant. And in Romans 2, Paul warns us about the temptation that we might face even today in very similar ways. I want you to see on the screen and listen to me, Romans 2:28 and 29 says this,

²⁸For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

So, in other words, Paul is saying that the promise doesn't come by the transformation of our skin but the transformation of our hearts. That unless God does a work in us, we find ourselves just like the people of Shechem who are marked out in ways that give the appearance of religion, the appearance of following God when their hearts haven't actually been transformed. And I imagine you might look at a passage like this in Genesis 34 and say, "Phillip, there are all kinds of ways that I might struggle to obey God in my life but this this just isn't really one of them." I say, "I could see where you're coming from on the surface but what if there's something going on underneath that more deeply that can affect us in ways we don't even realize right here in a Bible belt culture." What do I mean? Well at the heart of what the tribe of Shechem agrees to do here is they agree to cut their flesh for one reason and one reason only. They want to receive the benefits of the covenant of God without actually embracing genuine faith. They want all of what God has to offer with none of the cost. They want to create an appearance as if they are following God when their hearts are still far from Him. And the reality is in a Bible-belt culture like Bryan/College Station, that same temptation can show up today just often in different ways. So, you can imagine a teenager standing in those waters of baptism just like we had minutes ago. And a different teenager standing there and the reason that he's going through baptism is not because he's accepted Jesus but because he wants to be accepted by his family and his friends. And so, he goes through a meaningless ritual having his heart not actually changed because he wants to receive the benefits of their acceptance without the commitment of following Jesus. Or maybe there's a business leader in our community who finds himself connecting to a larger church like Central and becoming a member here not so that he can build up the body of Christ but so that he can build up his book of business. Because people look at him as a good man because he goes to church. He's a member at Central. That that same pull that would drive the people of Shechem to take a step to appear more religious without actually changing the heart can still show up in ways we don't even think about today. The disgrace is followed by the deception which leads us to the last consequence of this passage beginning in verse 15 and that's destruction. Let's see the destruction that emerges here in verse 25 when it tells us.

²⁵On the third day, when they were sore, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came against the city while it felt secure and

killed all the males. ²⁶They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went away. ²⁷The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister. ²⁸They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field. ²⁹All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and they plundered.

So, think about what happens here. The tribe of Shechem goes under the knife and now they come under the sword. We see in verse 25 tell us they've made the place secure but they're recovering for days after this. There's this soreness that is there. And two of Dinah's blood brothers, Simeon and Levi, they come into the camp. And they would have had no chance of defeating this enemy under normal circumstances but now, through their deception, everything's changed, and the destruction comes. And don't miss this. It's a sign of the covenant that leads not to life but to death, it'd be the equivalent of if we went up there in those waters of baptism and we held somebody under until they drowned. This sign that's supposed to point to the life that we have in God is now the one that brings about their death. And how does this death come? Simeon and Levi, they enter into the city, and they have a particular set of skills like a Liam Neeson. They go door to door, and they take each of these combatants out. They kill Hamor and Shechem. They pull their sister out of there and there is victory through the destruction of the people. And do you see what happens as a result of it? Down in verse 28 and 29. It tells us that they plunder them. They take the livestock, the possessions, the wealth, the people, the women, the children. In other words, all the things that Hamor and Shechem had promised to the men of that tribe, Levi and Simeon now receive. The destruction is complete. This is not just bringing judgement against someone who has wronged their sister. This is revenge. Retribution. They take out not just the guilty but the innocent around them. They're destroyed and that is another consequence of the way that sin takes root in this world all around us. And there in the aftermath with the broken body of Dinah near them with the dead bodies of these men all around them, we see a final exchange at the end of this passage between Jacob and his sons that brings us face to face with the reality that we encounter today. It starts down in verse 30. And it says,

³⁰Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. My numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household." ³¹But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?"

So, you see, even in the aftermath of this, there's a deep division between the way that Jacob sees this and the way that his sons see it. Jacob there, and we saw already in the start of the passage when he learned of this at first, there was this passivity, this unwillingness to step in to bring protection and deliverance. And that same spirit is still showing itself now in verse 30. Notice, everything that says here, it's all turned inward on himself. What's going to happen to me? You've made me stink to the people around us. What if they destroy me and our household? It's centered on himself rather than centered on the one who's been wronged. And I just can't help but notice in this passage, a danger all of us can face. Even today when we encounter moments just like this. The statistics tell us that one in six men and one in four women will experience some sort of abuse during their lifetime. That means 20% of the people in here, 20% of the community around us statistically have encountered that type of moment just like Dinah. And what we need to come face to face with is in that reality of the crisis of abuse that we have in our culture and far too often

in our churches. Our temptation in the face of it is to react just like Jacob. That we look on the injustice and on the pain and on the wounds and we respond not with a selfless protection but a selfless passivity. We're more concerned about what will happen to us than what happened to them. We're more concerned about protecting our institutions and protecting their bodies. We're more concerned about the way that it might mess up our future than the way that it's destroyed them in the past. And I'm just pleading with every one of us. May we be a people not marked by that spirit. May we not be the ones that look at the injustice and the wrong and the pain and turn the other way in passivity. May we instead be the kind of place that responds to those who are broken with the support and the help and the love they need, who stand for the broken because we follow one who has been broken.

And when we looked at the start of this passage, the question that I put in front of each one of us was, where is Jesus when life is messy? And you can even look at Genesis 34 and say, "Okay, Phillip, you've been helping us see Christ connections all throughout the Scripture, but I just can't make sense of this. It never mentions God. There's no clear preview of the Gospel. How do we see Jesus in a messy situation just like Dinah's?" And what we need to recognize is that shows up in at least two ways. Because if things had gone in a different direction, if Israel had intermarried with the tribe of Shechem, if they had walked away from God's design and His protection, then, it would have put the promise of God of a Messiah in jeopardy. But more importantly, this passage points us to a greater Jacob who's to come. Jesus, who comes not as a deceiver but as a deliverer. Jesus, who as we talked about last week encounters a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in John 4 and response to a person with a very similar story to Dinah in this text but in a very different way than what this Jacob responds here. He doesn't respond to her pain and her brokenness with passivity. He doesn't look inward towards Himself. On the other hand, He doesn't respond with a rage-filled vengeance like her brothers and wanting to get retribution on those who had wronged her in the past. No, He doesn't respond with passivity or power; He responds with a promise. And that promise he makes to her is the same promise of the Gospel that's true for us today. He looks at that broken woman at that well right near where this moment with Dinah took place and He says to that Samaritan woman the same thing he speaks over us. He says, "You're thirsty." He says, "I know a place where you can find living water." He says, "You're weary. I know a place where you can find rest. You're broken? I know a place where you can find healing, where you can find the eternal life that you're longing for." You see, the beauty of the Gospel is that God meets us in the mess through His Son. And through that, He binds up the broken. He brings healing to the wounded. But most importantly, He brings forgiveness to sinners. How? His body was broken so that our bodies can be restored. His body was wounded, so the wounds that we carry in body and soul can be healed. And His blood was poured out for you and for me so that the very sin and guilt that we feel weighing us down can be set free. And He calls us as a church to be the kinds of people who when we find ourselves walking with others who are in the middle of the mess, we don't turn away in our own selfish passivity. We run to the moment offering the only hope this world has to offer through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together.

Father, I don't know the stories of everybody that's here today, but I know that You do, God. And I pray that if there are people in this room who have wrestled with the kind of brokenness and mess that we see here in this text, God, would You give them a sense of comfort today and healing? And would you grow our church to be the kinds of people that respond to these difficult situations

in a way that reflects Your design, that honors You, that points them to the hope that we have in Jesus. Lord, Your word tells us, we can call to You in times of difficulty. We can turn to You in times of pain. Your word says that when the righteous cry for help, You hear and You deliver us out of all our troubles. And so whatever troubles we face today, God, would You be near to us in Your Son? Would You fill us with hope and now even as we prepare to respond to what You've done here in song, would You help our hearts be filled with joy, that we're not defined by our past but we're defined by our future with You. And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.