

“A Thing Which Ought Not to Be Done”

Genesis 34:1-31

March 12th, 2017

I was 16 years old the fall of my senior year in high school when I first met with an Air Force recruiter. He spoke of a life of adventure and travel, a steady paycheck, and the opportunity to serve my country using cool weapons. I was hooked, line and sinker! I don't remember my parents offering much resistance, though they had to sign my contract since I wasn't old enough to sign my own life away.

Two weeks after I turned 17 - the first week of December 1978 - my paternal grandparents dropped me off at the bus station in Rockford. From there I departed for Chicago and the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) to complete what seemed like a ton of paperwork, endure a military physical exam, and take an oath of enlistment.

It was an overnight trip. A guy sitting at my table during supper was going down the street to play pinball, and invited me along. Though I'd been to Chicago many times before – this was my first trip to the big city on my own. My naiveté must've been pretty obvious.

We played a couple of games of pinball, and I beat him easily in both. About the third game, he suggested we play for a couple dollars. Again, I whacked him. Thinking he'd had enough, he started to walk away, but changed his mind, and suggested we play for more - *\$20 maybe?* I thought it would be the easiest \$20 I ever put my hands on! But...you guessed it – he destroyed me. He'd been reeling me in, little by little, till the stakes were high, and then he soaked me.

I learned a hard lesson that night. There are people just looking for the opportunity to take advantage of unsuspecting folks. We see as much taking place in the opening verses of today's sermon text, Genesis Chapter 34.

I wish to thank Troy Young for filling the pulpit last Sunday in my absence. If you were here two weeks ago, you may remember me saying it could take us an extra week to prepare for the difficult chapter we'll explore today. The Bible is honest – sometimes brutally so; it portrays life unmistakably and graphically in a sinful world. And, unfortunately, some have endured comparable treacheries that we read of in today's passage.

Despite all the gore and depravity in today's passage, God's grace was at work. One commentator refers to God's grace in today's text as “fierce grace.” In the events of Genesis 34, “God allowed Jacob to experience the appalling weight of his sinfulness so he would return to his call. Divine grace – fierce grace - will triumph despite human sin.” (Hughes, 412)

Genesis 34:1-31:

“Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. ² And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her. ³ His soul was strongly attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman and spoke kindly to the young woman. ⁴ So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, “Get me this young woman as a wife.”

⁵ And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter. Now his sons were with his livestock in the field; so Jacob held his peace until they came. ⁶ Then Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. ⁷ And the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard *it*; and the men were grieved and very angry, because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter,

a thing which ought not to be done. ⁸ But Hamor spoke with them, saying, “The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him as a wife. ⁹ And make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters to yourselves. ¹⁰ So you shall dwell with us, and the land shall be before you. Dwell and trade in it, and acquire possessions for yourselves in it.”

¹¹ Then Shechem said to her father and her brothers, “Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give. ¹² Ask me ever so much dowry and gift, and I will give according to what you say to me; but give me the young woman as a wife.”

¹³ But the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father, and spoke deceitfully, because he had defiled Dinah their sister. ¹⁴ And they said to them, “We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that *would be* a reproach to us. ¹⁵ But on this *condition* we will consent to you: If you will become as we *are*, if every male of you is circumcised, ¹⁶ then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to us; and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. ¹⁷ But if you will not heed us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and be gone.”

¹⁸ And their words pleased Hamor and Shechem, Hamor’s son. ¹⁹ So the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob’s daughter. He *was* more honorable than all the household of his father.

²⁰ And Hamor and Shechem his son came to the gate of their city, and spoke with the men of their city, saying: ²¹ “These men *are* at peace with us. Therefore let them dwell in the land and trade in it. For indeed the land *is* large enough for them. Let us take their daughters to us as wives, and let us give them our daughters. ²² Only on this *condition* will the men consent to dwell with us, to be one people: if every male among us is circumcised as they *are* circumcised. ²³ Will not their livestock, their property, and every animal of theirs *be* ours? Only let us consent to them, and they will dwell with us.” ²⁴ And all who went out of the gate of his city heeded Hamor and Shechem his son; every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

²⁵ Now it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males.

²⁶ And they killed Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem’s house, and went out. ²⁷ The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled. ²⁸ They took their sheep, their oxen, and their donkeys, what *was* in the city and what *was* in the field, ²⁹ and all their wealth. All their little ones and their wives they took captive; and they plundered even all that *was* in the houses.

³⁰ Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I *am* few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I.”

³¹ But they said, “Should he treat our sister like a harlot?”

Did you notice there’s not even one mention of God in this entire chapter? His name is in the last verse of the previous chapter Genesis 33:20 – “El Elohe”. And we see God’s name mentioned in the first verse of the next chapter (Genesis 35:1). Here’s an outline to break down this chapter:

MP 1 – Bad Seeds Sown

MP 2 – Bad Weeds Grown

MP 3 – Applications (Fertilizer?)

Some foundational troubles (“bad seeds”) were sown before the dastardly weeds surfaced in this chapter. When we looked at Genesis 33, we learned Jacob had left his uncle Laban in Padan Aram. He and his family travelled to Succoth (for a short time) before settling down in Shechem for a lengthier stay. The problem was Jacob only partially obeyed God’s will. He stopped short of where God called him to return (Bethel). So, one bad seed sown consisted of Jacob’s disobedience in settling amid the pagans of Shechem.

It would be a sad day for the rest of us, but some of you will move from this community at some point in the future. What would you look for if you choose to live elsewhere – *financial advantages? The people who would be your co-workers or classmates? The neighborhood or community where you will settle? Potential friends for yourself and children, if you have them?* All of these are good things to consider, and its likely Jacob was considering such things, too.

But spiritual questions are more important for God’s people to consider. When Zach and Molly were nearing their college years, Jan and I encouraged them to choose colleges where a PCA church existed and could be their gathering place while they were away. We made the choice sweeter by helping them pay for their tuition and expenses if that were the case. And, they are reaping benefits because they haven’t had to sacrifice any of their religious convictions attending a church with different beliefs than they were raised to know.

Some of you may move because of work, family, climate, or illness. Others may move for college or missionary service. You must consider such questions as these: *What are the church options available to you? Can you get to a good Church easily from where you will live? What kind of Christian service is available for you in your new location? Do you have to settle for something less than ideal because it’s the best available option?*

Additional bad seeds appear in the opening verse of our passage today – “Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land.” Poor Dinah. She was the only girl among 12 children (11 brothers!) She could have been hoping to female friends in their new location. *Was she bored or lonely? Did she run away from home? Why was she allowed to wander away from home in a strange land without a parent, sibling or chaperone?* Because she walked away from her support structure without supervision, Dinah was vulnerable.

Jacob was responsible to provide adequate protection for his family. He did not in Dinah’s case. Similarly, many fathers in our day are guilty of failing their families. Some fathers are “too busy” to spend adequate time with their children, or they’re reluctant to discipline their children because they fear their kids will hate them. Dads, if you are failing your children in this area, reverse that failure, regardless of what your children think!

These “bad seeds” sprouted into “bad weeds.” Because Jacob and family settled in a strange place apart from God’s will; and Dinah was placed in a vulnerable position, we can predict what happens next. This is verse 2 – “...when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her (Dinah), he took her and lay with her, and violated her.” Dear, sweet, Dinah raped as if she were a mere sex toy!

Jacob’s response was passivity. He awaited the arrival of his sons before deciding how to respond. The sons, on the other hand, were incensed when they learned what happened to their sister. Hamor, Shechem’s father, meets with Jacob and sons. He offers a treaty of assimilation to Jacob – if he should agree, the Hebrews would be able to inter-marry with Hamor’s (another of the bad weeds). And that is “the point of the entire section – to lure the Hebrews into believing that they can become one with the people of the land.” (Currid, 151)

“Hamor’s offer pulsed with economic appeal – property in Canaan, grazing rights, the freedom to travel and dwell anywhere. In sum, Hamor promised what God had promised Israel. A shortcut to the Promised Land!” (Hughes, 413)

But, we must follow the path God has laid out for us in His Word, the Bible, which is not often the path of convenience or ease! God doesn’t allow His children to seek marriage with pagans! When the law of God was given to Moses, this is what God said to His people:

“You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. ³Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. ⁴For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly.” (Deut. 7:2b-4)

Marriage can, at times, be a struggle when both husband and wife are Christians! But when one spouse doesn’t serve Jesus, marriage can be sheer torture for the Christian one. Young Christian – single Christian – if you look for a spouse someday, you have no business getting yoked to an atheist, agnostic, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu or any other kind of unbeliever! In fact, the closer you both are in your theology, the more likely your marriage will thrive and sing!

In response to Hamor’s offer, Jacob’s sons propose a condition for Hamor’s people. That condition is that all their males undergo circumcision so they could truly be one with the Hebrews. Verse 13 informs us Jacob’s sons “spoke deceitfully” in seeking this condition – they had no intention of becoming one with Hamor and his people. Instead, they wanted revenge, and they’d go to great lengths to get it – even if Shechem’s defiling of Tamor required defiling of God’s covenant sign (another “bad weed”).

Moving ahead, we learn Tamor agreed to the condition, thinking it was a low price to pay for the opportunity to separate the Hebrews from their women and possessions.

But, Jacob’s sons Simeon and Levi had other plans. After Hamor, Shechem and their men receive circumcision, and were in a weakened state, disaster struck them. Verses 25b & 26 teach of Simeon and Levi, “...each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males. And they killed Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem’s house, and went out.” (Yet another of the “bad weeds.”)

Where our baser instincts may agree with such carnage, Simeon and Levi went way too far. The punishment didn’t fit the crime, and there was no grace evident whatsoever. Their deception and scheme were not characteristic of God’s people! And, importantly, they didn’t trust God to bring His justice to the situation. We’ve already noted that this chapter doesn’t include any mention of God. Neither Jacob nor his sons sought God in prayer – they didn’t appeal to Him to act in Dinah’s defense. No, instead, they show themselves to be more like heathen than children of grace.

There are at least three lessons for us from this difficult passage. (“Fertilizer?”)

1 – Bad things happen in a fallen world. *Did Dinah deserve to be raped?* No, she did not. No one ever deserves such devastating wickedness to be thrust upon them. But, bad things like this do happen – way too often – because we live in a world of sin and misery. We learned that when we studied Genesis Chapter 3. The sentence for the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden is upon us all. Terrible things happen to so many of us – sickness, terminal illness, severe injury, broken relationships, betrayal by loved ones, death. All of these are to be expected because this present life is so dangerous – all because of sin.

2 – God doesn't intend His stuff for unholy uses. That refers in this passage to the unholy use of God's covenant sign – (circumcision in the Old Testament, and baptism in the New). It further applies to His people. Jacob and his sons had no right to desecrate God's covenant sign by using it to trip up their enemies. With the dawn of the New Testament, Jesus established two sacraments for His Church – Baptism and the Lord's Supper. As we participate in communion today, I'll stand behind the table and fence it – instructing all present that the holy meal is for His people only, not non-Christians. Jesus words in **Matthew 7:6a** teach us – “Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine...”

Instead of taking things into their own hands, Dinah's brothers should have given room for God's justice. **Romans 12:17-19** – “Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ¹⁸If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance *is* Mine, I will repay...”

3 – Jesus came to earth to bring hope to the hopeless.

* Jacob stopped short of Bethel, but Jesus doesn't stop short of securing our eternal salvation. **Philippians 1:6** – “He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;”

* Jacob allowed Dinah to wander off among strangers, but Jesus doesn't allow us to wander. **Matthew 28:20** – “I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” **Hebrews 13:5** – “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

* Jacob was a passive father, but Jesus is an active Father. **John 9:4** “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; *the* night is coming when no one can work.”

The lyrics of today's communion hymn were written by Ray Palmer in 1832. For years, Palmer had burned the candle at both ends, working as a clerk in a dry goods store, attending classes at Yale, teaching at a girl's school in New York City, and preparing for the ministry.

When he met Lowell Mason on the street one day, Mason asked Palmer for a selection he could include in a hymnal he was preparing for publication. Too exhausted to produce anything new, Palmer opened his journal to a poem he'd written two years before. It was a personal prayer to God for renewed zeal and courage, composed one night when he felt sick, tired, and lonely.

Today, some 185 years later, Palmer's words serve as our own prayer of faith as we seek to serve a Holy God who “takes all our guilt away”, “wipes sorrow's tears away,” and “never lets us stray.” # 528 in the *Trinity Hymnal*, “My Faith Looks up to Thee.”

