

**S030114a – 05/03/26**  
**“Back to Bethel”**  
**Genesis 35:1-15**

**Introduction – Read Genesis 35:1-15**

- This Wednesday night we are going to finish up our look at Jacob by looking at Genesis 34-36 and chapter 38

**And we will get a closer look at his family and the impact his life had on them and I warn you it's not pretty**

- These are some pretty PG-13 chapters in this part of the book of Genesis
  - And I personally believe the reason God includes them in the Bible is number one so we will realize that not only are we losers that love God – but we come from a long line of losers who loved God
- So Wednesday night this week will help you feel better about yourself but more than that – these chapters are included so you can see where Jesus comes from

**The most disgusting of all the chapters we will look at this Wednesday is chapter 38 – and yet that is the story of Jacob's son Judah**

- And lest we forget Jesus is called the Lion of the tribe of who? – Judah – why – because Judah is Jesus' great, great.... Grandfather
  - And what that shows us is it is not just you that comes from a long line of losers, Jesus does too in His humanness
- And so we will see how we can't let our past or our parents determine who we will be, and how we will serve the Lord – we will see the connection of Genesis to the book of Job, and we will answer a pressing questions and that is why Genesis 34 says Shechem was an honorable even though he as most translations says, raped Dinah, there is a good answer and we will see it this Wednesday

**But this morning I want to direct your attention to the good part, in fact the only good as far as morally good, part of the text we are covering on Wednesday night and that is the scene in the opening verses of chapter 35**

- Now we will look at the context in detail on Wednesday night but so we are on the same page this morning, we need to understand what has just transpired over the last few years in Jacob's life

**20 years before this event Jacob met God at a place he named "Bethel"**

- Jacob was on the run from his brother Esau because he had just dyed his hair all over himself, pretending to be Esau and by it he deceived his blind Father Isaac
  - And when Esau found out – he vowed to kill Jacob
  - And Jacob knew Esau was serious, so he left town
- And he thinks he is all alone, that no one cares about him – so he grabs a rock to use as a pillow and he goes to sleep
  - But that night God meets Him in a powerful way
  - Jacob sees a ladder leading to Heaven and angels ascending and descending on it – and God was at the top saying I have been the God of Abraham and Isaac and I want to be your God too Jacob – and God repeats the promises He had made to Jacob's father and grandfather
- And Jacob says I didn't know God was in this place and he names the place "Bethel" which means "the house of God"
  - This is where God is at, this is where I first met the Lord

**But Jacob leaves Bethel, the house of God and goes to Haran because he is looking for a wife**

- He meets Rachel – a beautiful girl and her father uncle Laban who was a real scoundrel
  - After Jacob worked for Laban for seven years to marry Rachel, Laban switched Rachel, the girl Jacob loves, for her older uglier sister

**Not only did Laban do that, but the next 20 years with Laban was one raw deal after another**

- And Jacob after 20 years of this is frustrated, and tired and just done with it all
  - And God speaks to Jacob and says – get back to Bethel, get back to the place where we first met, where you knew I was your God and I was for you and loved you
  - Get back to Bethel Jacob

**And Jacob with his now family leaves Laban and heads toward Bethel, toward the place where he first met the Lord, where he first heard His call and His voice**

- But after his encounter with his brother Esau instead of obeying God and getting back to Bethel, Jacob for some reason has an eight-year pit stop in a town just north of Bethel called Shechem
  - And we will see on Wednesday night what a tragedy it was for Jacob to stop his family 12 miles short of where God called him to be

**By the end of chapter 34 Jacob's daughter has been violated by the prince of the city, maybe even raped, it is actually possible that is not what happened and I will explain why on Wednesday**

- But Jacob's daughter has been violated - His sons have committed genocide by killing 200 men in the city
  - And the nations all around Jacob want him and his family dead
- Jacob is once again devastated and frustrated, at the end of his rope, his family in ruins
  - And yet as chapter 35 opens up the word of God once again comes to Jacob
- And what a message of grace it is – God doesn't yell at Jacob, "you idiot, you stopped 12 miles short of where I told you to go and look what you did to your family"

**That was the message Jacob deserved and the message so often we deserve, but that is not what we see happen as chapter 35 opens**

- We see God simply repeating the last thing God told him – “get back to Bethel Jacob”
  - Jacob you are hurt, your family is hurt
  - Implied is, you thought 12 miles short was good enough – but I am still waiting for you in Bethel
- In fact, if you look at verse 9 up on the screen, from the New Living translation you get the indication from the Hebrew text that God didn’t consider Jacob back from Paddan Aram until he fully obeyed and came to Bethel

**“Now that Jacob had returned from Paddan-aram, God appeared to him again at Bethel. God blessed him.” – Genesis 35:9 (NLT)**

- Jacob was in Paddan Aram with his uncle Laban and God said get back to Bethel, to the place we first met, where we first built a relationship
  - And Jacob moved – He moved over 500 miles – but he settled 12 miles short of the city gates of Bethel – and although he had been there for over 8 years now, God still doesn’t consider him back yet
  - Not until Jacob fully obeys and comes back to Bethel
- Then now he is in obedience and then God blesses him

**And I was reading through this portion of the text I was thinking to how similar this is to parts of our lives**

- For some of us we were young, for some of us we were older and in a pretty dark place in our lives
  - But God met us and crashed into our darkness
- He met us and told us He wanted to be our God – He made promises to our lives and we surrendered to Him
  - We all had that time in our lives where we first met God, where He first captured our hearts

## **But then some of us, many of us, as life goes on, we move away from that place**

- Not just geographically where you met Jesus
  - But spiritually where you were at when you first met Jesus
- The passion, the dependence, the longing to be with Him and please Him and follow Him
  - Well sometimes in our lives that is replaced with our desire to pursue our things
  - To go our own way and pursue our own goals
  - We get passionate about other things, our hobbies, our pursuits and sometimes even our sin

## **And the result, always, always, always is we are devastated, and frustrated**

- And then God calls us through His word, through a sermon, maybe just a still quiet voice in our hearts, “get back to Bethel – get back to where you were when you first met me”

## **You remember, it's like Jesus said to the church in Ephesus**

- A church that had started out so well under the leadership of Paul the Apostle – effecting their community and producing disciples for Jesus Christ and church plants all over the region
  - Well 30 years later they are in a place where the machine of ministry is still running strong, but duty had replaced devotion
  - They were serving Jesus, but no longer in love with Jesus
  - And Jesus tells them in Revelation chapter 2..

## **“Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works...” – Revelation 2:5**

- Jesus isn't mad at them, He isn't yelling at them, “what's a matter with you? – you are so busy for me but not in love with me?”

**Jesus isn't mad, but Jesus does communicate that their current spiritual state is not acceptable**

- And then Jesus gives them the remedy, the same remedy He gives to Jacob, who is at the end of his rope, devastated by his own choices to compromise
  - No anger, no vengeance
  - Just the simple command that has never changed no matter how long it has taken Jacob to obey it
  - "Get back to the Bethel"

**And I point this out to you today because maybe you can identify with Jacob somewhat?**

- Again there was a time in your life when you were walking in darkness
  - And Jesus met you and called you and you realized He was what you were looking for

**And you fell in love with this one for whom there is no equal**

- And it was wonderful and foundational
  - But then life gets in the way
  - We get busy with jobs and families, with hobbies and even sometimes with sinful, carnal pursuits

**And we get to a point like Jacob that we are at the end of our ropes**

- Where are you Lord?
  - Where have you gone?
  - What is wrong with me and my heart?
- And I believe the Lord would answer us if we are in that place today
  - I am still in Bethel – I have never left
  - I am still in the place where we first met and developed relationship
- And whether you are 12 miles away or 500 miles away – I am still here, I still love you and I still want you to come back to Bethel

**And today I want us to look at what Jacob does next so we can see how to get back to Bethel in our lives as well**

**Back to Bethel – Genesis 35:1-15**

**#1 – Put away the idols – Genesis 35:2-4**

- The first thing we see Jacob doing in getting back to Bethel was he challenged his family to put away the foreign gods, to put away the idols
  - You see if you were with us last Wednesday night we saw the Rachel, one of Jacob's wives, stole her father's idols when Jacob and the family were escaping Laban and Paddan Aram
- And her possible motivations we looked at last Wednesday night, it might not have been that she wanted to worship these false gods – it may have been about inheritance

We are not 100% clear on her motivations but the consequences are clear – the idolatry that she had brought with her from her father's home had by this time spread to her family

**And that is what always happens**

- We think, “well I can handle watching these types of shows, I know they are worldly and have worldly morals and language, but I grew up around that – it doesn't matter that they are in my home”
  - And that might be somewhat true for you – but what about the next generation?
- We can think – well I have a balanced relationship with alcohol and you might – you might say I know what an alcoholic looks like, it was my father or my mother and I am not that – I have a healthy relationship with alcohol and so it doesn't matter that it is in my home and a part of my life – and again that might be true for you – but have you prayed through how it might affect the next generation? – have you passed on your mature balance to your kids or has it become so commonplace to them that they might struggle with its bondage like your father or mother may have?

## **I don't know and I'm not trying to condemn anyone**

- All I know is from personal experience that our liberties can become bondages to the next generation if we are not careful
  - And it requires, at the very least, an honest conversation with the Lord

## **I know for certain that our idols will pass on their strangleholds they have in our lives to the next generation**

- Because that is what idols do
  - They are a tool of the enemy that prays on our God given desire and tendency to worship
  - And if it is not truly the Lord we are honoring and devoted to in our lives
- We will replace that desire to worship, that desire to honor, to be a disciple, a follower, with something else

## **And that something else be it TV, social media or food, or golf or mountain biking – it can be something that in and of itself is wonderful and healthy**

- But if that something else is taking the place of God, it is an idol, plain and simple

## **And you might not even realize that the idol in your life is causing the barrenness you sense, the devastation you feel because again, it's not pornography, (it can be), it's not an illicit relationship, (it can be, those things for sure can be idols)**

- But maybe your idol is much more subtle, but hear me because I love you, it will be just as devastating
  - Devastating because it is adding to the barrenness, it is keeping you away from Bethel, from intimacy with Jesus
  - And if that is the case, like the idols of Jacob's family it needs to go

## **The first thing Jacob does is tell his family, we are getting rid of all the idols**

**And notice verse 4 what Jacob did with those idols, he buried them under a tree and I love that picture**

- I love that picture because that is exactly what we need to do
  - We need to take our idol and bury it under a tree
  - And of course, the tree I am speaking of is not in your back yard, but the tree on which Jesus bled and died, the tree of Calvary

**You see maybe you feel bad about your idol, you feel condemned**

- And the same enemy that tricked you into walking down that road, the same enemy that said, it will be great, this thing will fill the void in your heart
  - Once you have walked down that road, the same enemy will then heap condemnation on top of you
  - How could you?

**What kind of Christian are you? – You should give up?**

- And it hurts our hearts because the enemy, the father of lies, sometimes, hear me on this, sometimes he tells the truth
  - How could I leave Jesus for intimacy with something else – true, that is a true honest good question!
  - How can I call myself a follower of Jesus, a Christian, which means “little Christ”, someone who lives and thinks and acts just like Jesus – how can I call myself that and live this way – that’s a true honest question!
- Sometimes the enemy asks question that are true! – And our heart is condemned, but hear me precious believers
  - The enemy is asking those questions - Your own heart is asking those questions – Jesus is not!

**Jesus bled and died to forgive our sins**

- Jesus bled and died because He knew those hypocrisies existed in our hearts
  - Jesus does not condemn us
  - Jesus died for us

**And that means instead of being condemned – I can take the truth of those idols in my life, the truth that they are not good for me**

- And I can bury them under the tree of Calvary – Lord you died for this transgression, and I bury it under your cross, covered by your blood

**I love the picture that Jacob buried the idols under a tree**

- And I love the finality of that
  - He did not put the idols on a shelf, where they could be picked back up in a week or two when the fervor faded
  - He buried them in Shechem, under a tree and then moved away from that town

**There was finality in the act of repentance as their needs to be with us, especially with those idols that are sin in and of themselves**

**Back to Bethel – Genesis 35:1-15**

**#1 – Put away the idols – Genesis 35:2-4**

**#2 – Build the altar again – Genesis 35:5-7**

- In returning to Bethel, the first thing Jacob does and the first step in our lives is to recognize the idols, the things sinful or not in and of themselves, but those things that have become idols, taking the place of worship and devotion in our lives from the Lord
  - Those things need to be identified and put down, repented of
  - But then – and there needs to be a then, please hear me church
- If all we do is identify and put down the alters, that is great, but that will not take you back to Bethel
  - Because idols can be identified and repented of, but if they are not replaced with real genuine worship and devotion to God, it will only be a matter of time before we are back in bondage to those idols or have invented all new things to be devoted to

## **That is why there must be a then, after we have identified and put down the idols, then, we must rebuild the altar of the Lord**

- And the reason this is so important is again we have been created with a need to worship something
  - A need to be devoted to something
- And you might say, not me – I don't worship anything – yes you do – you worship you – you and your self-serving attitudes and life, you are your idol that needs to be repented of
  - We all worship something as the great theologian Bob Dylan once sang – we all worship something
- And if our idols are not replaced with a genuine move toward worship and devotion of Jesus, then again, given a week or two or 10, we will pick those idols back up again or invent brand new ones to follow

## **So we must rebuild the altar**

- We have talked about this in recent weeks and so I won't belabor the point
  - But since we live in a dispensation where we don't sacrifice animals as worship to God because of course Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice that doesn't not need to be repeated again and again
- So for us to build an altar doesn't mean we stack up stones and find an animal to kill – that would actually be offensive to God saying in some ways that what He did on the cross was not enough

## **So for us, building an altar doesn't mean gathering stones and killing animals**

- For us, building an altar is building that consistent place of worship in our lives again
  - For me that consists of my daily time in God's Word – I read through the One year Bible and I love it because it has a little bit of the Old Testament which at times is fantastic and at times it is difficult

**But even when it's difficult you also have the New Testament and psalm and proverbs, so God always has something to say to me as I read – it only takes me about 15-20 minutes to read through, of course I'm writing things down, verses that speak to situations, I'm facing so, it ends up being 30 to 45 minutes but it can be done in 15 (I love it for those reasons and because my whole family reads it, so we can send verses to each other of what God is showing us now that my kids are adults)**

- For me building that altar consists of time each day in God's word, and time in prayer – another 15 minutes of talking to God, like I would talk to a buddy about my issues and worries and frustrations – but so much better than talking to a buddy because God can change things, even if it is just my heart that needs to change – talking builds intimacy, good thing to know married guys, but the same thing is true with Jesus

**For me building an altar consists of time in God's Word, time in prayer, time in worship**

- Again like we talked about a few weeks ago, I love worship here but with everything that goes on here, sometimes the best times of worship are not right before the Bible study for me, sometimes they are
  - Sometimes it is on a Tuesday Morning as I am driving into church for staff meeting, sometimes it is Wednesday afternoon
  - Often the greatest times of worship for me is when I'm driving and a song comes that just ministers to my soul – and everyone else is filliping out over traffic or upset at the talk radio station because their candidate or their team isn't doing so great – and you can just be worshipping

**For me building an altar is being in God's Word, spending time in prayer and worship away from church, but of course it also involves being here with God's people**

- Because yes, I do get to sing and I do get to hear a Bible study, but being with God's people is another form of worship because I wasn't just made to receive, I was made to give out
  - And there are people here who need you to pray for them, but I'm not part of the prayer team – who said you're not? – did I say that, did Pastor rob say that?
  - Nobody told you, you can't pray for people?
- What do you need – you need a blessing – here you go (make a cross) – pray for people

**Be here and build an altar**

- You were made to worship, you were made to be a disciple of Jesus Christ

**And if you don't, if you don't make being in His Word, and in prayer and in worship and here at church to minister to others and make disciples of others**

**If you don't do those things, listen to me, listen to me**

- God still loves you
  - You are still going to heaven – because heaven has never been about what you have done, it's about what He did for you – your belief in Him
  - You are still going to heaven
- But, but, but – because you were made to worship and serve the Lord - If you don't
  - You will find something else to worship, you will find something else to be devoted to, something else to disciple you and for you to disciple others in
  - You were made for this and if it is not the Lord, it will be an idol you love and worship and serve and become a disciple of

**But listen to me, there is no one like Jesus – and these things or activities or people we replace Him with in our lives, they may be wonderful hobbies or activities or people, but they make horrible gods**

- And even more serious, given enough time those idols will not only not satisfy, they will not only leave you empty, but they will in time actually begin to destroy who God created you to be
  - So identify them, lay them down
  - Build the altar to God in your life again
  - And last thing....

**Back to Bethel – Genesis 35:1-15**

**#1 – Put away the idols – Genesis 35:2-4**

**#2 – Build the altar again – Genesis 35:5-7**

**#3 – Stay or abide there – Genesis 35:1**

- God tells Jacob to get back to Bethel and not just visit after hearing a convicting sermon – God says stay there (v.1)

**Identify those idols, put them down**

- Build the altar to God in your life again
  - And stay there!

**And why this is so important, why this is not just another Bible study is because this is what you were created for**

- As Jacob does these things, notice with me, see it for yourself, verse 7, he calls the place, “El Bethel”

**“Bethel” means “the house of God.”**

**“El Bethel” means “the God of the house of God.”**

- you see – Coming back to Bethel, and then abiding in Bethel is not just about a location – I have to get back to my old church, the place I grew up – precious church Bethel is not about a location
  - it is about a person
- It is not about the house; it is about the God of that house
  - And that God is not relegated to some location of the country or some house of worship
  - That God is here!

**And these three points this morning are not just three things to write down and talk about for a few minutes at lunch and then put away and wonder what next Sunday will be about**

- These three things were why you were created
  - To identify and repent of sin
  - To build an altar of worship and devotion to God
  - And to stay there
- That was why you were created and for some, that is what you are missing
  - And my heart is if that is true for you – you would get back to Bethel today, not back to a position on the map, but to the person of Jesus Christ – loving Him, serving Him, following Him and Him alone!
  - Amen? Amen! – Let's pray!
  - The Gospel, people up front