

The Consequences of Complacency Genesis 34

Turn with me tonight to Revelation 3. I believe the sobering words the Lord Jesus spoke to the church in Laodicea are a fitting introduction to our text tonight, and hopefully by the end of the night, you will see why.

¹⁴ “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

¹⁵ “‘I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. ²¹ The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’” (Revelation 3:14-22)

There, the Lord provides for His people a very clear and sobering warning about the dangers of complacency as we walk in this world. The prosperous Christians in Laodicea had forgotten how needy they were. The Lord was there, ready to eat with them, but they were not opening the door to Him. They were too comfortable and complacent in their lives on earth. With that warning in mind, let's turn all the way back to Genesis 34, where we continue our study of the life of Jacob. He has finally made it back to the land of promise after years of struggle and trial in Mesopotamia as a servant of his uncle, Laban.

Many years earlier, as he was on his way out of the promised land on the run from his brother, the Lord had appeared to Jacob at Bethel. The Lord spoke a very clear promise to Jacob. I want to remind you what exactly God had spoken to Jacob at Bethel.

¹² And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! ¹³ And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. ¹⁴ Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. ¹⁵ Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” (Genesis 28:12-15)

In the morning, when Jacob awoke, he set up a stone pillar and made a vow to the Lord. ²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, ²¹ so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, ²² and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you." (Genesis 28:20-22)

Curiously, we have not read anything about Jacob fulfilling that vow now that God had fulfilled His promise and brought Jacob back. The Lord had specifically said, "the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring," and Jacob had clearly vowed that the stone he had set up would be God's house, and that he would give a full tenth of all the Lord gave him back to the Lord as an offering. But now that he is back, there is no mention of Jacob's intention to fulfill that vow. In fact, at the end of chapter 33, after Jacob had reconciled with his brother Esau, we read that he built a house in Succoth, and then later settled in Shechem.

¹⁸ And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram, and he camped before the city. ¹⁹ And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for a hundred pieces of money the piece of land on which he had pitched his tent. ²⁰ There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel. (Genesis 33:18-20)

Take a look at this map.



Can you see Shechem and Bethel there toward the middle? Notice how close they are. Shechem was only about 30 miles north of Bethel. So, after traveling some 500 miles from Laban's house in Paddan-Aram, Jacob stopped just 30 miles north of the place he named Bethel, the house of God—the specific place God had promised to give to him and his offspring, and the specific place where he promised he would give the Lord a tenth of all He had given him. Almost obedience is still disobedience. What is the explanation for Jacob's stopping short of Bethel?

First of all, Shechem was a place that would have had some significance to Jacob, as it was the first place his grandfather, Abraham, had stopped when he first came into the land of Canaan all the way back in chapter 12. There, we read, **“When they came to the land of Canaan,⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. (Genesis 12:5b-7)** So, it's possible that Jacob had that in mind as he settled in Shechem. It could be that Jacob felt that he had completed the mission because he had made it to the place where his grandfather had first received the promise of the land. But it's important to remember that Abram did not stop at Shechem. In fact, he didn't stay there long at all. That was the first stop, but from there he sojourned on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and from there, he journeyed on toward the Negeb, and continued sojourning all the days of his life, making it clear that he was seeking a heavenly homeland, not an earthly one.

Now, I can't be dogmatic about this, but I think it is likely that Jacob grew complacent upon arriving back in the land of Canaan. Complacency often follows immediately on the heels of success. Think of all that the Lord had delivered Jacob from in chapters 31-33. He had escaped from his bondage to his deceitful and manipulative uncle Laban, and then he had been delivered from his fear that his brother would kill him. The Lord had delivered him from his greatest fears. Finally, Jacob felt he could rest, free from fear and danger. His relief of finally being free of all these anxious thoughts and being in a place he could call his own could very well have led him to get too comfortable in a dangerous place. Here's a good principle for the Christian life: You are never home in this world.

We live in the tension between the already and the not yet, for we are saved in hope (Romans 8:24). We live in the already of our conversion to Christ. Truly, we are already dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus, and the Apostle Paul tells us to reckon ourselves as such (Romans 6:11). We are already in Christ, set free from sin and the law, to serve Christ in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code (Romans 7:6). Through our faith in Christ, God has joined us with Christ in his death so that we might be raised with Him to newness of life through His resurrection from the dead. These are the present, already realities for the Christian which our baptism represent.

But there is also the tension of that which is not yet for those of us who are in Christ Jesus. We are not yet glorified. We are not yet home with the Lord. As long as we are in this body, we are away from the Lord because we are on earth (2 Corinthians 5:6). Though He is with us and even abides in us, He is not on the earth. Our destination, our home, is the place where He is. Until

we get there, we dwell in a place that is not ours and in a body that is not ours. We dwell in a world that is evil because it lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). Life on earth is hard, but it's good if you abide in Christ. To live is Christ, and to die is gain. We groan under the tribulations of life in this world. We suffer, we mourn, we groan inwardly as our bodies waste away on the outside, but we are inwardly being renewed day by day.

This “not yet” aspect of the Christian life is the key to keeping us from growing complacent, or luke-warm. It keeps us sober-minded and alert because we know we have not yet made it to the goal. When we begin to think we have arrived, we remind ourselves with Paul, **“¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”** (Philippians 3:12) We press on until the end. The race will not end until we breathe our last breath in this world, which will be our greatest gain.

Jacob would have done well to remember that simply being in the land of Canaan was not enough. It didn't mean his labors of faith were ended. He needed to continue surrendering all to the Lord, but instead, he bought land and seems to have settled in very close to the pagan inhabitants of the land, just 30 miles short of the place where God had first met him, the place which he had vowed, probably somewhat rashly, would be the house of God.

What are the consequences of his complacency? That brings us to chapter 34.

Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land. ² And 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. ³ And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. ⁴ So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, “Get me this girl for my wife.” (Genesis 34:1-4)

The text probably skips over several years in the space between the last verse of chapter 33 and the first verse of chapter 34. We can estimate that Dinah would have been about 7 years old when Jacob escaped from Laban and came back to the land of Canaan. She would have likely been a teenager when we come to chapter 34. So, it's possible that a span of 7 years or so is covered in the last couple verses of chapter 33, which indicates further that Jacob was in no hurry to return to Bethel. It seems he had really made his home at Shechem.

What happened to Dinah here ought to make us angry. It is meant to be something that causes our blood to boil, for it is an injustice. It is something contrary to righteousness. This is what happens in the world where men suppress the truth by their unrighteousness. We know it is something that happens all too often even in our own culture. Rape has tragically become quite common-place in America, and it gets very little coverage, a symptom of our godless age. What's tragic to me is how “unshocking” such a biblical text is in our day and age. We have forgotten how to blush (Jeremiah 6:15). We are living in a world where evil is running rampant, and that causes us to become desensitized to the madness around us. Desensitization leads to complacency. It seems Jacob might have suffered from the same desensitization to evil.

⁵ Now 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. ⁶ And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. ⁷ The 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. (Genesis 34:5-7)

Is it just me, or does something seem a bit off about Jacob's response here? Does he not seem a bit too passive? His daughter had been defiled, and he "held his peace" until his sons came? There is a time to hold your peace, but I'm not so sure this is it. This seems more like a moment to take action and go get his daughter. So, we have further evidence that Jacob has slipped into a mode of complacency.

But we can likely trace his complacency further back to what we already read in verse 1. **Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land. (Genesis 34:1)** What was Dinah, who, again, was likely a young teenager, doing wandering away from the safe harbor of home by herself to see the women of the land? The author did not just throw in the fact that Dinah was the daughter of Leah haphazardly. I believe that is a significant statement because it hints at something very tragically wrong in Jacob's heart. Jacob, being the husband of four wives, Leah, Rachel, and their servants, Bilhah and Zilpah, had a very real problem with showing favoritism. He had a lack of regard for the sons of Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah. He favored Rachel's two sons, Joseph and Benjamin. We will see more of that sometime down the road.

It seems he had an even greater lack of loving concern for his daughter, the daughter of Leah, his less-favored wife. This is the tragic and inevitable outcome of polygamy. It can only breed favoritism in the father and competition in the wives and their offspring. Dinah, it seems, did not have much of a father. If she had, she certainly would not be wandering off alone into a dangerous place. It is a father's duty to protect his daughter. Dinah's desire to see the women of the land likely speaks to her curiosity about their customs and ways. The allure of worldly customs is very strong for young men and women. The magnetic pull of the city lifestyle of the women attracted Dinah and lured her away from the sanctuary of her home. What resulted were the tragic consequences of her father's complacency. Her innocence was stolen, and Jacob had only himself to blame.

Yet, for whatever reason, Jacob seems to be almost apathetic about his daughter's plight. Any objective observer would expect a loving father to don his superman cape and fly to his daughter's rescue, but perhaps out of his unwillingness to face the reality of his own culpability in the matter, Jacob holds his peace. Dinah's brothers, however, are not going to be so measured in their response to her defilement. If their father would not act, *they* most assuredly would.

⁸ But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him to be his wife. ⁹ Make marriages with us. Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. ¹⁰ You shall dwell with us, and the land shall be open to you.

Dwell and trade in it, and get property in it.”¹¹ Shechem 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.”¹² Ask 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.” (Genesis 34:8-12)

Shechem is being driven almost entirely by young love. This is “eros,” the passionate love of the flesh that, once awakened, is a fire that cannot be quenched. He offers the world for his prize. Hamor, his father, seems kind enough in wanting to open up the land to Jacob and his kinsmen. However, such fellowship with the Shechemites would only have a corrupting influence upon Jacob and his family, which should be clear based on the circumstances. The admonition of the New Testament certainly applies to such an offer.¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?¹⁵ What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?¹⁶ What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; (2 Corinthians 6:14-16)

Jacob’s sons would have none of the kindness of Shechem and his father. In their spiteful anger, they would go to the opposite extreme. What takes place next is a terrible miscarriage of justice by the aggrieved party.

¹³ The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah. ¹⁴ They 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. ¹⁵ Only on this condition will we agree with you—that you will become as we are by every male among you being circumcised. ¹⁶ Then 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. ¹⁷ But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter, and we will be gone.” (Genesis 34:13-17)

Here, the sons of Jacob abuse that which is sacred to carry out an action that is quite profane. They are baiting a trap using something God intended to be the seal of their sanctification unto Him. Remember, God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision after he had already been justified by faith in order to provide a physical and tangible sign of Abraham’s being cut off from all his reliance upon the world and the flesh, and set apart as the family belonging to the Lord. All the men who belonged to the family of faith were commanded to be circumcised as an outward demonstration of the inner reality of their utter dependence upon God to fulfill His promises to bless the world through them. Only three generations later, Jacob’s sons are deceitfully using this sacred symbol to exact revenge upon their enemies, which is the exact opposite of God’s purpose for circumcision. In connection to this, Matthew Henry said, “Those who act wickedly, under the pretext of religion, are the worst enemies of the truth, and harden the hearts of many to destruction.”

Paul spoke of this pernicious tendency to act wickedly under the pretext of religion in addressing the Jews who justified themselves but judged others in Romans 2. ¹⁷ But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God ¹⁸ and know his will and approve what is

excellent, because you are instructed from the law; ¹⁹ and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— ²¹ you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. ²⁴ For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” (Romans 2:17-23) May such a thing never be said of us, Christians. We ought to be very careful about setting ourselves up as judges, for sin tends to make us very poor judges. We will be measured by the same measure by which we judge others.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Simeon’s and Levi’s deceitful tactic worked. Watch how the sons of Jacob got their revenge.

¹⁸ Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem. ¹⁹ And 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. ²⁰ So 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. Let us take their daughters as wives, and let us give them our daughters.” ²² Only 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. ²³ Will not their livestock, their property and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us.” ²⁴ And 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.

²⁵ On 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. ²⁶ They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went away. ²⁷ The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister. ²⁸ They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field. ²⁹ All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and plundered. (Genesis 34:18-29)

That is a demonstration of what poor judges human beings make. This was not an eye for an eye. Parents, how often do we have to remind our children that two wrongs do not make a right? Human retaliation so often exceeds the original offense. There is something in our fallen nature that tends to delight in vengeance taken to an extreme. Our anger so often causes us to sin. We can justify some of the most heinous crimes by calling it justice.

But there is a new and better way revealed to us in Christ Jesus. It is the way of leaving vengeance in the hands of Almighty God, who alone judges justly. This doesn’t mean that we should cease to be concerned for justice in this world, but it does mean that we never take revenge. Paul’s instructions are quite helpful at this point,

¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:17-21)

In another place, Paul said, "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil." (Ephesians 4:26-27) Anger that is mixed with pride and selfishness will always lead to devastating results. On the contrary, anger that is concerned for God's glory and His righteousness, and that is driven by love for the other, is righteous anger. It is always slow to reach boiling point. God is slow to anger. He is incredibly patient in dealing with us, and He expects us to be the same as we live in a world where we will be wronged and hated. We must learn to suffer offenses with patience and with a heart that is ready to forgive, which is exactly how Jesus suffered His offenses. He did so, entrusting His Spirit to the Father who judges justly, knowing that His suffering was the very means by which His Father would be revealed to be both just and the justifier of the one who believes in Jesus (1 Peter 2:23; Romans 3:26).

All of this mess could be traced back to the complacency of the father. Had Jacob not grown lackadaisical in his walk with the Lord upon arriving back in the promised land, things could have gone much differently for him and his family. Fathers, let this passage serve as a warning to us today about how our complacency in the home can affect our families. We need to lead in humility, patience, and faith. We need to keep our families tethered to the Lord through Bible reading, prayer, and humble acts of service. We need to prioritize the Kingdom of God, and not our own kingdom. If we do not seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, if we grow complacent in this evil day, we can be sure that trouble will follow.

³⁰ Then 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." ³¹ But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?" (Genesis 34:30-31)

Jacob would have been wise to turn the magnifying glass on himself rather than pinning the blame on his boys. His boys did what they did because he failed to act as a father should. His daughter was defiled because he failed to protect her. It is the parents' responsibility to protect their sons and daughters. Our sons and daughters need protection today, parents! Do not grow complacent. Be very careful with what you put in their hands. Be very careful about the places you allow them to go on their own. Now is not the time to be luke-warm, not that there is ever such a time. But especially today, while evil is being called good everywhere we turn, our children need our protection, and they need us to teach them the ways of our gracious and merciful Lord, whose ways are righteousness and peace, and who saves us by grace through faith. They need us to lead them to Jesus Christ by going to Him ourselves day-by-day, praying

without ceasing. Do not grow complacent in-between the already and the not yet. Live in this world as a sojourner, depending entirely upon the grace and mercy of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and he will equip with every good thing to do his will.