

## Genesis 35 – 36 Purified and Presented

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro  
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It's interesting to me the concern that people will have about what they put into their bodies – whether it is a desire to go pesticide free, local grown organic, or some fad diet to lose weight or aid performance, people can pay a lot of attention, and a lot of money for, the foods they consume. They don't want the wrong things going into their body.

What really amazes me as a pastor though, is that so few people seem to be concerned about what they take in spiritually. They understand that ingesting the wrong things can be bad for your physique, for your health, or for your performance, but they give little or no thought to what impact the things they are seeing, doing, experiencing, or otherwise taking in will have on their souls. And I would argue that your soul is far more important than your stomach.

This morning we are going to see Jacob and his family put on a spiritual diet of sorts, and watch as they purge themselves of the things that were getting in the way of their relationship with the one true living God. -----

Let me set the scene for you, because the background of last week's sermon is important.

A local prince had raped Dinah, Jacob's daughter. His sons, Simeon and Levi, took it upon themselves to retaliate, but instead of just going after the man responsible, they wiped out his whole town after persuading them to be circumcised and then attacking them while they were healing.

When Jacob found out what they had done he was concerned. What if some of the other village in the area decides to attack his family in retaliation?

Jacob realizes he is in danger and right at that moment, God shows up.

1 Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother."

You remember, over twenty years ago, Jacob had been scheming and conniving, trying to build a kingdom for himself by whatever means were necessary when he finally crossed a line by deceiving his dad and stealing the blessing meant for his older, twin brother, Esau. Esau had sworn to kill him as a result, and Jacob had fled for his life, empty-handed.

Yet while he was on the run, God spoke to Him one night and made a promise to him, that He would always watch over him, that He would bring him back to the land that he was

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leaving, and give it as an inheritance to his sons and grandsons, and that He would give him those very children so that they could inherit the land. It was the same promise, the same covenant, that God had made to his grandpa Abraham and his dad Isaac. It was a gift of God's grace, not something he had earned. Now God is telling him – return to the place where I made you those promises.

[2](#) And Jacob said to his household and to all who *were* with him, “Put away the foreign gods that *are* among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. [3](#) Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone.” [4](#) So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which *were* in their hands, and the earrings which *were* in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which *was* by Shechem.

They're about to step out on a journey to the place where God met with Jacob, but first Jacob tells everyone to get rid of all their idols, to wash themselves, and to put on new clothes - to purify themselves – and everyone does it.

We're going to take a look at this idea of cleansing, or purifying ourselves, cleaning ourselves up, because it applies to us as it applies to Jacob. But first, we need to make sure we grasp one VERY important point: Jacob was already in a relationship with God before he ordered this purification.

Remember, God came to Jacob when he was on the run, right on the heels of a nasty sin and showed him grace. When we looked at that passage in Genesis chapter 27 I said that we saw the same thing with the Apostle Paul – he was on his way to persecute Christians in Damascus when Jesus confronted him and changed him. And the same is true with us – God comes to us, the Bible says, “while we were still sinners” and shows us grace.

So we don't ever have to clean ourselves up enough to **find** God – *He* finds *us*, He draws us to Himself, but then, as He begins to grow us, He also has certain expectations of us. Turn with me to John 13 and we'll see what I'm talking about.

This takes place in the Upper Room, before the Last Supper on the night before Jesus is crucified – He's up there with the 12 disciples, and He wraps Himself in a towel and starts to wash their feet.

[6](#) Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, “Lord, are You washing my feet?”

[7](#) Jesus answered and said to him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.”

[8](#) Peter said to Him, “You shall never wash my feet!”

Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.”

[9](#) Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head!”

[10](#) Jesus said to him, “He who is bathed needs only to wash *his* feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.” [11](#) For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, “You are not all clean.”

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When we enter into a relationship with Christ, we are cleansed, we receive “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom [God] poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:5-6). And maybe that is where some of you are this morning – you need to be washed from sin. There are dirty spots all over your life – maybe some are big, maybe some are little, maybe some are old and faded – but no matter who you are, without Christ, you have spots.

The Bible says “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23) – even educated, sophisticated, powerful people in DC. And, the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23), but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.

He offers to wash you clean from all the junk you have been through and that others have put you through. He says in the book of Isaiah – “Come now, let us reason together, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

God offers to forgive you just as you are. This is the gospel, there is no better gospel, and there is no other gospel.

What Jesus is referring to though, here in John, is the dust that we all pick up on our feet as we walk through the world after He has cleansed us. In the times when Jesus walked the Earth, there were no sidewalks, no concrete or pavement, you walked on dirty, or on dusty cobblestones – so even though your body was clean, anytime you walked somewhere your feet would get dirty – as a result you didn’t need a full bath, just a cleansing of your feet.

That’s what Jacob and his family needed and that’s what we need – a purification, a purging of all that is holding us back in our relationship with God and then a presentation of ourselves to God.

There have been several of these purges in my own life, large scale purges that is, where I just got rid of things that I felt were not compatible with my desire to put God first in my life.

Years ago, when I was a young Marine living in Japan, I had a job as a DJ at the Officer’s Club on base on Friday nights, so I had this pretty good sized stack of CDs and videos, but when God got ahold of me, He started to show me how the message that much of that music contained was in conflict with His values and priorities for my life and that I needed to get rid of it.

The problem was, I had invested a lot of money into my collection. I resisted getting rid of it for a while until an idea came to me – I could try to sell them at a used music store and then I would take the money and buy a bunch of Christian CDs. So, I loaded up two milk crates of CDs and took them down to the store expecting to get a hundred dollars or more. The guy took a look at what I had and offered me something like \$30 for the whole stack. I

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couldn't believe it. I packed up my stuff and walked out and God spoke to me "Jeff, if I didn't want you to have it, why would I want anyone else to have it?"

So, I took it home and threw it in the trash, which is what I knew I should have done all along. Jacob could have tried something similar – he could have said, well, here, let's take it all and melt down the gold, and maybe we can use the wood for something else, and let's see what else we can do with this stuff – but he didn't, he just buried it all. He got rid of it.

There have been other times when I got rid of some movies, or we stopped the Victoria's Secret catalog from being delivered to our house. It's just a good experience every so often to ask God – what is there that is displeasing to you, or that is tempting to me that is in my life, in my possession, is there anything in my room or in my house, or in my storage that just needs to go?

Now, here is the warning – you can get legalistic about this and feel like you're better than other people because you don't have... whatever, you fill in the blank. We all need to purge our lives of things that are blatantly sinful, but then there is room for individual conviction. Mady knew a girl at one time who looked down on her for owning soundtracks from secular movies – just the soundtracks, completely instrumental, no lyrics, but they weren't 'holy music' so they shouldn't be owned. The Bible doesn't say that, it was just her conviction.

So place yourself before the Lord, offer up, with open hands, everything in your life and in your possession, and allow Him to take out and place in whatever He likes, *but unless you have chapter and verse, don't go forcing your own convictions on other people.*

**Unless**, you are the mom or dad – then there's a lot more room for you to enforce your convictions, though you still have to be cautious. You need to give your kids room to develop their own convictions while you guide them. But notice, it *was* dad who made the call here – he said, "this is what we are going to do" and maybe he took some flack for it, but he stood up and made the call.

It reminds of Joshua's stance when he addressed the nation of Israel, Jacob's descendants, and said "chose this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). Joshua took a stand for God and led his family regardless of what anyone else did.

Here's the other thing you need to know – Christians shouldn't be a bunch of kill joys, uptight prudes who are only known for what we are against. Remember, that wasn't the way God set things up in the garden – God gave Adam and Eve free reign over the place – there were all kinds of things there for them to do, to explore and to enjoy, only one thing was placed off limits.

Don't get that backwards – whether you are the parent ruling your home, a leader in your organization, or whether you are just ruling yourself – have a much longer list, or a much more significant list of what you CAN do, than what you can't.

If you're going to make certain things off limits, that's OK, but then figure out what IS OK and be as lenient as possible with it.

A little saying I picked up from Jon Courson is that 'sin isn't bad because it is forbidden, it is forbidden because it is bad.' In other words, if you are opposing something, it should be because it's something bad, something that will harm you – so get rid of it, or avoid it, but then find something much better that will do you good and which will glorify God.

Jacob is telling everyone to get rid of their idols because they have been chosen to be in a relationship with the true and living God – why waste your time with little powerless trinkets?

So they bury all that junk, cleanse themselves, and put on new garments - let's see what happens next:

[5](#) And they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that *were* all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. [6](#) So Jacob came to Luz (that *is*, Bethel), which *is* in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who *were* with him. [7](#) And he built an altar there and called the place El Bethel, because there God appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother.

[8](#) Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the terebinth tree. So the name of it was called Allon Bachuth.

Something small, but very important occurs here – Jacob travels to this place where God spoke to him, where God made the covenant with him, it was once named Luz (which means light), then it was also called Allon Bachuth (which means Terebinth of Weeping); after God appeared to Jacob twenty years ago he named it Bethel (which means the house of God), but now, Jacob calls the place El-Bethel, "God of the House of God."

Do you see the subtle, but important difference? Once Jacob was just noticing that this is where God spoke to him, he called it God's house. Back then the focus was on geography, now it is on God Himself.

[9](#) Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him. [10](#) And God said to him, "Your name *is* Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name." So He called his name Israel. [11](#) Also God said to him: "I *am* God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. [12](#) The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land." [13](#) Then God went up from him in the place where He talked with him. [14](#) So Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He talked with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured a drink offering on it, and he

poured oil on it. [15](#) And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Bethel.

Here, where God had made the promises in the first place, He reiterates them. And it's a very cool scene – Jacob remembers all that God had promised to do, and now he is standing there, surrounded by the material proof of God's fulfilled promises.

This is one of the privileges of getting older, if you are focused on God – the longer you live, the more of God's promises you get to see fulfilled.

But, the more heartaches you go through too, because we still live in a fallen world – even though we are washed by Christ, there is still dirt that can get on our feet – we are not yet walking on the streets made of Heavenly gold. And here is Jacob's reminder of that:

[16](#) Then they journeyed from Bethel. And when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel labored *in childbirth*, and she had hard labor. [17](#) Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said to her, "Do not fear; you will have this son also." [18](#) And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni (Son of my sorrow) but his father called him Benjamin (Son of my right hand). [19](#) So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (*that is*, Bethlehem). [20](#) And Jacob set a pillar on her grave, which *is* the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day. [21](#) Then Israel journeyed and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder. [22](#) And it happened, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard *about it*.

This isn't a move of lust, it's a power play, Reuben is trying to take his place as head of the family too soon. His attempt fails and will cost him the rights and privileges of the firstborn.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: [23](#) the sons of Leah *were* Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun; [24](#) the sons of Rachel *were* Joseph and Benjamin; [25](#) the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, *were* Dan and Naphtali; [26](#) and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maidservant, *were* Gad and Asher. These *were* the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram.

In Genesis 49 when Jacob/Israel passes out his final blessing, he skips over Reuben because of this event, and then skips over number two and three – Simeon and Levi because of the massacre they were responsible for last chapter, and establishes his fourth son, Judah as the head of the family.

[27](#) Then Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kirjath Arba (*that is*, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had dwelt. [28](#) Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. [29](#) So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, *being* old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

(We're not going to cover chapter 36 because it is just a thick genealogy that shows us the descendants of Jacob's twin brother Esau. There is some good factual data there, but there's nothing special to dig out of it, so we'll pick up next time in chapter 37.)

The important thing we see here in these chapters is the capstone of Jacob's life – from here the focus will shift more to his sons, specifically Joseph. But here we see the consummation of God's promises to Israel – He has brought him back into the land, He has given him offspring, and He has blessed him. God is doing a work through this man.

He wants to do a similar work in our lives, but in order for that to happen, we must decrease so that He can increase – we need to be purged of all the stuff we have gathered for our own benefit or our own amusement if it caters to our depravity and not our holiness. We need to let Him have His way in us and in the lives of those under our influence, but we need to do it all in a spirit of Grace.

We are going to celebrate communion now, it's a great time for you to take a moment as the elements are passed out and to open up the doors of your life – to ask God to clean out and bury whatever He wants. Maybe you need to do that for the first time this morning – to surrender your life to God and say “have your way in me, wash me, and make me new” – you can do that right where you sit by talking directly to Him.

But all of us need to take these moments and ask God – what needs to come out, what needs to come in, and to thank Him for all that He has already done.