

Text: Genesis 34:1-35:7

Title: "The Ugly Nature of Sin"

Time: 3/29/09 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Have you every received something in the mail that made you wonder why that particular piece of mail was sent to you in particular? I get a good deal of this kind of thing in our church P.O. box. One of the things that comes to mind is the advertisements I get every now and then from a huge church in California about their upcoming conferences and youth events.

Don't they understand that I live in New Hampshire, the place they are mailing that advertisement? I cannot just jump in the car every quarter and high tail it to California for a conference. It makes me wonder why they send the advertisements to me.

We read a passage of Scripture this morning that can make us feel that way – why was this written for me? As we read it, it describes a very sordid account of lust, rape, vengeance, and murder that we do not expect to have to read about when we come to church on Sunday. So before we begin our study of the content of the passage this morning, I would like us to consider two things that will help us see that the truth of this passage is not as foreign to our everyday lives as we may think.

First, there is some question about the nature of the crime committed against Dinah described in verse 2 of our passage, and this affects how we apply the passage to our lives. Some Bible interpreters see the crime of rape described here, forcing someone to have intercourse when she does not want to. They conclude that Dinah was not

consenting to what was being done by Shechem in this verse. This understanding is based on the word translated *defiled her* (KJV), because that word also appears in later passages that clearly involve the crime of rape, such as the account of the crime of Amnon against his step sister Tamar in 2 Sam. 13:12, 14.

Clearly, what we have described in 2 Samuel 13 is the crime of rape, but even though the same word is used in Genesis 34:2, it is not as clear that rape is happening in this context. The word literally means *to humiliate someone* in a general sense, and in the book of Genesis Moses uses the word in this less than technical way (15:13, 16:6, 31:50). None of these contexts involves rape, but they all involve the humiliation of improper treatment.

I think that what happens between Shechem and Dinah is consensual on Dinah's part for five reasons:

- (1) Dinah never voices a protest the way Tamar does; crying out for help is part of what determines whether or not an incident like this is a violent crime (Deut. 21:24);
- (2) Shechem's love for Dinah contrasts Amnon's hatred for Tamar – rape is an act of violence as much as an act of lust – Shechem demonstrates lust, but not violence;
- (3) the word *take hold of her* in 2 Sam. 13:11, which describes Amnon's act, is far stronger than the word used to describe Shechem's act *take her* in v. 2;
- (4) Dinah stays in the house of Shechem after verse 2 (34:26) – their relationship is evidently peaceful and ongoing and under the same roof; and
- (5) Shechem's sin is described as treating Dinah as a harlot by Dinah's brothers (34:31).

So what we have going on here is the humiliation of Dinah in the sense that Shechem has treated her as his wife when

she was not his wife, and Dinah has gone along with the idea. Now that is not foreign to us at all, is it? It is happening all over our town, and all over our country. I saw a study that said that 40% of newborns in 2007 were born out of wedlock. We have lost our sense of the shame of this, but this passage reminds us that these acts are not God's will.

So the passage is not very far removed from our situation this morning for this reason, but there is an even more important reason this sordid tale is not far from us. Remember what the Lord Jesus said about murder and adultery in His sermon on the mount? (Matt. 5:21-26; 27-28). After reading these passages, the sins of murder and fornication do not seem as far from our own experience as they did a minute ago, do they?

Genesis 34 is a passage that describes the ugliness of sin, and in so doing it tells us what lurks within our own hearts and lives, things that we need God's help with. With the time we have left, I want us to consider five things about the ugly nature of our sin this morning.

I. Sin is universally pervasive.

Illustration: I mentioned as a praise last week the fact that my brother had the opportunity to preach in chapel at Bob Jones University. Bonnie has just returned from the Bible conference there. I enjoyed listening to my brother's message on the BJU.edu website. He preached two messages, and the first one was on Prov. 28:13, which says: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy." He made a good point about that first phrase that he called "Sin is a constant." Notice that the verse assumes that we sin. That is a universal given or a constant, according to Solomon. The

question is not whether we are going to be sinners who sin. The question is whether will we try to cover it up or will we find mercy.

Application: The passage before us teaches this truth about sin – it is universally pervasive, everyone is a wretched sinner whose nature is marked with the ugliness of sin. These are the patriarchs of Israel who are committing these sins and living this way. If I were to ask you on that day of Shechem's death, who on the face of the earth knew the true God better than anyone else, the answer would have to be *Jacob* (or perhaps *Isaac*). And yet, if I were to ask you on that day whose family more than any other on the face of the earth displayed the awful ugliness of the nature of sin, you would again have to answer *Jacob's*. Jacob's family was not above the ugliness of sin, and neither are you and I. Like the old song says, we are sinners "without one plea."

Before we leave this point, we need to note something about the difference between Scripture and legend. Legends are tales about a culture's heroes, which are embellished so as to help make the culture look good. The Bible is very frank about the failures of even the heroes of Judaism and Christianity, because the Bible was not a product of Judaism or Christianity. This book is a product of the Spirit of God. It describes men not in a legendary manner, but rather in an honest and historical manner, the way we would expect the Spirit of Truth to describe them.

II. Sin is hazardingly contagious.

Illustration: When we speak of contagion, we are normally talking about disease. Any disease that fails to spread will die out – infection is a disease's livelihood. The World Health Organization reports that "measles is the most

contagious disease known to man. It is a major childhood killer in developing countries - accounting for about 900,000 deaths a year. The measles virus may ultimately be responsible for more child deaths than any other single microbe - due to complications from pneumonia, diarrhoea [sic] and malnutrition" [www.who.int/infectious-disease-report/pages/ch2text.html; accessed 3/27/09].

Application: Sin is often compared to a disease in the Bible, and part of the similarity between disease and sin is that both are contagious – they spread through contact. We see Jacob’s family unduly affected by the sinful world around them as they stop short of returning all the way back to Bethel in this passage.

Dinah gets in trouble as she goes out to see the daughters of the land (34:1); foreign idols and foreign practices like wearing earrings had infiltrated this family (35:4). The offer of Hamor and Shechem was to overlook the wrong and become one of us (34:8-12). “Compromise”, “compromise”, “compromise” is the constant din of a sinful world that wants to infect the people of God. Paul warns us, “be not deceived; evil communications (acts of sharing) corrupt good morals.” We must draw a line and not go beyond it.

III. Sin is blindingly selfish.

Illustration: To be blind is to be handicapped. Jesus talked about the blind leading the blind, and how the result is that they both fall into a ditch. I saw advertised a movie that came out last year that was called “Blindness,” and it is a story about how everyone in a city is afflicted with an epidemic of blindness all at once. I don’t know what kind of movie it is, and I’m not trying to endorse it or any other movie this morning, but that would be something if

everyone in a city were suddenly struck with blindness. Clearly, the city would be in a lot of trouble.

Application: The blindness of sin is at the root of the trouble people experience in these verses, but I also want us to see that the blindness is selectively selfish. Selfishness keeps us in the dark about how our sin affects others, even while we can see perfectly fine how the sins of others affect us or third parties.

Jacob's brothers illustrate this. They see clearly what Shechem is thoroughly blind about – the effect the nature of Shechem's sin had on Jacob (34:7). But they could not see the awfulness of their own sin or the effect it had on their father (v. 30). Instead, they defend their treachery to the end (v. 31).

How are we to have our eyes opened so that we can see the treachery of our own sin? David examples this for us. Remember how angry he got, when he heard from Nathan that story about the poor shepherd who had his one sheep stolen away, and yet David had taken Uriah's wife and murdered him. Somehow he had failed to get angry at himself for that. His sin was blindingly selfish.

What was David's cure? Two prayers: (1) Ps. 139:23-24; God used Nathan to accomplish this in David's life, do not despise those who help you see your own sin; (2) Ps. 51:2-3; the ability to acknowledge our sin, to see it plainly, is God's gift so that we can ask Him to cleanse us from it.

IV. Sin is violently destructive (Levi and Simeon).

Application: We have not left a lot of time to address this, and there is really no explanation for the ugliness of the violent nature of sin. Perhaps the saddest verse of this entire

episode is 34:29. God wants us to understand that there were wives and little ones affected by the actions of Levi and Simeon. He also wants us to understand that neither Levi nor Simeon would get away with what they had done (Gen. 49:5-7). The consequences of sin are severe because sin is violently destructive.

V. Sin stains what only God can cleanse (35:1-7).

Application: How do you go on after what has happened in chapter 34? Why get up in the morning, given the fact that our nature is stained by the ugliness of sin? It is universally pervasive, so we all have it; it is hazardously contagious, so it is all around us; it is blindingly selfish, so we have trouble seeing it; and it is violently destructive, so the scars and pain in its wake are seemingly irreversible.

The answer to how we go on anyway begins with the first three words of chapter 35: "Then God said." Throughout chapter 34, we saw what life is like where God's Word is absent, where it is ignored, where it is not heard. But with chapter 35, God speaks. We need to love this Book in order to know its cure for the ugliness of our sin. Why this book? Because it tells us who God is and of the importance of worshipping Him (35:1-7).

Worshipping God cures our sinful natures. When we worship Him, our natures are transformed into an image of His nature. To do this, we have to put away idols – the gods we invent, the things in life that we love and worship and serve more than the true God. Keep your idols, and you will keep the ugliness of sin in your life. Put away your idols, worship God, and you will find that God can cleanse what sin has stained.

Conclusion: Psalm 51 speaks of the worship of God as an important part of David's victory over his sin (vv. 10-19). Broken-hearted worship of God cleanses the ugly stains of sin.

Have you asked for that cleansing recently? Are your eyes opened in a new way to something ugly in your life, which they could not see before? The Lord is working to cleanse you. Pray the prayer of David and know the wonderful washing of God's mercy and forgiveness from the ugliness of your sin.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching