

Genesis 35: 1-15; "God's Faithfulness to Revive His People", Sermon # 94 in the series - "Beginnings", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on March 18th, 2007, in the Morning Worship Service.

When we think about the terrible sins that were committed in the last chapter by the sons of Jacob, and the mistakes that were made by Jacob himself in his failing to take charge of things and restrain his sons, it is a remarkable mercy given to them that God gently and powerfully comes to them, to revive them at this time. But this was the sovereign choice of our God. Our God is "merciful and gracious, He is longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth." "He keeps mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but by no means clears the guilty," it says in Exodus 34: 6 and 7. It is important for us as Christians to understand how great God's Electing love and grace really are toward us who are undeserving. We are unworthy of the least of His mercies, but He comes and shows us His love and care even when we deserve to be punished for what we have done. This does not mean that God's people ever "get away with sin", or that they can "continue in sin that grace might abound." God will not allow us, as believers, to think that it is acceptable behavior to practice sin, either in our hearts or in our behavior. He will discipline His children where they need it, and He will discipline them diligently. "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." God will teach every one of His children His ways. Jacob would have to undergo many trials and disappointments in his future life, in relation to his family and especially in relation to his sons. We shall see this especially in the account of Joseph in chapters 37-50. God would teach the whole family many important lessons related to repentance and faith in order that they might see how great God's love was toward them as a family.

You and I must remember this morning that Jacob and his household were some of the only people that knew the Lord on the face of the earth. They are the household that the Biblical account focuses on, because the promised Seed would come through Jacob's line. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jacob is now told by God to, "Arise," and leave Shechem, and "go up to Bethel and dwell there." He and his family were the household of faith in that day. They were "the house of God", which is the church of the living God, in that day. They were the "pillar and ground of the truth" of that day. And God is going to take steps to preserve them. Is this not an amazing thing that God did for them; leading them and guiding them to the place where He would teach them what it would mean to know Him? He would teach them in the years to come about the greatness of their sins. But He would teach them also about the greatness of His mercy and grace in Christ. Out of the whole household, He had revealed

Himself to only to Jacob at Bethel, in the past, when he was going over to live with Laban. Now God would continue His goodness and kindness in revealing Himself to Jacob; and through Jacob, God would also teach his household. It is no doubt true, that everyone in Jacob's household did not know the Lord, but the Lord would surely save some of them in the future. But here, at this time, God understood that Jacob and His household needed to be revived. They needed to be revived because Jacob's faith, and the faith of others in the household had fallen very low as a result of the sins of Jacob's sons. What kind of a vision could Jacob have of anything good and great taking place in his family after this episode at Shechem? He says to his sons in verse 30 of chapter 34, "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, and I shall be destroyed, my household and I." "But God is going to revive Jacob and teach him of His covenant faithfulness. He then, would be able to teach his household. You and I, who believe in Jesus Christ, and have become Christians, are also of the "household of faith." We, as well, may need to be revived at this point in our life. So this is what I will speak to you about this morning.

We know that revival has come to ourselves and to our church when, because of God's presence and power working among us, He so manifests Himself to us, that we come to have a worshipful obedience and a thankful heart. What does God do in His faithfulness to revive His sinful, downcast and bewildered people? That is the question of the morning. I believe that we can find 4 ways that are given to us in the text, that will show us what God does when He comes to revive the spirit of His sinful, downcast, and perplexed people. Let's think about them together.

1st of all - He gives direction concerning where His saints should live and worship Him. (Verses 1 and 3)

"Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there," God commands him at this critical time. Our God is a God who leads and guides us through this life. At times, God knows that we need to be revived in order that we might remember how awesome a thing it is to know Him. We will know His greatest blessings when we will obey His command to go to Bethel. Bethel means "house of God." And Jacob was being told to go up to the House of God, the place where he first met God, some 30 years before. God knew where Jacob should go, and where he should live, even if Jacob did not. Jacob had forgotten something which was very important, from the conversation that he had with God on that night so long ago. Turn with me to Genesis 28. After giving Jacob a vision of Christ, pictured as a ladder set up on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven; Jacob beheld His God and Savior in this vision, giving him great promises of the future Messiah being descended from him. And God promised him in verse 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 spoken to you." "Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.'" "And he was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place!' "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" Jacob considered the place where God had saved him as "awesome" in that day of his conversion. But now he had lost that sense of wonder and awe in his worship of God. The morning after he had been converted, he had "set up worship" in that place. It says, "Jacob rose early in the morning, and took a stone that he put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it." "Then Jacob made a vow, saying 'If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God.'" "And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You." God had been faithful to His promise. Jacob had now been living in the land of Canaan for eight years, and he had purchased land and dwelt there in Shechem. God had brought him back to the land, and to his father's house in peace, but Jacob had not fulfilled his vow.

Sometimes, after we become a Christian, and God has done many things to prove Himself faithful in our lives, we forget the things that we promised Him years before. Has this been the case with you? You have told the Lord; "Lord, if you save me and help me, then I will serve you." We may even tell Him that we will serve Him in some particular way. We are dead in earnest about it at the time, but then years go by, and so many things change, that we think that it does not matter to God if we fulfill the thing that we once vowed to do. But God remembers. And He will bring us to the place where we will remember also. It is evident from this text. We may have promised Him that we would be constant and faithful in attendance upon the stated services of the church. But now we rationalize to ourselves that there are other things that are more important on the Sabbath Day than praising God and listening to His Word, and having that word speak to our hearts. We may have ceased listening for God's voice speaking to us through it, and we have neglected reading it when we are at home in private. We may have promised God that we would be generous in our giving; that we would give Him a tenth, that we would faithfully tithe on our income, but now there have come to be so many financial needs pressing upon us that we do not feel that we can realistically do it. These are very serious declensions in our faith, and it would be just with God to exercise us with afflictions that will wake us up to our dangerous spiritual state. I think that this is one of the reasons for what took place in chapter 34. But God would not let Jacob settle down to become a worldling, after He had revealed so much of Himself to him. And He will not let any true Christian live that way either.

Let us behold how good and gracious God was to Jacob, here; not to upbraid him with all of his failures, but rather to come and show him the

blessedness of His leading him. It was God who revived Jacob's heart and soul to remember what he had done for him before. He had been in distress when he was fleeing from Esau his brother. God had answered his prayers for help. Do you know that God does the same for His New Testament, New Covenant people as well? He leads them to the place that He would have them to live and to worship. Whenever we move with our family, we always ought to ask ourselves why we are doing this? Is this being done at God's command? I know that in our day that we hear no audible voice of God speaking to us. But we do have the commands of His Word and His Spirit to guide us. If our move will enable us to go to a church where God is truly being honored and magnified, where the doctrines of His grace are being taught and lived out, where we and our children will really learn and respond to what the Lord is teaching us; then it is good that we move. If our move will take us away from those primary considerations, then it cannot be good. If our work or our pleasures are more important than learning and following the way of the Lord; then we put ourselves into a place of spiritual danger. We should always consider these things carefully, because God considers them most important.

2ndly - When God revives His people He faithfully shows them how He is to be worshiped. (Verses 1, 3, and 7)

"Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there," God says to him. Our worship and the things included in it, ought always to be done at God's command, and not be our invention or innovation. It ought to consist of what He wills and not what we will. It ought not to be "will-worship". In the New Testament and under the New Covenant, our altar has been built by a person as well. In fact, our altar is that person as well. Turn with me to Hebrews 13, verse 8. Here it says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." "Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines." "For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them." "We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat." What is being said here? These verses are indicating that it is that Jesus Christ who is the altar upon which all of our worship of God is built. It is the merits of His righteousness as a person which God accepts. He was and is the high priest of our faith. It is the value of His death in the sight of God that atones for our sins. It is His finished work on the cross that frees us from the guilt and power of our sins. We then offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God on this "altar" of what Christ has done for us. You should ask yourself this morning whether you have built this kind of altar in your heart to God. Jacob built a literal physical altar. New Testament believers build a literal spiritual altar in their hearts. "It is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them." He is saying that it will not profit you to think that if you take the sacraments and go through

the ceremonies of a church, that you will find the substance of what it means to know God and be accepted and led by Him into eternal life. Salvation does not come to us in a sacramental way. The substance, the food of spiritual life, is found in Christ; feeding upon His sacrifice. The altar is in your heart if you are a true believer. Ours is a different altar than the Old Testament priests, and it is a different altar from those who preach a sacramental salvation. You are saved by grace through faith. It is not of yourselves. It is not of any priest or bishop or pastor, or Pope. It is of God. This is why we conduct our worship centered around the preaching of Christ and His Word. And in the administration of the two Biblical ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, we find the substance in Jesus Christ and not the ceremonies themselves. We "proclaim the Lord's death until He comes," in the Lord's Supper. We proclaim our union with Jesus Christ in the waters of Baptism. Then in our worship and our obedience to His Word, our offerings in righteousness are all based upon His perfect righteousness. Our sacrifices of praise are all based upon His sacrifice for our sins. Everything that we do and accomplish for God is based upon the grace and strength of Jesus Christ. This is the true worship of God.

3rdly- When God comes to revive his sinful, downcast, and bewildered people, He gives life and power to the preaching of repentance. (Verses 2-5)

"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.'" Here we find Jacob, the patriarch and head of his household preaching repentance to his two families and all of his servants as well. They are to do certain specific things; "put away the foreign gods, purify themselves, and change their garments." When God comes to revive His people this is what is always seen in a great and wonderful spiritual reality for those who believe in Him under the New Covenant. First Jacob preached to them this brief sermon, and then the people responded. I do not think that this reaction, of all of Jacob's family and servants, to put away the foreign gods meant that every one of them were truly converted. They went along with Jacob's lead, and with some of them, their hearts might be still holding on to the idols. But I am saying that when true converting grace comes, repentance comes as well. Turn with me to 1st Thessalonians 1: 9 and you will see this. It says here: "For they themselves declare (the believers of Macedonia and Achaia, and in every place) concerning us (Paul and others who preached at Thessalonica) what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." This is what happens in genuine conversion; a turning to God from idols in order to serve God. You cannot serve God and have other gods before Him. You cannot have anything or anyone else before God in terms of the One whom you serve. He receives your first and most

time and attention in your mind and heart. You come to have greater regard for Him and His commandments than for anything else in your life. This means giving up and putting away certain things and practices.

This repentance of Jacob's was in relation to what God had done for Him and His taking a vow. And it shows God's power to revive His Church, to grant repentance in a larger sense, which is indicated by the family's outward obedience to the word preached to them by Jacob. In verse 4 it says that 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." Revival has come when everyone in the household of God becomes conscious that they should give up their idols. In this case, many in Jacob's household had little household gods, such as the ones that Rachel had stolen from her father when they left Padan-Aram. Her father Laban had hotly pursued them, and when he overtook them, his main complaint was that Jacob had stolen his "gods". These were probably little statues or amulets which were held in their possession and consulted or prayed to, so that good things would come to them, and bad things kept from them. But this is something that only God can do for a person. How easily we are deceived. These little teraphim were also on some of the ear-rings of the people. They gave up all of these things to Jacob when he asked them. Why? Because they had been told by Jacob that there was no other God but the God that had revealed Himself to him at Bethel. He told them that this God was a jealous God who would be angry with them if they served and worshiped other gods. They loved and respected Jacob and no doubt, many of them had come to believe that what he said was true. But I would have each of us to consider this morning; that you yourself must repent of all of gods but One. God will not accept just the outward repentance; although that is where you must begin. He will only accept that repentance which you will do by the grace of Christ. Come to Christ and you will repent. Repent and you will come to know that it is grace that led you to do so. True repentance and faith begin in the heart and then come to be seen in our actions. It is not enough to just go along with what your parents and teachers say you should repent of. You should come in prayer to the Lord Jesus so that you will find the power and life in your soul to put away the idols related to your former sins.

Jacob hid the idols and the ear-rings in the ground under the terebinth tree. He buried them there, so that his family and servants would not be able to have them again. Let me ask you now, whether you have taken the things related to your past sin; the things that were more important to you than God; have you taken those things and buried them where you cannot get them again? The books that talk about magic, the books and tapes and CDs which speak of your being able to help yourself through your problems in life. Have you gotten rid of "all the vain things that charmed you most", which related to your pride and

foolishness and sensuality. Have you taken off the ear-rings which tell of your faith in astrology? Have you rid yourself and your house of the hundred other things that speak of a life lived for something else, or someone other, than God and His Son Jesus Christ? You may have loved what those things said or what you thought that those things did for you; but now you know that it was wrong. These things are not true. Now is the time to get rid of them if you haven't already. In Acts 19: 18, after the Apostle Paul had cast an evil spirit out of a man in the name of Jesus, it says, "And many who had believed came, confessing and telling their deeds." "Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all." "And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver." That is God's reviving power.

They also "purified themselves and changed their garments," it says in our text. They needed to be purified after this bloody incident at Shechem. They needed to change their clothes. This also, is the physical picture of what takes place when we repent in our hearts, of our former sins. It says in Isaiah 1: 16, "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes." "Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow." That is repentance. The change of our heart, in turning from sin, and having sorrow over our sin, translates into learning to do good. We must be purified, we must change our garments. We must put off the Old Man with his deeds, and clothe ourselves with Christ. We must put on the garments of righteousness and clothe ourselves with holy zeal to do what is right. This is what God's reviving brings.

And then 4thly - When God comes to revive his sinful, downcast, and bewildered people, He causes us to know that He has been and He will be with us through all of life's journey to bless us. (Verses 5-14)

It says in verse 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." God, our God is the One who saves us from all of our enemies. God is the One and the only One who can deliver us from many of the just consequences of our sins. Jacob's sons deserved to die for taking matters into their own hands in the matter of killing Shechem and Hamor and all the males of the city. But God's purpose was that they not be put to death. He keeps them from this. He caused His terror to fall upon the cities that were all around them. God would teach them and discipline them and lead them by a very unusual way to learn what their sins deserved and to learn just how great his grace was. He was much, much better to them than their sins deserved. And so he is with each of us as well, when we trust in Jesus Christ. This is revival, when the terror of God falls upon men and they are unable to do what they would by nature want to do to get rid of the people of God or the power of the gospel toward themselves. The Apostle Paul knew something of the terror of the Lord. He says in 2 Corinthians

5: 11, "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I trust are well known in your consciences." This is the kind of revival that He wanted to see; when, knowing what terror will fill men's minds and hearts on the judgment Day, that He would be able to persuade people to come to Christ. This persuasion was Paul's making the case to the conscience of everyone that he spoke to, that it is only if Christ is believed and received, then a person can be very content to die.

In Jacob's case, God comes to him and persuades Him with promises of life and blessing, instead of wrath. He appears to him again. He tells him again that his name shall not be called Jacob any more, but Israel would be his name. He gives him the commission to be fruitful and multiply, for he would become a nation and a company of nations would proceed from his body. The land that God gave to Abraham, He would give to Israel and to his descendants. "Then," it says in verse 13, "God went up from him in the place where He talked with him." And God not only answered him in regard to his immediate needs, He answered him by being with him in all the places that he had gone. This is what you and I should remember this day in closing. The best part of being a Christian is knowing that God is with us. It is something that in times of revival, that Christians find most precious. But we ought to consider this truth precious at all times.

*Hallelujah what a Savior; Hallelujah what a friend; saving,
helping, keeping, loving; He is with me to the end.*

When the Lord is with us and He lets us understand this in our soul; when He comes to us in the way of His power, then we can face and do many things to His glory.