

## A STORY OF GRACE/WEEK 5 NOTES

### *All Sufficient Grace/ Genesis 35*

**BACK TO BETHEL.** Chapter 34 ends with such despair. But in mercy, God speaks to Jacob at this very low point in Jacob's life. God simply tells Jacob to go back to Bethel and worship there. It is interesting to me that God does not remind Jacob of his sin (Jacob lingered at Shechem). God simply speaks with clear directions. Jacob is to stay in Bethel until God has accomplished all He wants to do in Jacob's life. Remember the first time Jacob stopped in Bethel? He thought it was just an overnight stop while running for his life. But God was already there, waiting for Jacob, introducing Himself to Jacob for the first time. And Jacob was afraid. Also, at Bethel (Gen. 28) Jacob made a vow that was short on faith. This time, however, when Jacob returns to Bethel there is no fear. Instead, there is relationship with God and obedience to God.

**Jacob prepares.** From this point on in Jacob's life there is no record of deception or manipulation. With a heart of obedience Jacob prepares to return to Bethel. What a humbling blessing to know that after 10 years of disobedience, God still desires a relationship with Jacob. Again, God proves Himself faithful. What an encouragement to any of us who have lived even for a season in disobedience. God always desires relationship. He will call us back to Bethel, a place of repentance and surrender.

In preparation, Jacob tells his family to put away all of the idols /foreign gods they have carried with them. This is first time Jacob is confidently, spiritually leading his family . Rachel had stolen her father's household idols ten years earlier (Gen. 31:34). Jacob never delt with Rachel's idolatry. His lack of leadership and indifference toward idolatry has allowed false worship to co-exist alongside worship of God. His stay n Shechem has multiplied idolatry in his family. Now, Jacob finally obeys and tells them to get rid of the idols. His family listens, not only getting rid of the actual idols but also the jewelry they wear to represent those idols. He buries idols and jewelry right there in Shechem. No idol will go with them to Bethel. For us, idols are anything we rely upon to give us or do for us what only God can give us or do for us. While we may not bow down to literal idols, what do we seek before we seek Christ? What do we turn to expecting it to give us what only God can give us? What have we allowed to co-exist with Christ in our ideology, thoughts, opinions, and actions? Like Jacob's family, we must put away our idols.

Jacob also instructs them to take a bath and put on clean clothes. This is an act of consecration or dedication to God. It is an outward act that symbolizes an inner spiritual condition. For us, we do not bathe and put on clean clothes as an act of dedication. We do, however, invite the Holy Spirit to search our hearts and minds, to dig out anything in our lives that stands in opposition to God. The Holy Spirit will use the Word of God like a skilled surgeon uses a scalpel to cut with precision in the areas where sin hides (Psalm 139:23-24, Hebrews 4:12). When even our thoughts and motives are exposed to the light of Truth, we are drawn to confession (agreeing with God about our sin) and repentance (turning from our sin). We receive by faith the forgiveness God offers through Jesus . We allow Him to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We live by faith, trusting that we have been forgiven (1 John 1:9). As we confess, repent, and receive forgiveness we are not getting more of Jesus. Jesus gets more of us. God has Jacob's heart for the first time in Jacob's life. The awful circumstances at Shechem have made Jacob more receptive to the voice of God. "Pain is the megaphone of God." (C.S. Lewis) Jacob's heart is now prepared to worship at Bethel.

Genesis 35:5, Jacob and his family journey towards Bethel. Interestingly, Bethel is only 30 miles from Shechem. Disobedience and obedience were only a one or two days journey apart. We are reminded to stay on the path of obedience. A delay in "Shechem" could cost us greatly. While Jacob travels, the Canaanites do not pursue him. His fearful response in Genesis 34:30 is replaced by the power and holiness of God resting on Jacob. In chapter 34, Jacob is afraid. In chapter 35, the Canaanites are afraid. When we walk through life in the strength and power of Christ, the world takes notice.

**Blessing at Bethel.** Verses 6-7. Jacob arrives at Bethel and worships. He calls the place El-Bethel (The God of Bethel). In Jacob's mind, it is no longer just a geographical place, Bethel (The house of God) but it is where God Himself dwells. Verses 9-12, God speaks to Jacob. The Lord is not giving Jacob new promises, but Jacob has a new listening and obedient heart. God reminds Jacob that his name has been changed to Israel. From this time forward, Jacob will not be a perfect man but he will be a man who is learning to live like a prince instead of a pauper... Israel instead of Jacob. God identifies Himself as God Almighty, El-Shaddai, All-Sufficient God.

**Surrender at Bethel.** Jacob's response to God is worship. He builds an altar and offers a sacrifice to God. Verse 14 says Jacob pours out a libation, or drink offering on the burning sacrifice. "A drink offering was a supplement to a regular sacrifice and poured out on the altar as the sacrifice was burning. It was a symbol of dedication—the worshipper's life poured out for the Lord and consumed by the Lord" (Warren Wiesrbe). Read Philippians 2:17, Paul refers to himself as a drink offering.

Jacob is exactly where he needs to be. He is living fully in God's blessings, surrendered to God, poured out as a drink offering. Finally, as an old man, Jacob is God's man, and the old Jacob is gone. Certainly, grace and mercy have followed Jacob all of his life... not because Jacob is worthy but because God is faithful. Leaving Bethel may have been bittersweet for Jacob. Like Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration, perhaps Jacob wanted to linger longer at such a transformational place. But God has told him to go home and Jacob's obedient heart journeys on.

**AFTER BETHEL.** There are times when we are walking closely with Lord and still we experience difficult circumstances. The life of surrender does not shield us from death, suffering, sadness, sorrow, or the effects of someone else's sin. Jesus said, "In this world you WILL have tribulation..." we are not promised comfort and ease. Jacob is in the best spiritual place he has ever been. He is obedient and poured out to the Lord, but he is not shielded from hardship.

Genesis 35:8, Deborah dies. She was his mother's nurse and probably very instrumental in raising Jacob. We do not know when she joined Jacob's family, perhaps she brought the news that Jacob's mother Rebekah had died. Regardless of when she arrived, her death was a great loss to Jacob. He buried her beneath an oak tree and called the tree The Weeping Oak. Genesis 35:16-20, his beloved Rachel dies in childbirth. He buries her near Bethlehem. Her death is a profound loss for Jacob and yet verse 21 says, "And Israel (Jacob) journeyed on..." Genesis 35:22 his oldest son Reuben commits a grievous sin against his father by sleeping with Bilhah, one of Jacob's concubines (slave-wife). This sin will disqualify Reuben from being head of the family after Jacob dies. Genesis 35:27-29, after Jacob returns to his father's home in Hebron, Isaac dies. Esau comes to help Jacob bury their father. Jacob never sees Esau again. Death, sorrow, sin, ruptured relationships are still a part of Jacob's life, even as he walks with the Lord.

For us, the surrendered life is a life of obedience and trust, but it is not a life of ease. So how do we respond to the difficult circumstances that are sure to invade our lives?

**Questions are normal.** In difficult time we ask God questions. We want God to explain our tragedy. We want to know "why?". Many people in Scripture have asked God questions in times of distress. Gideon in Judges 6. Habakkuk the prophet in Habakkuk 1. Job asks "why?" 15 times (with no answers from God). Jesus cries out on the cross, "My God. My God. Why have You forsaken me?" Certainly, God is big enough to handle our questioning. But God is never obligated to explain Himself. He does not often, if ever, give tidy answers to the problem of pain. On this side of heaven, we may never know the "why" but we can know "the who", We can know Christ and lean into His love for us. Yes, God is sovereign but He is also our Father who loves us even when do not understand His thoughts or His ways.

The Psalms are filled with lament psalms. A lament is a strong spoken grief directed at the ears of God. The psalmist asks hard questions, but his questions are not asked with an upraised fist. The questions are asked from a place of deep brokenness. Read Psalm 77:7-10. Examine the questions asked

by the psalmist. Every lament psalm has a turning point , when the psalmist chooses to worship even when he does not understand. Psalm 77:10 is the turning point. He chooses to remember what God has done for him in the past, the great deeds God has done, and the holy ways of God. Dear one, ask your questions remembering we can approach His throne of grace with broken hearts (not raised fists). Ask your questions knowing God may not give tidy answers but He does give freely and fully of Himself.

**Remember.** Like the psalmist, Jacob will have to remember all that God has done for him, even while he grieves the losses and the heartaches. We must remember as well. Be careful with remembering. We do not look back to recount our sins nor do we allow the enemy to stir up guilt and condemnation. We look back to remember what God has done for us. His ways are holy, there is not a speck of unrighteousness in anything God does. He does not second guess His own decisions and His own ways. His ways and His wisdom are perfect and while He exercises perfect wisdom He demonstrates perfect love.

**Receive His Comfort.** John 14 is a comforting chapter. Read it. Jesus is speaking to His disciples just hours before His crucifixion. They cannot comprehend what Jesus is saying about leaving them. Read John 14:1., John 14:18, John 14:26 and 27. Comfort and peace is available through the Holy Spirit which is the presence of Christ in us. Jesus is not dispensing peace. He IS peace. Read Philippians 4:6-7. The peace of God surpasses comprehension and stands guard (like a soldier at his post) over our thoughts and emotions. Paul also writes about comfort in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. We receive comfort from God who is the God of all comfort. But we also comfort others in the same way we have received it. Do you see it? We must *receive* His comfort! We must allow the Holy Spirit to comfort us. This will never happen if we are spouting anger and animosity toward the Lord. There is a humility that often comes with pain. When we are suffering, typically we are listening, yearning to hear God's voice. As we listen, even while we do not understand the "why, God speaks comfort to us through the Holy Spirit, through His word, and through those around us who love us.

We all walk through difficult times, so we can all offer comfort. Please remember. A suffering person does not need to hear your story of suffering. Many times, a suffering person cannot focus enough to read books about suffering. Spouting Bible verses like band-aids are not the answer either. Suffering people do not need for us to come up with reasons why a tragedy has happened. We just need to show up and be quiet. Suffering people need Christians who will walk with them over the long haul, the day in and day out of suffering...sometimes for years or a lifetime. Praying for those who are suffering is a powerful form of comfort.

**Trust.** Hebrews 7:19 "This hope we have as an anchor for the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast..." The English word for *hope* and the Biblical meaning of *hope* are vastly different. Biblical hope is confidence. We have confidence that God is who He says He is, and He will do what He says He will do. We experience hope because we know God through Jesus Christ, therefore Christ is our hope, our confidence. He does not come and go, wax and wane, show up when we are good and depart when we sin. He is sure and steadfast! Unfaltering and unwavering. We can trust Him even in the sorrows of this life. Read Romans 15:13. God is not dispensing hope. He is hope. As we trust Him, He fills us with joy and peace. By the way, trust is an assurance that the rug will not be pulled out from under us. God is faithful to His Word. The joy and peace that we experience as we trust Him overflows to those around us.

We have been called and equipped to trust Him even when we do not understand. Psalm 112:& says, *The righteous will not be afraid of bad news, his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord.*