

RUF Bible Study – The Gospel in Genesis  
Doug Serven, RUF Campus Minister<sup>1</sup>  
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Genesis 34 – Dinah and the Shechemites

Gen 33: 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.

34:1 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."

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.

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."

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."

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. 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?"

Raise your hands if you've heard a sermon preached on this text. I never have, and to be honest, I'd like to skip over it and get back to some other thoughts and themes. I have two real problems with this chapter in the Bible. The first is how awful and graphic it is. We're confronted with the Bible's portrayal of sin, and the sin of God's people. So often I hear of folks who want a sugar-coated faith – nothing bad ever happens, no "adult content" ever enters our minds or lives. So people ban Harry Potter. They get books out of the library. They boycott Disney. And there is, of course, an element of good in that. We don't want anything and everything hitting our children, and ourselves. Enough is enough. But if you were to start reading the Bible with your children, you might blush several times in this first book. Cain kills Abel. Sodom and Gomorrah. This passage. Tamar prostitutes herself to Judah. The Bible is filled with adult themes, carefully, skillfully and tactfully addressed, but certainly there. So we have to deal with them too.

The other problem I have is that I am convinced that every passage teaches us something about Jesus. Not everyone thinks so, you know. Some commentators just skip it altogether. J.M. Boice says that H. C. Leupold gets to the end of his comments and then writes this: "We may well wonder if any man who had proper discernment ever drew a text from this chapter." Then he says, "As a whole it is an invaluable sidelight on the lives of the patriarchs. It is rightly evaluated by the more mature mind and could be treated to advantage before a men's Bible class. But we cannot venture to offer homiletical suggestions for its treatment."<sup>2</sup> (Not a ringing endorsement for my sermon today.)

And even the great Boice, though he does comment, sadly ends up with a Jesusless text. That cannot be, my friends. We are Christians here, not Muslims or Jews, religions who honor this as a Jesusless passage. He has to be in here. Every text points to him. Some are more implicit, have more to do with shadows and types. But *every* passage is useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking and training in righteousness. So I read Genesis 34, and I honestly have to scratch my head. At first glance, I've got nothing here to work with. So what do I do? The tempting thing is to preach morality. Don't be like Jacob, don't be like Dinah, don't be like the brothers. And that is partially true and some of what I will say. But that doesn't help you. You need more than that. You need to see Jesus today. Let's pray that I might do that for you, that God might illuminate Himself through His text and His humble preacher.

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<sup>2</sup> Boice, p. 342 of Vol. 2 on *Genesis*

Our basic premise today is that we learn about Jesus from the negative example of God's people.<sup>3</sup>

You're familiar with this principle. Have every heard how you are supposed to watch a solar eclipse? Is it a good idea to stare up at the sun? No, even when covered by the moon, it's too powerful for your eyes. You do some craft project so that you can see the negative of the sun, an indirect image projected onto a piece of paper. Now, let me ask you - is it the sun? The right answer is yes and no.

Negatives from pictures would be another example. When you get your roll back, and pull out the negatives, do you have any idea of what they are? Of course you do. Your mind can translate the images into their reverse main colors – we can make sense of them.

The same is true sometimes in our quest to see Jesus. We see him in our kings' failures, our prophets' lack of speaking, our priests' mishandling of the people. We see him in the negative, and are able to make the associations to see him, not exactly as he is, but there nonetheless.

The textual story lays out in four scenes. Shechem rapes Dinah and seeks to marry her, ending with a command to his father. Then we have two talking scenes. Scene two has Hamor and his son discussing the proposal of a marriage alliance with Jacob's sons and their counteroffer of a city-wide circumcision. Scene three has Hamor and Shechem's plea to their town that they go with the plan, and the townsfolk consent. In the last scene, Jacob's sons rape the town, ending with a plea to their father. Action – speech – speech – action. Rape of Dinah – maneuvering – maneuvering – rape of town.

We also might think of the contrasts we have in this text:

Father of action – Hamor // Father of passivity – Jacob

Man of faith – Israel // Deceiver – Jacob

Too little action – Jacob // Too much action – his sons

Pragmatism, Fear // Idealism, Brashness

There are many other things going on here, and we'll touch on some of them. But this isn't a Bible class. It's a sermon, so I need to combine some of these thoughts and present them in a way that appeals to your mind and your heart.

### ***We see Jacob's lack of covenantal faithfulness, but God is faithful to His covenant***

To see Jacob's first problem, and how that points to Christ, we need to remember a few things.

Remember what promises Jacob has taken hold of:

*28:15 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."*

And how Jacob responded:

*28:20-21 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,"* It appears then that Jacob is supposed to make peace with Esau and then come back to Bethel to live, to build a small temple to the Lord so he may be worshipped there.

But in 33:19-20, we read:

*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.*

About ten years pass between 33:19-20 and 34:1. Jacob isn't doing what he is supposed to be doing. Instead of getting back to Bethel, he's dillydallying in Shechem. Now, I'm sure that if you asked him why that was, he'd have a good explanation, one that would sound reasonable to us. But the bottom line, is that he is not fulfilling his calling here. He's getting sucked into the world and its way of doing things. In a real sense then, all the things that follow in this chapter are a result of Jacob's covenantal unfaithfulness.

Let's apply this two ways. The first is in the general. Recall Mike's sermon on Leviticus 13:47-59<sup>4</sup> and how he talked about the gracious but relentless eradication of sin. We do this in small ways, but in larger ones too. We can be sinful in our thinking.<sup>5</sup> In our flirting with evil. In our loving of sin.

John Owen says "be killing sin or it will be killing you." "You cannot deal with sin piecemeal.... You must deal with it entire. You cannot best temptations one at a time, dealing with one while leaving the others to wreck their havoc in your life. The only true and effective answer to any particular temptation is a life of comprehensive obedience.... We cannot leave the sins we love alone while pretending to be devoting ourselves to the mortification of sins we are quite happy to give up. Nor, even, can we work seriously on one sin at a time, while continuing to practice the others without any real effort to subdue and destroy them... It is precisely the cast that a diligent, faithful life, busy at serving the Lord, it is precisely the cast such faithfulness imparts to a Christian's life that gives him or her power over any and every sin. It is when Christians slow down in spiritual things, when they

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<sup>3</sup> In an email to me when I was asking him for help on this passage, Dr. Tim Keller wrote: "Keep in mind first that the 'types' of Christ point us to Christ not only by their similarity but by their *dissimilarity* to Christ. Failures by key figures point us to Christ as much as successes. And don't forget that in the book of Genesis it is always the younger (not the older son) or the outsider woman (the unloved, or the barren, or the rejected) one through whom the Messianic seed comes. That always points us to Christ, who wins through losing, who saves us through being rejected and unloved and trampled."

<sup>4</sup> available at [www.ctknorman.org](http://www.ctknorman.org)

<sup>5</sup> CS Lewis has a character who discusses this in *The Great Divorce*.

lay down their duties, when they are no longer thinking about pressing on in the life of faith, when they leave off taking new steps in their pilgrimage each day, a general weakness and lethargy overtake them and then particular falls occur.”<sup>6</sup>

But here is another real way this can happen if we might be specific in our application. Many people move all the time, taking better and better jobs. But I rarely hear of a family that visits the churches in the area of choice beforehand. There is an assumption there that everything is going to be fine, okay, because dad is getting \$10,000 a year and a better job title. Is this the way we make decisions as Christians? Isn't this an example of Jacob's sin of staying where he could be safe and happy, cozied up next to the world? Of having exactly the wrong definition of what makes God's people "prosperous and successful"?

We need to end here. "The logic of the story implies the importance of keeping one's vow. Jacob fails to keep his vow to build his altar at Bethel and then almost loses his household. One cannot worship God as one pleases. Jacob builds an altar, but in the wrong place. Because he is not in the place where he is supposed to be, he brings a sword, not a blessing, upon the nations."<sup>7</sup>

Wenham summarizes this passage and how it points to God and Christ this way: "By the end of chap. 33, Jacob has enjoyed divine protection in Mesopotamia, gained descendants, and bought land in Canaan, but has not quite reached his destination in Bethel. Here, on the verge of the total fulfillment of the promise and his vow, Canaanite lust, his own cowardice, and his sons' folly all combine to destroy the prospect of Jacob's return to his father's house in peace. Yet he does make it; as often in Genesis, the invincibility of the promises is once again demonstrated. Divine grace triumphs despite human sin."<sup>8</sup>

Somehow, which we know that this isn't the end of the story, Jacob makes it. Why? Because, even though Jacob is faithless, God is faithful. What an assurance we have, Jacobs!

How do we see Christ? Our Greater Jacob, fulfills his vow. He is at the right place at the right time, in accordance with his Father's command – "Not my will, but Your will be done." And, He does not slumber nor sleep (Ps. 121), but has an eye on His children, His friends, at all times – contrary to Jacob, who sets up camp within a stone's throw of a pagan city and continues to look after his family only passively.<sup>9</sup>

In the Psalms, the configuration "God of Jacob" or "Mighty One of Jacob" occurs thirteen times (in the ESV). An example is: Psalm 75:9 "But I will declare it forever; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob." Friends, I don't know about you, but I am glad we aren't only signing praises about Jacob. That would worry me. We sing about Jacob's *God*. He is the hero of this story, the one whom we worship, the one who is faithful.

### ***We see Jacob's apathetic fatherhood, but God is an active and loving Father.***

In this point, we really get into the text and story. We first read about Dinah in 30:21. It's unusual to record the birth of girls, but since chapter 34 is coming, we needed to be set up for it.

In 34:1, we see the beginning of the story action. "*Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had born to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land.*" Dinah was the daughter of Jacob and Leah. She is probably about fifteen or sixteen here. And it sounds like she's just like her mother – unloved and an outcast. She's the daughter of a woman who had hired her husband for the night. Now perhaps she is doing the same thing, she may have learned too well from her desperate mother. She is flirting with danger at the very least. She "went out" to the outside, to the women of the land and this landed her into all kinds of trouble.

Was Dinah innocent in this sordid affair? She "went out." Aren't we supposed to go out? Go out and make disciples. Yes, but the text doesn't indicate Dinah had such a motive, as dangerous as that even would have been in her time.

Women in the Bible don't "go out" like this. "Girls of a marriageable age would not normally leave a rural encampment to go unchaperoned into an alien city."<sup>10</sup> So, if her actions are innocuous, her motives may have been suspect. Like showing up at a hotel room of an athlete just to talk – at 2 a.m. Maybe Dinah longed for more attention and companionship. The text doesn't indicate if she had any other sisters or not. She perhaps needed some friends. And her father's love.

It's interesting that the narrator "blanks" Dinah's reactions to all of this. In the story, "she is an object of passion to Shechem, a bargaining chip to Hamor, a source of moral outrage on her behalf by her brothers, and passive indifference by her father."<sup>11</sup> I wish we could hear her explanation and reaction for what has happened.

Let's look at the other characters and the way the story goes before focusing on Jacob.

Shechem was certainly wrong to rape her. He is unequivocally condemned in the text. Shechem saw her, seized her, and lay with her and humiliated her. By piling on these words and terms, the author shows a very negative picture of this act. The verb here *skb*, refers to objectified and illicit sex. "To do violence... to rape a woman."<sup>12</sup>

Later in Old Testament law, we find out that the consequences of such action would be a large payment of damages and possibly a forced marriage if the women's father desires it.

However you feel about it, Shechem softens a bit in the story. He isn't the feared, callous anonymous rapist, but someone who loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her. He wants to marry Dinah, and even seeks Jacob's consent to the marriage.

At least Shechem didn't follow the course of Amnon when he raped Tamar. Having done wrong, he seems to want to make it right. This immediately turns sour though when Shechem orders his father to "Get me this girl for my wife." Not even a please here.

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<sup>6</sup> Rob Rayburn summarizing John Owen.

<sup>7</sup> Waltke, p. 468.

<sup>8</sup> Wenham, p. 309

<sup>9</sup> From an email from Rev. Bill Boyd.

<sup>10</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 233

<sup>11</sup> Waltke, p. 459

<sup>12</sup> Waltke, p. 462

The long scene that follows is dialogue and everything appears polite and diplomatic on the surface. However, we have to remember that Jacob's family speaks deceitfully and also that Shechem's family is holding Dinah captive.

Shechem and Hamor come to talk to Jacob but "Jacob held his peace until [the sons] came." Jacob's sons by Leah are hurt by their father's callousness toward them and their sister. There is an obvious indifference to Leah's kids. What would Jacob's reaction have been if Joseph or Benjamin had been treated this way? We find out in the next chapters. This may be what causes Leah's sons to overreact.

Hamor and Shechem soon find out that they have to deal with the brothers and not Jacob, for the brothers are Dinah's protectors. Hamor and Shechem lay out their case, proposing an alliance through the marriage. There is never a hint of any sort of apology of wrongdoing.

The brothers appear to not care about the economics of the deal, but instead to be concerned about the covenantal aspects of joining and receiving. Three days later, the real intentions of the brothers are revealed – revenge, humiliation and death. But we don't know that yet.

Shechem and his father, Hamor, appear to be reasonable men and agree to the proposition of the brothers. But then, when they return to tell their city of the plan, they fail to mention all the details to their town, and seem to be appealing to greed and economic gain for themselves.

What do we learn about Jacob here?

Jacob is most concerned with the peace of his estate. Dinah's honor? The wrong committed by his sons? Of no matter. What happened to the man of faith we just read about in Gen 32-33? God shows us just how Jacob struggles with his two natures – who, which will win? *Simul justus et peccator*. At the same time justified and a sinner. Recall Paul saying "The things I don't want to do I do." We have a war against our sin nature here. Jacob doesn't know what to do. He's not a good father.

We see this all the more at the close of the chapter. The narrator presents a pathetic Jacob. I'm scared they're going to be really mad, he says. You shouldn't have done that – not because it was wrong, but because it might turn out bad for me. "He does not condemn them for the massacre, for abusing the rite of circumcision, or even for breach of contract. Rather, he protests that the consequences of their action have made him unpopular. Nor does he seem worried by his daughter's rape or the prospect of intermarriage with the Canaanites. He is only concerned for his own skin."<sup>13</sup>

So we see Jacob's failures as a father. In the negative, we see our Father. The one who is still faithful. Here's just a sampling of what the Bible says about God being our Father.

*Psalm 68:4 Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts; his name is the Lord; exult before him!*

*5 Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.*

*6 God settles the solitary in a home; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious dwell in a parched land.*

*Psalm 89:26 He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'*

*Isaiah 63:16 For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.*

*Matthew 7:11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*

Here is my best illustration, but it's not a happy one.<sup>14</sup> I feel like I can share it in this context, when it actually pales in comparison to the graphic depiction of evil we have here in our passage. I have a recording of a message by a former pastor given to women at a conference. He's discussing with them the consequences of sexual sin – his sexual sin. He tells how he got further and further enmeshed into pornography, getting down to the level where he was arrested and it all came out in the open. But that wasn't the most tragic thing. He and his wife had struggled for years and years. When his wife had gone to other women, they suggested ways to make her more beautiful, more attractive, and thus more desirable to her husband. She reasoned that she had to look like the women he lusted after. So she went for it. And in short order, she was battling anorexia. In the meantime, the man's daughter began cutting herself. And then, a little later, she began trying to commit suicide. Why? What was the connection between his sin and how it affected his family?

It was her daughter that explained it to him. She said once, Dad, I'd sit at a restaurant with you and mom. She was the most beautiful woman in the room, hands down. And you'd never look at her. You were staring at very woman who went by. I knew right then that, if mom couldn't compete for you attention and affection, that I had no chance. I guess I thought that the only way I could get your attention would be in a negative way.

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<sup>13</sup> Wenham, p. 316

<sup>14</sup> From Gene McConnell's message from Campus Crusades Dallas Winter Conference 2004

It wasn't like he was actively hurting his wife and daughter's persons per se (though of course he was in reality without laying a finger on them). He was actively hurting himself, his relationship with his God, and passively hurting the women in his life.

Many of you have grown up with unfaithful, unloving, uncaring, apathetic fathers. I could cite example after example of them. Story after story of cruelty or apathy that stays with people. But you now have a good Father. One who cares for you. The positive characteristics of God are revealed by the negative ones of Jacob. Come now to your Father. He, like the Father running towards the son who ran away, is running toward you full of care and love if you are his child.

***We see the brothers' deceitful overdoing of justice, but Jesus our brother faithfully combines justice and mercy.***

In our last point we look at the wrong actions of the brothers.

Remember that Jacob hears about Dinah – his daughter had been defiled! What should he do? He does nothing. He keeps his peace. He remains silent. This is bad. Hamor comes and speaks father to father with Jacob. The brothers come home and, upon hearing of what had happened, are outraged. They can't believe it. They care about Jacob's honor, Israel's honor, and appear to care about it more than Jacob/Israel himself. They say "such a thing ought not be done."

Hamor starts in with his negotiations. He begins with Shechem's love for Dinah. But then he quickly moves to a broader proposal –the two tribes intermarry at a broader level. He reasons that such an alliance would be good for both, economically, that is. Don't forget that Hamor is bargaining from a position of power unfairly obtained. We don't know if Dinah is being held hostage against her will or if she stays by choice, but her brothers assume the worst. We never get any sort of an apology.

Jacob's sons respond. The narrator tells us that they respond deceitfully, so we're tipped off that what they're about to say is not to be taken at face value. We have to find out later how that will play out. We are reminded why they deceive – because he had defiled their sister Dinah.

Whereas Hamor had stressed the economic advantages to intermarriage, the brothers emphasize the religious impediments to marriage.<sup>15</sup> To marry an uncircumcised man would be "a disgrace," something that would make one the butt of jokes, ridiculed. So "all your males must be circumcised." See Gen. 17:10. So the brothers dismiss the economics and appeal to the religious identity of the Shechemites. If they can comply with the covenant stipulations, then they would be viewed as Israelites and everything would be kosher. If not, watch out.

The brothers may have expected the men to balk at such conditions, but they agree.

Hamor and Shechem then go and present their case to their town. Much of it is similar to what we've just read. However, notice that they fail to mention a few things – like that this is all coming about because of the personal folly and hopeful gain of Shechem. They press the economic advantages quite hard. They fail to mention any of the threats given to them. Calvin: "[Hamor and Shechem] then enumerate other advantages; meanwhile they cunningly conceal the private and real cause of their request. Whence it follows that all these pretexts are fallacious. But it is a very common disease, that men of rank who have great authority, while making all things subservient to their own private ends, feign themselves to be considerate for the common good, and pretend a desire for the public advantage." (2:224)

They tell the people that the brothers are "at peace with us." Yeah, right.

The Shechemites go ahead and all the males get circumcised. The narrator seems rather unimpressed with this. I'm pretty impressed, since it seems quite a ways to go in order to make a treaty. But I think we can also read in that these people weren't genuine in their acceptance of the covenantal sign. They didn't have faith in Jacob's God. Elohim. Yahweh didn't matter to them. They wanted land and this was the best way to get it, however strange and painful it might be.

Simeon and Levi then exact their version of "justice." There is a certain amount of justice here. They care about Jacob and Dinah's honor. But this is in no way equal to the crime committed. A whole town's male population wiped out because of one man's sin?<sup>16</sup> This isn't justice, this is an overzealous treacherous vengeful massacre, this is the literal meaning of "overkill." Two men against a whole city would have been possible under just these circumstances, and we are led to believe that Simeon and Levi fulfilled their plan just as they had envisioned it.

All along we've been hearing, "because their sister had been defiled." Now the brothers are the "defilers."

However egocentric and self-preserving Jacob's protests are, the brothers reply is idealistic. Damn the consequences, they say. Pick up the sword and deal swiftly with wrong! Their words at the end condemn themselves, Shechem, and Jacob, and certainly qualify as a statement of hyperbole.

Not only that, but in doing their malfarious deed, they profaned God's sacrament. They used God's signs and symbols in a way that brought dishonor instead of honor, strife instead of peace, confusion instead of clarity, chaos instead of shalom.

This is not justice. This whole passage, and our country today, sounds a whole lot like the period of the Judges; "in those days Israel had no king, everyone did as he saw fit in his own eyes."

You'll remember that another one of Mike's points from his Leviticus sermon was that our dealing with sin must also be gracious. Persistent, yes. Relentless, yes. But gracious. We don't quickly excommunicate people. We don't quickly cut people out or cut them off. We take time with others. We pray together and reason together. We meet with the elders. We give others the benefit of the doubt. We try to think the best. We don't use church courts to further our agendas. We seek mercy and justice.

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<sup>15</sup> Wenham, p. 313

<sup>16</sup> There is a small part here. The scriptures are filled with one man's actions conferred to a wider group of people. Think of Achan's sin and how his family paid for it. Or the unmerciful servant and how not only he, but his whole family were thrown into the dungeon. Or, how Abraham "bought" out those who would go from Sodom and Gomorrah. Or... of Jesus, whose pure and holy life is conferred to millions upon millions who had nothing to do with it.

I'm afraid that we do little of either. As a nation<sup>17</sup>, as a people, we are often too enamored with the Republican party than with true justice and mercy. We want the economic gain of our foreign policy without getting our hands dirty in working with people. We claim trickle-down economics as our excuse for not helping the poor.

Or we let people off the hook far too easily. We don't pursue truth and reconciliation, we just drop it. That isn't justice or mercy.

Jesus had both, didn't he? We readily think of Jesus as merciful. He had compassion on the people for they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. He said, come to me all you who are tired and I will give rest. He extends his hand to those in pain and agony, healing them with merely a word. He comforts the disciples.

But he is also a powerful judge. He blasts the Pharisees, challenges the disciples and says that he will cast out the goats on the last day. He exacts true justice – filled with mercy but uncompromising in truth. He doesn't ignore sin but deals with it, purposely, with a finality, but also slowly and tenderly at times. Just think of what he could have done if manipulating the signs and seals of the church were in his tool bag. But of course he never resorted to that. He honored them far too much. He is the good brother, who defends us and cares for us, but who also knows the difference between right and wrong. He gets angry, of course, but doesn't merely smite the offenders.

Friends, this is what we need. We need a God who is faithful even though we are faithless, who doesn't get off track in His calling even when we so easily do. We need a Father who loves us even when we are unlovable or when we are apathetic and unconcerned in our love. We need a Brother who cares for us and defends us, but who is gracious and kind in his dealings with us and others.

It's a picture in the negative to be sure. But it is a picture of God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

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<sup>17</sup> My obligatory Fourth of July moment.