

Purged from Idols to Rest in Jesus

Genesis 35:16-20

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Introduction:

Last week in our study of Genesis, we came to chapter 35.

- In this chapter, we seem to have the winding up of a generation as the stage is set for a new generation to emerge.
 - Isaac has been the old patriarch who has been in the foreground, and Jacob has been at center stage,
 - But now with Isaac's gathering to his fathers, Jacob will be the patriarchal head and his twelve sons will move to center stage...
 - It is with them as a body that we will see God at work to shape them and to lead them to faith in His promised salvation.
 - It will be a very glorious thing to behold as we will see Joseph as a type of Christ, and Judah taking his place as the one destined to bring forth Christ.
- But first we must see how the groundwork for the next generation is laid with the rounding out of the present one.
 - Last week, we saw how the LORD marvellously prepared Jacob to be the patriarchal head by renewing his spiritual vitality...
 - bringing him at last to fulfill his vow at Bethel.
 - Without this change, his family was in danger of being swallowed up the world, but at God's call, Jacob was able to lead them repentance at the house of God.
 - We saw how he led them to put away their foreign gods and to cleanse themselves from all defilement and come to worship at God's altar.
 - The altar represented their need for Christ crucified to atone for their sins that they might be forgiven.

But there is still more to be done to prepare this family to move into the next generation as the people of God.

- In chapter 35, picking up at verse 16, we see three more things that are done in closing out the former generation and preparing for the new...
 - In short, they include:
 - First, that Jacob must be purged from an idol—that is this week's subject which we find in verses 16-20.
 - Second, in verses 21-26, that Jacob's twelve sons are presented to us as a divided company with Reuben the oldest grasping for power in a very wicked way.
 - Their divisions will get worse, but in the end God will use this to prepare them for the coming Saviour in marvellous ways.
 - Third, in verses 27-29, Isaac will be buried to close out the generation, and we will see Jacob and Esau still at peace...reminding us that God was protecting Jacob's family as they move into the future...

- Remember that Esau had once resolved that he would kill Jacob when their father died.

That is what lies ahead for us.

- For our scripture reading, I will read the whole section beginning in Genesis 35, verse 16 and reading to the end of the chapter,
 - although our focus this week will be only on verses 16-20.

Please give me your attention as I read to you from Genesis 35 beginning in v.16.

- This is the Word of God.

Gen 35:16-29: 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; but his father called him Benjamin. 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. 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. 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.

May the LORD bless the reading of His holy Word.

As we saw last week, God had done great things in Jacob’s life!

- Jacob had led his family to the house God (Bethel),
 - and by his insistence, they had put away their foreign gods (images of departed ancestors that they prayed to) and cleansed themselves from defilement.
- But there was more idolatry that needed to be purged—idolatry of a more subtle kind.
 - It was idolatry in Jacob himself, and some in Rachel as well.
 - And today we are going to see how the Lord purges them from it.
- And in looking at this, we are, of course, not just looking at it as an interesting (or perhaps not so interesting) history lesson about people that lived a long time ago.
 - We are looking at it to learn about how God works in His people to purge them from their idols,
 - and especially that we might see how He works in us to purge us from our idols.
 - And we want to see this so that we might realise how important it is for us to deal with the idols in our life before the LORD does.

We will look at this under two headings...

- First, that God is faithful to purge us from idolatry.

- Secondly, that He does this that we might more fully rest in Christ.

So let's get on with our first point...that...

I. God is faithful to purge us (as His people) from idolatry.

A. Have you ever noticed how trouble often comes *after* you repent and are restored to God?

- Oh, I know—it comes before as well!
- 1. But we have a tendency to think that all will be well when we come back to God:
 - “Now it will be smooth sailing for me—I have come back to the Lord and I am trusting Him to bless me—and I know He will.
 - Already, I have so much joy and peace.”
- 2. But you see what happens to Jacob on the heels of his spiritual renewal...
 - a. His beloved wife Rachel goes into hard labour—and dies giving birth to Jacob's twelfth son.
 - Here the couple was looking forward to the birth of Rachel's second son, and suddenly there is this extremely difficult labour,
 - and now she is dead—she is taken away from Jacob.
 - b. What a difficult time this must have been for him!
 - He dearly loved this woman!
 - You remember how he laboured for seven years to have her,
 - and how the scripture said that it seemed a very short time for him because of the great love he had for her.
 - And how the pain of her parting lingered with Jacob—
 - Years later, when he is on his deathbed, he remembers it so clearly and passionately: **Gen 48:7: But as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).**

B. Why does the LORD so often send affliction at such times—in times when we have come back to Him?

- 1. There are a number of reasons.
 - a. Scripture teaches us that He sometimes sends them to test us.
 - Often testing comes to see if we really meant business when we said that we returned to Him—how serious is your commitment?
 - You set out to walk with Christ and maybe your own mother condemns you for it—or your friends reject you because you do not get drunk with them—or maybe your job is threatened because you refuse to lie.
 - Will you turn back from following the Lord because of these things?
 - b. This also gives us an opportunity to show our love for the Lord to others.
 - I remember quite well when I was converted on a secular university campus.
 - My friends were all watching me to see if it was for real.
 - I remember them telling me that over the summer, I would go back to my old ways—and at the end of the summer they asked me if I had.

- Sometimes such people will even put us to the test through persecution or temptation...
 - And in all this, we are able to show them that our love for the Lord is real.
 - c. The Bible also tells us that the LORD sends affliction to teach us patience...
 - We have to learn to keep on serving Him without murmuring—
 - We grow in patience when we have many sorrows.
 - We become more patient through exercise.
 - James says that patience in affliction does a “perfect work” in us so that we become “complete, lacking nothing (Jam 1:4).”
 - d. And yet another purpose of affliction is to strengthen our hope of heaven.
 - When trouble comes, it makes us yearn more for our inheritance—
 - it causes us to delight in the hope of the resurrection and of the lifting of the curse and of our coming deliverance from our enemies.
 - To build up our hope all the more in suffering,
 - the Lord even promises to give us a greater reward in heaven when we are persecuted or when we bear affliction patiently.
2. One thing you need to remember when affliction comes is that you asked for it!
- You asked for it when you returned to the LORD to serve Him faithfully.
 - a. Now you will say to me—“What do you mean? I did not ask for affliction! I asked Him to take affliction away!”
 - But you did ask for it!
 - You asked for it when you asked Him to help you grow and to become more holy!
 - His answer, very often, is to send you affliction.
 - We want Him to zap us with instant holiness, but instead He sends trials, and James says we should count it all joy when they come because they work in us—to make us whole.
 - b. When we ask God for wisdom, James says that we should ask in faith... doubting nothing!
 - In other words, you need to see that God is working when a load trouble comes.
 - You wanted the wisdom without the trouble, but that is not how wisdom comes!
 - Don’t doubt God when you have asked for it!
3. But there another reason the Lord sends affliction to us that I have not mentioned.
- a. He sends it to purge sin from our lives.
 - You know what it means to purge something—it means that it is removed from you—sometimes by violent measures.
 - b. The Bible often speaks about God chastening us—sending affliction into our lives to purge us from our sin.

- We should not automatically suppose that this is always the reason affliction comes to us—
 - but we should not err in the other direction and automatically assume that it is *not* the reason He sends it to us.
 - Hebrews 12:6 says: **For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.**
 - And Deuteronomy 8:5 says, **“You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you.”**
- c. Sometimes we have idols in our lives that we are holding on to, and the affliction God sends is to take the idol away from us!
- I know a man who was a lover of money (and he was making a lot and had plans to make more and retire early) but he lost it in failed investments.
- 1) We are familiar with the kind of idols that Jacob’s family disposed of before they went to Bethel—images of saints that are served and trusted in...
 - But an idol can be anything that we put in the place of God.
 - *Covetousness* is idolatry according to the scriptures.
 - 2) John Calvin once pointed out that the fallen human heart is an idol factory.
 - As sinners, we are constantly coming up with idols to live for—idols to sacrifice everything for that we might have them.
 - We can make people into idols, or success, or leisure, or drugs, or money, or food, or peace and safety, or even morality.
 - An idol is something you put at the centre of your life and live for...
 - You can be in bondage to it and wish for escape...or you could be delighted with it...but in either case...
 - Everything else has to give place to the idol—including God Himself.
 - We think God is there to give us the idol rather than to be the One who is leading us and whom we are following.
 - 3) Do you understand what I mean by that?
 - We are supposed to be subject to God, we are supposed to follow Jesus as Lord, but when we have an idol, we follow the idol and serve it.
 - I think it will help you to see this better if we look at Jacob and Rachel’s idols.
- C. It seems pretty clear that both Jacob and Rachel had idols that God faithfully purges them from.
1. For Jacob, it was Rachel herself that was an idol to him.
 - a. We have seen this all along the way...
 - 1) Remember how he was immediately taken with her and did not ask God to guide him and give him wisdom and discernment about her?
 - He did not want to consult with God because he wanted her, regardless of what God might say about it.
 - Have you ever been like that?
 - You don’t want to know what God says because your heart is fixed on something and you feel that you must have it.

- And this becomes even more clear when we look at the second evidence of Jacob's idolatry
- 2) And remember how he did not reject Leah when Laban tricked him and gave Leah to him instead of Rachel?
 - He should either have refused to take Leah even if that meant that Laban would have refused to give him Rachel...
 - Or he should have accepted Leah as his wife and not taken Rachel as a second wife.
 - He did not do either of these because he wanted Rachel so much.
 - It is a clear sign of idolatry when you are willing to set aside God's commandments so that you can have your idol!
 - If you cheat in order to keep a job or get a promotion...
 - If you break the Sabbath so you can win a gold medal...or just make the team!
 - If you join in the telling of dirty jokes so you won't be rejected...
 - You get the point...
 - What else did Jacob do that shows that Rachel was an idol to him?
- 3) Well you remember that he showed extreme favouritism to Rachel and her children and treated his other wives and children with contempt.
 - And sadly Jacob is not purged of this even when Rachel is taken away from him.
 - As we will see, he continues to keep Rachel's children as idols— Joseph until God takes him away,
 - And Benjamin until he is forced to surrender him—
 - All that we will see...
 - But this favouritism shows that Rachel is in idol...
 - When you have an idol, you will withhold love and affection from those to whom it is due because of the idol...
 - For example, if you love money, you will neglect your wife and children in the pursuit of money—
 - and you will be irritable toward them as those who are in your way rather than loving them.
 - If your idol is booze or porn, the idol will suck up all of your affection—it will swallow up your soul.
 - It will take away your love for God and your love for others.
 - 4) A fourth thing that indicates that Rachel is an idol is the way Jacob indulged her...
 - When she gave him her maidservant as a wife, he went along with it—so as not to displease her?
 - When he finally called for his family to give up their idols, was Rachel among those who were using them?
 - If you indulge those who are under your authority and let them break God's law without confronting them, you have made an idol of them...

- Or perhaps an idol of peace (not wanting to have the trouble of dealing with it) or of your hobby (you are just not interested in dealing with your family because your hobby has your heart)...
- b. So you see that Jacob had made an idol out of Rachel.
- But God, in faithfulness, purged her away from him...
 - It was a very painful thing—but it was a necessary thing.
 - God will not tolerate idols in the lives of His people.
 - If you are not one of His people, He may very well let you keep your idol until the day you die, and then you will have judgement without mercy...
 - but if you are one of His people, He will purge you in faithfulness.
- But I told you that Rachel also had an idol that she had to be purged of...
- What have we seen Rachel make an idol of?
2. Rachel had made an idol of having children!
- a. Remember how she had entered into a competition with Leah to see who could have the most children?
- When she could not conceive herself, she is the one who started the whole thing with giving Jacob her maidservant, Bilhah.
 - As we saw with Jacob, you have an idol when you are willing to break God’s law that you might have your idol!
- b. And not only that, but do you remember what she said to Jacob when she could not bear a child?
- There is a great irony here in our text about this...
 - She had said (this is in Gen 30 ver.1) to Jacob, **“Give me children or I die!”**
 - God later gave her a child—and she did praise Him—we may indeed thank God for our idols...but she wanted another son...not just a child, but children!
 - And now, in our text we have this irony that the woman who said “give me children or I die,” is given children and dies!
 - She dies having her second son!
- c. This is God’s faithfulness to purge her from her idolatry!
- God will at times take the lives of His people to deliver them from their idolatry, and that is what He seems to do here.
 - Paul speaks of this as something God did to some of the believers at Corinth...he tells them that some of them have died because of their conduct at the Lord’s Supper:
 - **In 1 Cor 11:30-32, he says: For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep [the death of a believer is called “sleep” in the New Testament]. ³¹ For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.**
 - Do you see the reason they are chastened with death?

- It is so that they will not be condemned with the world!
 - It is in mercy to purge them from their sin or their idolatry.
 - Never again would Rachel make an idol of her children!
3. Is it not a great mercy of our Lord to purge us from our idols?
- a. What has He taken from you that you had made an idol of?
 - Are you able to thank Him for it?
 - It is extremely painful—and of course you ought to be pained when your spouse dies—whether he or she was an idol or not...
 - but rejoice when God takes away your idol.
 - I can definitely think of something the LORD took away from me.
 - Can you?
 - b. But here is a harder question for you—
 - Is there some idol in your life that *needs* to be purged from you?
 - You won't want to admit it, of course, but you need to!
 - Paul tells us in Corinthians that if we will judge ourselves, we will not be judged!
 - If you have some idol—some silly idol that you are holding on to like a little child grasping a forbidden object in his fat little hand—
 - then let it go—repent and be free of it!
 - If it is something lawful in itself (like a spouse or a child), then learn to rejoice in it as God's gift,
 - and if it is something you can't get, learn to rejoice that God has withheld it from you to keep you from idolatry...
 - c. Be sure that our loving heavenly Father will not hesitate to take us through very deep waters if that is what it takes to purge us from our idols!

TRANS> But why does He purge idols from us?

- This is the second thing I want to look at with you from our passage today...

II. The LORD purges idols from us so that we might rest in His Son, our Saviour.

A. This is beautifully seen with Jacob here in our text!

- There is an indication that he repents and turns to Christ his only hope at Rachel's death.
 - How so?
1. Well, in that in her painful struggle to bring forth her son, Rachel names him Ben-Oni.
 - This name means “son of sorrow,” or “son of affliction.”
 - We trust that for Rachel, this is a godly sorrow that leads to true repentance.
 - You can imagine if she was brought to glory, to the company of Abraham and Noah and the saints that had gone before...
 - how different her perspective would have been—she would realise how foolish she had been to hold on to her idols.

- Perhaps she saw that even as she was departing this world in her deep sorrow...
 - But how great her joy to experience complete forgiveness and the clarity of pure light and sweet holiness before the living God.
2. But this name that she gave to her son would not do for Jacob.
- a. The name Ben-Oni would have meant that with this son Jacob was constantly looking back to this day with sorrow.
 - It would have meant that he was stuck in his loss and was not moving forward in hope.
 - By God's grace, Jacob knew that this would not do!
 - He was appointed, by God's grace, to bring forth the kingdom of God!
 - It would not do for him to be stuck in the past and in what he had lost.
 - He must look to what lies ahead—to what God had promised!
 - b. And so it is for you...
 - It is not for you to fixate on what you have lost and never move forward.
 - It is for you to look to God's promise, what you are to be—what He has said that He will do—
 - With Paul, you need to say, **Phil 3:13-14: forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**
- That is what Jacob does here...he is changing!
3. And so Jacob renames his son—he is not Ben-Oni—he is Benjamin!
- Verse 18 says: **And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin.**
- a. This name means *son of the right hand*.
 - He is not the son of sorrow, but the son of strength and blessing...
 - The right hand is the place of power, strength, and joy.
 - He is now the completion of Jacob's house, the twelfth son completing the twelve tribes of Israel.
 - b. Jacob, you see, refuses to look at this as the end, but as a new beginning.
 - He has faith in his sorrow and in his tears to see that God is at work...
 - that God who had so faithfully worked in his life was still at work even now in and by means of this tragedy...
 - He sees that His work would still go on and that Benjamin would be a part of that great work that God had promised...
 - the work of bringing in the kingdom of righteousness to this fallen world that he and his house and the nations might be saved!
 - c. Jacob also expresses his hope in burying the body of Rachel.

- Her soul had departed to be gathered with her people, but we are told that Jacob buries her body.
 - This care of the body was done in hope of the resurrection—in faith that the body would be raised up again.
 - He buries her and puts up a monument, believing that she will yet inherit the land that God has promised to his household.
 - How careful the patriarchs were to be buried in that particular land that God had promised to them to express their hope.
 - Later on when Jacob is in Egypt, he will insist that Joseph bury him in the land that he is yet to inherit...
 - And Joseph, though buried in Egypt will make the sons of Israel swear (Gen 50:25) that they will bring his bones to Canaan—to the land that he too is yet to inherit.
- Burial is the way of the faithful from ancient times...
 - Christians do not burn the body—that is a pagan rite—but we bury the body in hope that we will stand again upon the earth...
 - in a resurrected body that will never again see death.
 - This was Jacob's hope!

TRANS> What a great work the LORD had done in this man!

- B. And you—you in your affliction...you must learn to look to the Lord in hope to make Ben-Oni (the son of affliction) Benjamin (the son of the right hand)!
1. Like Jacob, you will have many sorrows and afflictions that you will have to bear in this world...
 - But like Jacob, you must learn to look to God to use them all to bring about blessing and life in you!
 - When trouble comes, lift up your eyes to the LORD and watch Him work!
 - Pour out your prayers in hope that Ben-Oni will be Benjamin!
 2. What a difference it will make in your life to have such hope!
 - God has promised to work in us as His people.
 - He promises to send sorrow and affliction into our lives to accomplish His gracious work in us.
 - Go through your life and through your sorrows trusting that He *is* at work!
 - I do not know what He may bring to you or even what you may be going through now...
 - but I know that if you are His child, He is busy preparing you for glory—for your glorious inheritance...
 - And that preparation will include crosses and losses—and then a glorious resurrection in eternal glory.
 - As Paul said in 2 Cor 4:16-17: **Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.** ¹⁷ **For our light affliction, which is but for a**

moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory...

- Make it your constant hope that God is at work in all your sorrows and in all your joys too to bring forth His glorious kingdom.

C. And ultimately, I want you to consider that Jesus Himself is Ben-Oni who becomes Benjamin!

1. He went to the cross as the Son of sorrow and affliction,
 - that He might be raised again as the Son of the right hand—to sit at God's right hand in glory!
 - In Him, the stump of Jesse that was cut down to the ground became the tree of life for all nations!
 - In Him, the rejected stone became the chief cornerstone on which the whole church is built.
 - In Him, the lamb that was slain became the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world—the reigning Saviour of all!
 - The rejected crucified Son of sorrow has become the Son of God's right hand to reign forever and ever until all His enemies are made His footstool.
2. Your salvation is found by trusting in Him—the Son of sorrow who is also the Son of God's right hand!
 - He was crucified to take away our sin—
 - His sorrow was to purge our sin and our guilt that we might be forgiven and healed!
 - And He was raised for our justification—
 - To declare that we are all accepted through His offering on the cross that we might reign with Him in glory.
 - In all your affliction, turn your eyes to Him in hope—
 - That Ben-Oni will become Benjamin...
 - That after your suffering in Christ will lead to reigning with Him forever.
3. Look to the LORD, and He will purge you from your idols!
 - Yes Lord—
 - Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean!
 - Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow!

Conclusion: Our gracious Lord purges us from idols so that we might rest in Christ!