

Sermon: "Cleansing Us Entirely of All Our Sin"
Texts: Gen. 34:18-31; John 3:15 and 1 Tim. 6:1-2
June 14, 2020

After Shechem raped Dinah, she was not allowed to return home. Today we would say she was kept as a sex slave. She was not a prostitute which makes sex a transaction! Or a porn artist, merchandizing lewdness and exposure. Her situation was more like that of Kayla Mueller, who was kidnapped/taken captive, compelled to marry and then sexually abused by ISIS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (in 2015). I am not asserting a moral equivalence between Shechem and al-Baghdadi only a parallel of circumstance for Dinah and Kayla. And we have the Epstein/Giselle debacle which plays into sex trafficking and the exploitation of young women on Epstein's "Orgy Island." Epstein hosted a Disneyland for the debauched and many of the rich and powerful were implicated in sex slavery, and rape. While on top of the heap for horrific, these transgressive situations are far from uncommon. The behaviors of the perpetrators are crude, crass, despicable and vile but they put us in touch with the defilement, the dishonoring and the filthy effects of sex trafficking.

Slavery, in all its varied venues has, because human beings are involved, always had this seamy side. And we needn't dwell on that having once established the bridge between the sinfulness of Shechem's actions (Gen. 34) and the "defilement" that resulted then and continues to apply in our present day. Rape slimes as sin defiles. Who's responsible for slavery? Is it those who sold others as slaves? Is it those who brokered the process (slave traders and auctioneers?) who then profited off the practice? Or is it those who bought you at the slave market (for the going rate)? Or, all of the above? People of all races were involved in the slave trade (an African example: blacks capturing blacks (tribal warfare) and selling "war captives" as slaves to Arabs who sold them to each other, and to other "owners" across all ethnic/racial lines worldwide, including European whites—which is what all white Americans were prior to independence!).

In short, history demands that slavery be viewed as a problem for the human race—there is only one race—and it cannot legitimately be reduced to a black on white matter, especially as originated four hundred and one years ago—regardless of what the proponents of the 1619 project espouse! Besides reverse racism is racism still. From the beginning of America, slavery was abhorrent to many people of conscience! And the line between slaves and indentured servants was ever ill-defined and squishy. However, by way of introduction, I have two things I want to assert from a Christian perspective: a. when it comes to godliness slavery is *irrelevant*; and b. slavery is not the *ultimate* cause of inequalities, or social injustice racially defined.

Christian slaves were a significant demographic in the early church, particularly the Gentile church. This means that we, the church, have had a long history of confronting the issues surrounding the institution of slavery. *This engagement predates the American experiment by some fifteen hundred years!* So it is not American, it is not white, and there was little direct European engagement (Germans practiced slavery, Native Americans practiced slavery (see Mayans and the Iroquois Nations) and Greeks even had Anglo-Saxon slaves) meaning slavery involved non-black people groups). Because slavery definitely predates even the emergence of modern Europe, sloppy generalizations should be taken with a grain of salt. *Slavery was the common fate of war captives in the regional wars of Asia, Africa and the Near East/Mediterranean basin regions.* The

Hebrews had laws prohibiting life-long bondage of their own people while all of this traffic in human beings was transpiring—some two to three thousand years ago. These are some of the facts which break the “four hundred and one years narrative” (as is espoused in the 1619 history curriculum) pushed politically in our country! Furthermore, 1 Timothy 6:1-2 has some arresting things to say about “slavery.” And one of the most astonishing is that slavery is irrelevant to one’s salvation—that one’s social and economic standing or racial origins is no bar to being Christian and growth in holiness, or godliness is not contingent on whether one is slave, or free. That insight, in itself, is very liberating—Christians weren’t ignorant about slavery. However, they knew that when it comes to being Christian, slavery is irrelevant!

Everyone, without exception, needs redemption from the bondage of sin—all need to be saved regardless of race. Besides, our bondage to sin is a far deeper *bondage* than any human institution any culture can devise/impose.

If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:36)

Here’s what, by way of contrast, is **essential** to being Christian: ***realizing the godliness which comes from the power of the blood of Jesus*** which “**cleanses all of us, from all our sin.**” Godliness is emancipation indeed. *A slave can be godly. A master can be godly, friends*—there is no disqualifying distinction in slavery. Godliness is the goal.

Let’s see if we can unpack this a little bit because it has *some considerable bearing* on the “sex crimes and punishments” (sins) involved/detailed in Genesis 34. So, picture yourself going to the dry cleaners. You bring your soiled, stained and filthy clothes and pay for them to be cleansed. The blood of Jesus acts like the cleaning agents involved in dry cleaning! When you go to pick your clothing up, and you inspect the work, hopefully, you receive them back, fresh, clean and spotless—they feel and smell almost “good as new.” Proper care of suits, business attire, delicates and woollens entails regular, periodic cleaning! In like manner, the blood of Jesus, applied by faith, purges, cleanses and purifies the inner man—heart, mind, body and soul! *All of us entirely cleansed of all our sin. Sadly, sin both defiles and is defiling*—thus the sexual sin of Shechem both defiled him and defiled Dinah! He filthied her. Every known culture held that rape was reprehensible/morally wrong—even in the pre-Jewish/pre-Christian epoch we are reading about! Therefore, just as our clothes need to be taken to the cleaners, so do we also need to be taken to the cleaners! An essential problem in the narrative is that neither Shechem’s attempt to make reparation, even to the point of marrying Dinah, did not address the issue of sin. It brought no atonement, occasioned no forgiveness and yielded no reconciliation! Furthermore, the retaliatory actions of Dinah’s brothers, added sin to sin—***violence is no remedy for violence***. The bridge is our universal need for salvation—for rescue, redemption and emancipation!

We have an actual interest, according to Paul and John, in the blood of Jesus! The Old Testament saints had no recourse to Jesus’ blood—our great difference and advantage! *They had other means to apply—they didn’t.* No one apologizes to God or to his fellowman—no one seeks forgiveness. That quest could be pursued with God—it wasn’t. If Jacob offered “sin offerings” (which were known and practiced!) it is not recorded! And he certainly didn’t instruct either Shechem, or his sons in the matter as necessary. *There is a crying need for godliness in Genesis 34; it doesn’t happen.* Slavery is irrelevant.

Our interest, however, embraces both the sacrifice, and the powerful cleansing effect of the blood.

I think of the characters involved in the narrative of Genesis 34: male and female, and realize with me that what each one of them needed was cleansing, purification¹ . . . a trip to the soul cleaners. And yes, this spiritual cleansing is also freeing: it originates **from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, and ruler of kings on earth. O him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.** (Rev. 1:5-6) When the promises of God are so succinctly set forth, my heart wants to exult in the goodness and mercies of God! Not only has Jesus freed us **from our sins**, justifying us(!), he has also appointed and anointed us, **priests to his God and Father**—purified, cleansed and sanctified for those very purposes, eternal promises. “Freed us” in Old Testament terms means God has removed the filthy garments (as with the high priest Joshua in Zechariah 3), or the guilt and shame slime paste, that filth sin has plastered all over us! **See I have removed your iniquity**². (Zechariah 3:4) It is, from the beginning, as if sin performs a facial on sinners—only the purpose is not purification and cleansing, but defacing and filthying us. Satan seeks to get at God by dehumanizing, defacing/*filthying* us and destroying us.

How does this “spiritual cleansing” happen? “The Holy Spirit communicates the purifying virtue of the blood into us (body, mind, soul, spirit and conscience!) in our entirety (of being).” (J. Owen) What is required *for godliness* is atonement plus sanctification, purging plus purification. So **by faith we receive** (what is communicated) the purifying virtues of Jesus’ blood as well as the Christ presence (power, influence)—which we describe “as Christ living in me.” The blood of Jesus applied to all four corners (horns?) of us—as contrasted with the ark of the covenant and mercy seat—anointing us continuously; not an it, us, and not a symbol of divine presence! Not a symbolic act conveying some religious truth, but the actual effecting of a person, a transformation.

Perhaps you remember the woman with an issue of blood (for twelve years, costing her all her wealth, with no results) in Luke 8:43-48. When she, by faith, touched the hem of his garment (!) was healed. **Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me.**” (v.46) That’s the power, cleansing virtue, or strength that Christ provides and I am trying to describe to you. She **declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed.** (v.47) So, let us seek to touch and cling to him in order to obtain a continuing healing, and cleansing from him as **he is the vine and we the branches**. (John 15:5) This interaction in an ongoing manner is necessitated by two things:

- a, by the setting of this world where we are situated (structural sin)
- b. and by our fallen nature (spiritual bondage)

In Sickness Unto Death, Soren Kierkegaard identifies that sickness as despair. I would suggest better that “sin is the sickness unto death” which ties it in, more biblically, with

¹ In shepherding practices, sheep are drenched, or dipped to rid them of parasites and disease.

² This divine prerogative is echoed in various places. Isaiah 6:7 says “**Behold this** (the coal removed with tongs from the altar) **has touched your lips, your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.**” God has been dealing with sin his own way from forever. He was in Jesus **atoning for our sins** on our behalf!

the verse **The wages of sin are death.** (Romans 6:23). Our reaction(despair) to sin is secondary to the reality of sin's ravages. This is ultimate.

By faith we receive life and growth from Christ. By faith, the lusts and corruptions which surround us, and seek to envelop and absorb us, are addressed by the Holy Spirit and so managed, mortified, *rebuked*, subdued, diverted, defeated, *revoked*, and, eventually, exterminated from within. This is everyman's battle. Because we observe this: that all defilements spring from the remainder of sin and lust operating within us! I found an illustration of this in the experience of a friend who experienced the injury of a catfish spine in her foot. All of that spine had to be removed because any part of it remaining worked poisoning, infection and painful corruption. She had to endure three operations to achieve the object of full excision! Faith seeks remedy for sin by subduing it through the application of ointments and treatment such as transfusions, and antibiotics. And these come by fresh applications and supplies of the Spirit and grace—both of which come from Jesus Christ, **The sting of sin is much worse than a poisonous catfish spine!** Faith enlists two main “motives” so as to stir up the diligence to prevent further defilements. They are firstly participation in the excellent or, surpassing promises (universal purity and holiness (2 Cor. 7:1). And, secondly, they are anticipations of the full, and future enjoyments of God (eternal fellowship: Heb.12:14) which are reserved to the just and the justified.

The real dilemma in Genesis 34 is this: the rape of Dinah defiles both her and Shechem. Unfortunately, the defilement of Dinah is never addressed! Shechem is never cleansed from the defiling sin—he never admits sin, nor asks for forgiveness. It appears that he senses the wrongness of his actions—he tries reparation, he offers marriage, dowry and gift as compensation. Then he is murdered.

Was there no hope, no other recourse? How about a sin offering? How about making atonement for his sin and getting right with God—was there no way forward? His actions may betray guilt, shame and remorse but no confession and no repentance. He never repents of taking what he sees and likes—he stole, looted and pillaged Dinah. He took by force what was hers to give and did not seek to give her back her honor, her self-respect, due consideration *by asking forgiveness of God and of her*. Again, no apologies even.

Now Jacob knew about atonement; he actively sought to appease Esau but he didn't ask for forgiveness and he didn't even purify himself from his sinful past! He never said, “Please forgive me for my theft, my trickery, and my deception.” Neither from God, nor from Esau! Jacob said nothing, did nothing. And his sons took vengeance in lieu of godly counsel! No one fasted, no one prayed, no one asked God: “What shall we do?” No one. The sons didn't ask and their father did not offer. They also do not console Dinah, by simply removing her from Shechem's house in the midst of slaughter and a burning city!

Jacob does say, **You have made me a stench.** He does not say, “You have added to the stench that I had already made.” *I needed to repent of planning and scheming, of “handling things” on a merely human level and I did not do so*³. I failed to lead you,

³ We can capitulate to sin by desensitization, by rationalizing it, and by re-norming the culture—We chose to affirm wickedness and validate it by acceptance.

sons, so you took the reins and now, I turn and blame you? Why didn't we discuss with Hamor and Shechem, amongst ourselves, "What's to be done about this rape?"

How about liberating her?

How about owning one's own base behavior—confessing and repenting of rape?

If all the men of Shechem were "rapists," and not one of them was innocent, does even that justify pretense, betrayal and murdering them? Do we conclude that intermarriage was forbidden and therefore this is okay? Did God command this calamity? Or was it a plot of the making of Jacob's sons?

We are so much more fortunate, blessed even, than were these pre-Christian men and women. Dinah needed cleansing because she did not sin against Shechem. The whole Dinah business is shabby. But it reminds us of what is essential to being Christian: ***realizing the godliness which comes from the power of the blood of Jesus*** which "***cleanses all of us, from all our sin.***" Realizing godliness by regular repenting and renewing, by application of the blood where it matters most. Whether we are slave or free is irrelevant to godliness. Sin, not social standing, or legal status is the real source of evil—inequity, injustice, immorality all issue from the cesspool of sin!

We have the spiritual resources and the means, however, to do this *cleansing* business better. The question is, will we? Doing nothing is not a viable option. Asking God what we are to do about sin in us, among sounds like an excellent option—if by our life and actions, we do not already know what to do. But, we do know, the Word instructs us.

What I learn from Genesis 34 is that a lot of unnecessary troubles flow from acting on our own, from not submitting to the offer of Christ, from not obeying our Father in heaven. Let his will be done through us! After repenting comes relenting. Relenting? Yes, relinquishing our control to pursue sweet obedience.

Amen.