



The Sermon

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Genesis 34:1-31

"Our God is Bigger Than Our Mistakes"

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TRANSCRIPT

Could you open your Bibles, please, to Genesis chapter 34, Genesis chapter 34. I want to say, first of all, a big thank you to the elders here in the church. It's been really special this summer. We were given a little bit of extra time off over the summer kind of vacation period. We've been in the church there in Ireland seven years, and they gave this little extra break just to kind of recharge. And the elders here asked if I would come and speak, and they were very gracious to allow me to come several times to speak, and I've really enjoyed it. It's good to get to rest, but it's good to get to come and to see God at work. And this has been a really sweet time. God's allowed in His grace me to come probably a couple of times each year since you began; and because of that and these subsequent years, see how He has blessed and grown very obviously numerically. But this particular couple of months we've been able to taste something of how the church has grown spiritually in maturity.

Now you people have been very, very good to us, praying for us. We've had a number of messages and emails, just people in the church who've reached out to let us know they've been praying for our family situation with my sister-in-law's illness, and just praying even for our church in Ireland, and praying for us as a family; and we really do feel blessed. It's going to be hard to not be here for a while because we've grown to love and to care for you, and to feel the love and the care that you have shown towards us; and I think that's the way it's meant to be. Now we're part of the family of God, and it's lovely whenever we get to rub shoulders with each other, even for a few brief moments, and get reminded that we are eternally connected, and eternally connected because Jesus Christ is our Lord and our Savior, and we love Him, and we worship Him.

I want us to this morning come to Genesis chapter 34. We need to remember the man who we've been focusing on over the last number of weeks: this man Jacob. He's, at this point, re-entered the Promised Land. He's now at peace with his notorious twin Esau. God has replenished his herds after he gives so much away. He has built an altar and he's worshiping God. In fact, when he names the altar he calls it after the God who is the God of struggling men and women – a real testimony to the journey that Jacob has gone on. He's been a man who has struggled; but now he has struggled with God, and God has prevailed. God has made Himself, insisted on making Himself clearly known to Jacob. And so what you have here really is a true rags to riches story, both in how God blessed him materially, but far more about how God blessed him spiritually. You have a scoundrel who very much becomes a saint, and he is still growing and he has still much to learn, but he's been dramatically transformed through God's work and his life.

One of the older saints here the last time I spoke reminded me of that first in Scripture, "Jacob have I loved." Now that's God's testimony to this whole story: "Jacob have I loved." And so there's a danger sometimes when we come to these characters in the Old Testament or New Testament, these particularly strong personalities like Jacob that we focus on them. But actually when we're looking at this story of Jacob we should see something of the nature of God. And I think as we think, especially in chapter 34, more about Jacob, we should be reminded that God loved Jacob. So that's because God's love is a gracious love, where we're going to see more of the weeds that past life and decisions brought at this point for Jacob.

But God is still persistent. God is still working. God is still gracious and loving towards this man. And as we think about that, we should remember the nature of our God. Our God is a God of gracious love, and that gives us hope. As you sit here this morning, we don't all know each other as deeply as we've got to know Jacob here, but we can assume that all of us have some level of works, some level of works still to be done in our life, some elements of maybe even past sins, past mistakes that we made or bad choices that we made that are still having repercussions on our life here and now. What is our hope? Well, it's the God who is love, the God who shows gracious love.

Jacob's story really is a story of redemption; and yet as we approach chapter 34 we need to remember that that transformative work – and it was truly transformational – that that work that fostered a God-dependent limp in

this man, it's one that has happened very recently, two chapters before. Chapter 32, the heel-grabber Jacob. He was once out for number one, but he's been gloriously transformed through God's work in his life recently.

But what about his parenting all those other years? In fact, his kids now are largely grown up, they're largely independent. Now he has been dramatically transformed through meeting with God a couple of chapters before. But what about the rest of the family? For the majority of their life they grew up with, well, the scoundrel of their father. And now there is a new dad at home, and that is a wonderful thing. But for most of their childhood, their adolescence, even their early adulthood, they didn't have a man who had wrestled with God at home at that point. And so chapter 34 helps us to think a little bit more about them and the life that has been created and fostered here.

So let me read to you. In fact, let me go back into chapter 33 and read from verse 18, just the end of the chapter before, just to remind us of where we are, and let's read the chapter, we'll pray and then delve into the text. I want to read from chapter 33, verse 18.

It says, "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. And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for a hundred pieces of money the piece of land on which he pitched his tent. There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.

"Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land. 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. And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, 'Get me this girl for my wife.'

"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. And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. 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.

"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. Make marriages with us. Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. You shall dwell with us, and the land shall be open to you. Dwell and trade in it, and get property in it.' 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. 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.'

"The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah. 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. Only on this condition will we agree with you - that you will become as we are by every male among you being circumcised. 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. But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter, and we will be gone.'

"Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem. 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. So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying, '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. 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. Will not their livestock, their property and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us.' 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 the city.

"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. They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went away. The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister. They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field. All their

wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and plundered.

"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.' But they said, 'Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?'" Let's pray.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we recognize that Your Word is a holy word, and we recognize, Lord, that from it You speak. We thank You that we can get to know You better from this text, and to know Your ways more clearly; and also, Lord, to be confronted with the sinfulness of our own hearts. We pray and ask that you would graciously work amongst us. In deed, Lord, we pray especially for those who maybe have already experienced some of the hardest aspects of our fallen world, some of the hurt of, the abuse of sexual mistreatment, or some of the issues that this text will touch on. And we pray, Lord, that You would lift their gaze up from simply the pain that has come and the hurt that has been caused, and that you would help them to see that You're still gloriously a God who is above it all. Lord, we pray for all of us, and we ask, Lord, that You would help us to see something more of the darkness of our world, indeed Lord, the darkness of our own hearts. But we pray that you would cause us especially to see something of the brightness of Jesus Christ and the hope to be found in him. So help us, we pay; for we need Your help this morning, and we ask it in the name, the glorious name of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen. [End]

Well, this certainly isn't anybody's favorite chapter in scripture. But It's needed today. I think especially today. It's a chapter that helps us to understand the nature of the world that God so loved, the darkness of that world, the corruption and the brokenness, the fact that we today live very much in a fallen world.

Here in chapter 34 there is a teenage who's abused, she is mistreated, and yet the majority of the conversation that goes on after the event. It's pragmatic. It's a conversation really about how everybody can be financially better off if we just turn a blind eye to the sin that was done and we all play happy families. Only the boys seemed horrified. But their horror, rather than prompt a move for true justice, it ends in this spiral of disaster that

climaxes with genocide. This is such a dark chapter and it's meant to remind us that we live in a very dark world.

Now as we said before, God did bring about an amazing change in the life of Jacob. But prior to that, Jacob had been a selfish rogue. His family was secondary. You remember a few chapters before he was allowing his wives to pay one another for bedroom time. He seemed so disengaged from his family. He was the type of man that would rather be out with the herds; he'd rather be at work than to have to deal with all of the issues in the tents, all the issues at home. He set a bad example. You notice the text - I think it's verse 13 - talks about the boys acting deceitfully.

Where do you think they learned that? From the man, the dad who, time and time again the text stresses, acted deceitfully. He was one who had left a legacy of shortcuts, of deceitful decisions, and the result was he had created fallen children living in a fallen world. And now his life has been changed; praise God. But the mess that he had created still grew, still was festering in the tent. The years of neglect were going to have repercussions. And this man, Jacob, he had been successful. He was a good businessman, and he was still wired in a way that was good at making money. In fact, he was wired as one who was good at making money rather than wired as one who was good at making a godly home.

That's the problem with Jacob here in chapter 34. And this chapter really presents a picture, the difficult picture of parenting in a fallen world, and all the pain and the mess that we live amongst. In this chapter all I want to do is point out two big mistakes, and then one glorious note of hope. So two big mistakes, and one glorious note of hope. And here's the first big mistake: "Jacob left his daughter vulnerable in order to pursue a good job. Jacob left his daughter vulnerable in order to pursue a good job."

This sad story of Dinah begins a lot like the story of Lot back in chapter 13. Look at chapter 33, verse 18 again. It says, "And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram, and camped before the city." Now if you have your Bibles, turn back to Genesis chapter 13, and I want you to notice just how similar the language is here in Genesis chapter 13 and verse 12, speaking of Lot going and settling in wicked Sodom. We read chapter 13, verse 12, "Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and

moved his tent as far as Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord."

Jacob had promised God, back in chapter 28, that when he would in years to come return to the land he would head back to Bethel where God had revealed Himself. And when you get to the next chapter to chapter 35, verse 1, the way God speaks seems to indicate that that was the expectation. God expected him to go back to Bethel, he was still meant to get there. But Jacob didn't at first. It got way late here in Shechem. He just happened to camp on the edge of the city, just as Lot had camped on the edge of Sodom.

I think just like Lot, Jacob was attracted by the prospect of Shechem. Shechem was a kind of trade center in this part of Canaan, it was where a lot of the main roads crossed over, and so trade was a big, big thing. It was the Silicon Valley of Canaan. It was a place where you went if you wanted to make a lot of money fast. And Jacob had big herds, and so I think here Jacob has dollar signs in his eyes. He sees the potential. Now I don't think he's stupid here, I think he sets up outside the city on purpose. He knew there was potential to make money, but he also knew the city itself was wicked; and yet, he still set up home there.

Now remember, this is a land where Abraham, Jacob's grandfather, had been told this land and this people are wicked. And ever since that point it had got more wicked. It had regressed and gone further, and it would continue to until ultimately God sends Israel under Joshua to the land to conquest, to take it and seize it. But this is a land of sin, a land of the debauchery, and it's got worse over the years. In fact, all the way through chapter 34 nobody's surprised. You notice that? Nobody is surprised at Shechem's actions. None of the people of Shechem are surprised, they don't think anything of this; this is normal behavior. Hamor talks about it like, "OK, now it's time for an engagement. This is what people do. This is the custom of the city."

And so I think the idea here is that Jacob sees the threats, but he saw the paycheck more, and as a result he builds his home on hades' doorstep, and the obvious happens. Dinah goes wandering, and she's sexually exploited. Jacob made that all too common mistake of setting up his home where he could have his best job, rather than trying to find the best job in order to have a wonderful home. You see the difference? For Jacob the job came first rather than the home. It's such an easy mistake to fall into. And the

problem of that mistake is most often it is felt not primarily by the generation that makes that choice, but the generation that comes up next by the children. This story reminds us, and we need to take note of this, that there is a danger in being close to this world. There is a danger in being close to the world.

Sometimes Christian parents pride themselves on just how normal their kids are, how integrated they are in society. Now I don't want you to misunderstand what I'm saying. There's nothing wrong with football or soccer. There's nothing wrong with music, there's nothing wrong with hobbies in and of themselves. But we do need to remember that out there there is a fallen world, and there is a threat that comes with that.

I've heard some Christians talk about the clubs and all that they send their kids to and talk about them as if it's good and noble because they want their kids to be salt and light in those clubs and those settings. Your kids are called to be salt and light. Christian, you're called to be salt and light. Your kid inherits your genetics, he doesn't inherit your saltiness; that's not the way it works. In fact, Christian parents, you're called to be salt and light, most to the children in your home. Salt preserves, light breaks down the darkness. Your job as a parent is to guard and protect your children from the corruption and the brokenness and the danger of this world. Now I am thankful for sports and clubs. I send and drive every week our kids to swimming, and we have arguments in the car as we go, and piano lessons, and even more arguments about practicing and everything else. And I do believe those things are good, they're worth doing. But we need to be alert that there is a danger that this world has embedded in it.

I heard a story about another older pastor at home, he shared it with me, about a family in the church that came over for dinner, and they were kind of a wee bit flustered when they came to the house. And they all sat down for dinner, and the pastor was about to pray over the meal, and they said, "Would you pray for our daughter tonight. Pray that she'd make good choices. We dropped her off with some friends to go to the club and dance tonight, and we're just so worried about her. Pray she'll make good choices."

And the pastor, he's a little direct; and he looked up and then he said, "Why are we praying for something that's already been done wrong? The bad choice was already made when you dropped her off. Why are we praying



about that?" Friends, this world is dangerous. As Christians we need to be on the alert. There is a danger that comes with being close to this world.

Second thing we're reminded of here is that natural man is often carnal, self-serving, and abusive. This sad story reminds us really about our theology of humanity, of men and women. How are they wired? What is natural man like apart from the grace of God? Well, he's carnal, he's self-serving, and he's abusive. Men and women are not naturally good; that's why we have cops, that's why we have locks on our doors. They are not naturally good, they are sinners, and over time they become more and more base, more and more carnal in their desires.

Shechem raped this girl, and then he fell for her. Does that not sound weird to you? Does that not sound upside-down to you? He abuses her, and then in verse 3 he talks so sweetly to her. But ultimately it's all still fueled by his lust, by his carnal desire. When he first speaks to Jacob and Jacob's sons, he doesn't say, as you would expect, "I did wrong. I'm sorry. Can you forgive me?"

No, he doesn't even think to go there. He goes in and he says, "This could be really profitable for you. You name the price. In fact, you can have a gift as well as the marriage price. Whatever you want, you can have it, guys." In other words, to Shechem, he appeals to the boys – what he imagines anyway – to be the boys' love of money that conquers all, because that's how he's wired. Everything has a price. Every moral can be bought, because natural man is carnal, self-serving, and abusive.

And then we're also reminded here that even the best intention of natural man is twisted to begin with. And this is a bleak picture, isn't it? Even the best intention of natural man is twisted to begin with. Shechem now wants to marry her, but he raped her first. This man is obviously like so many other men in this world. He, in his head, "That's not sin, because now I feel right about it, now I feel love," and it's all been passed over.

But marriage isn't going to sort this guy. If they did get married, then they weren't going to live happily ever after. This was only going to go one way because Shechem's heart is a twisted heart. This would be a father's worst nightmare. Imagine having Shechem turn up on your doorstep asking for your daughter's hand in marriage: "Uh-uh, this is not going to happen." And

what is the result of this whole debacle? Well, don't miss it. Here is a teenage girl in the text who's been abused and left completely defenseless, and in the other room there's a bunch of men debating her future and the fortune it could bring everybody if we just treat her like some sort of show pony that's up for sale.

Friends, our world is dark, and I hope you never experience anything close to what's going on here in chapter 34. But it all resulted because of where Jacob built his home and the freedom he gave to his daughter. This world isn't safe, it's not safe. People joke, don't they about being a mama bear, or the stereotype dad who won't let his daughter date until she's 40. But the reality is, this world is dangerous, and it is full of people who will hurt, who will abuse if they're given a chance to do it. I'm not trying to scare you, but I do want you to see this world is dangerous and it needs to be engaged with thoughtfully.

Just think of something very basic: the Internet in the home. As a pastor of a church I am so surprised the types of issues that come up in homes because of the Internet, parents who just let the Internet exist free range in the house; everybody can have it all of the time - phones and computers and everything else in the bedrooms; and there's no limit to that at all, no restrictions in the house. Friends, that's dangerous. Now you may not know and understand the technology, it's changed so much since you were a teenager, but you need to learn it, parents. You need to think about it. You need to pray about, "How do we manage this?" You need to pray about, "How do we listen and give more freedom as they get older?" but to do it thoughtfully.

And I think even to err on the side of caution. Be slower rather than faster in the freedoms that you give your kids in such a dangerous world. You can't, you can't protect them forever, but you can teach them how to live in a fallen world and how to be alert to the danger that is there. You need to teach them how to fight lions before you let them go and walk amongst the lions. That's what I'm saying. That's what we need. Humanity is more sinful than we want to think about.

Actually, it does remind us of something else, doesn't it? I think the last three times I've been here I've mentioned that verse, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world." Does this not make that statement all the more profound, that God so loved this sort of a world with its mess, with its brokenness,

with its vile? God so loved the world. Jesus Christ came and lived amongst us; no wonder He was familiar with suffering, it was everywhere around Him. He was the one that the Father said, "This is My Son, in whom I am well pleased." He did it right. He was holy, He was perfect in every way. Imagine the contrast as He lived amongst us and amongst our sinfulness; and yet this one with whom the Father was well pleased. "For a bleak, sinful world, the Bible says, "gave His life as a ransom for many." What a contrast.

The second big mistake I want us to see in the text is "Jacob never taught his boys the law of God. Jacob never taught his boys the law of God." This might not be as apparent as the first mistake, but bear with me while I explain myself. When these boys hear news of what has happened to their sister, they are rightly outraged. Look at verse 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."

"He did an outrageous thing." The idea is this can't be thought of as reasonable. This is unbelievable that somebody would think this as normal behavior. They are disgusted. You get that idea reinforced at the very end of the chapter, verse 31: "But they said, 'Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?'" And they aren't swayed by the offer of money and gifts because their sense of right and wrong is bubbling. It's interesting, these boys, before really they are affected by God's grace, they still have a moral compass, they still have a strong sense of wrong; and yet God has graciously given a conscience to humanity. Humanity is aware that there is sin, that there is lines, that there is wrongness out there.

And so, look at verse 13. Verse 13: "The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah." They hatch a plan. But the problem with their plan is it is so disproportionate. It wasn't just about Shechem who was the guy who had done wrong, but instead, according to verse 24, every male in the town was circumcised.

And in fact, look at verse 25. Verse 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." In fact, look at verse 28: "They took their flocks and their herds,

their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field. All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and plundered."

You see the stress in the text: "all." This is brutal. And yet it's all in their head reasoned out because of verse 27, "The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister." These boys felt that what had happened was wrong; and it was. But then they saw red, and everyone, even the innocent, the kids, anyone who had any connection to Shechem were mowed down in their wake. This was genocide, and it deeply displeased God.

Now why did I say that? Do you remember what God's law would then declare later, "Eye for eye and tooth for tooth." In other words, in God's justice there's meant to be proportion, there's meant to be reasonableness; the punishment is meant to fit the crime. But these boys, their action is brutal, it disproportionate, it goes over and above. It's a criminal level of revenge.

God's law called for examination, for regulation, and for fair punishment. God's law was designed to protect the innocent from being harmed alongside the guilty, and none of that is reflected here in the boys' actions. Why? Well, very simply: because they were never taught that. They were never taught anything about God's standards, anything about how God operated. Why? Well, they'd grown up in a home with a dad who until maybe a couple of days ago hadn't thought this way, hadn't cared about God's standards, hadn't yet limped. The Bible calls parents especially to teach God's law to their children. We are either going to be controlled by our feelings or we're to be controlled by God's law. And these boys, they felt wrong had been done, they felt rage, and so there was this fire of response that bubbled out to the harm of many.

Most of our world is like these boys, they're controlled by their feelings. But God has given us a good law to control us, but it can't control the one to whom its never been taught. And parents and maybe those who are involved in some of the children's work here at Trinity; your work can often feel fruitless, can't it? Because in the immediate, you see, very little return. It's a long-term investment. Yet that work of planting God's Word in the heart, guarding the mind, giving a rationale to work out and not be controlled simply by our gut and our feelings; that's a long-term effect of

work. The greatest investment you can make into your children's life is not how a university fund, college fund; the greatest investment you can make in their life is simply to take ten minutes each day to read Scripture with them. Long-term that's going to make a difference. That's going to ground them in truth.

The first big mistake here in chapter 34 was Jacob left his daughter vulnerable to pursue a good job, and the second was Jacob never taught his boys the law of God. Now lastly, I want to leave you with an encouragement from this sad chapter of Scripture, and it's this: "Yet in it all, God overrules to take them out of the mess before the next generation is lost." In other words, in this dark, bleak chapter, God is still at work. God is still operating.

Look at what's proposed in verse 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. Make marriages with us. Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. You shall dwell with us, and the land shall be open to you. Dwell and trade in it, and get property in it.'"

Now what's the problem of that suggestion? Well, it's that this seed-carrying line is – the proposal is that they would be joined, that they would be merged with a sinful line that rejects God, that doesn't care at all about Him or His promises or His standards. Look at verse 16: "The 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." That's the language back in Genesis 6:1-4, where the different lines – the daughters of men and the sons of God – they merge, they blend in this strange intermarriage. Now could that happen again? Is there a danger here that the seed line is going to be muddied, going to be lost? No, because God said He would keep it.

This chapter contains rape, calls for bad marriages and genocide, and yet in it all, God is working despite Jacob's decades of bad parenting. God is working to ensure that His good plan marches forward. Your family can often – will either cause us so much worry and so much concern. And this morning I do want you to leave hearing the call to work hard in caring for your family in protecting them. I want you to hear the call to take seriously this charge to teach God's law to your children. But ultimately, I want you to leave with hope, the hope of knowing that the God who hears your prayers is in control. He is in control. And God did save of Jacob, and He is going to be at work in

the boys' lives. God will do it. In time, messy Judah – and you'll see in a few weeks, he was a mess – but he will put his life on the line for his brother.

Joseph will wisely care for the others. And even the sword-carrying Levi, he'll become the father of the priesthood. Family life is hard, it is hard; but we can hope in the Lord, for His arm is not short, and His arm is even long enough to reach over our mistakes and the messes of our past and to still bring redemption.

I don't know; maybe you have already made a mess of your life, of your family; maybe even the thought of that actually stops you coming to God now in repentance. But the message of Scripture is God forgives all. God forgets even the hurt that you have caused to your family if you simply come to Christ today and repent in some faith. God said Jacob was a mess? No. God said Jacob deserved a good kick? No. God said, "Jacob: Jacob I loved, I loved."

Friend, whatever mistakes you have made, whatever brokenness you have left in your path that others are still affected by, we have a God whose love is able to reach down and to save and to redeem, and He is the source of hope. Our hope is never in our performance as parents, never in the amount of Bible verses we can get our children to recite; our hope always sits in the grace of God, the grace of a God who loves, and nothing else. Those who are parents, you have a wonderful charge, a glorious responsibility, and yet more importantly a sufficient hope, because that hope is pinned on God Himself, the God of love.

This is such a bleak chapter at one level, isn't it? And yet when we see God is still at work in it, God is still doing in it, it gives us hope in our world today. The stars are so bright as they sit against the dark night sky; that's this chapter. It's so dark. Humanity is so broken, so muddy, so messed up, and it makes the God who so loved the world all the more glorious. Friends, He is our hope. He is our refuge and strength, our ever-present help. Be still and know that He is God. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we are so thankful that You are at work in this world. Lord, we take for granted the darkness and the sin. We so often minimize the nature of our own hearts, the rebellion that sits within. But

Lord, we are so thankful that You are one who can create in a new heart. We are so thankful, that despite ourselves, You are the God of love. We are so thankful, Lord, that even in the midst of all the chaos of this world You are one who can give a peace that passes all understanding, that You are the God of all comfort.

And we pray, Lord, for the saints that are here. We pray especially for those who maybe have been faced and confronted with the hurt and the brokenness, the aggression of this sinful world, and we pray, Lord, that You would apply Your balm to them, that You would restore, that You would grant help, that You would sustain. Lord, we pray for the parents that are here, and we ask, Lord, You would give them wisdom. We ask that You would give them help as they navigate this world, that You would help them to train their children to be able to walk amongst the lions that are out there, that You would give them the grace and wisdom needed to parent well.

And, Lord, for all of us, we pray as we go out of this place, this glorious moment of refuge where we unite in voice and praise Your holy name, as we go out to this world, Lord, would You equip us for the work of ministry in this week ahead? Would You grow our hope and confidence in You? Would you remind us afresh that You have granted us Your Holy Spirit, the Helper, that You have assured us in Your Word that You will never leave nor forsake us? And may You help us, Lord, to honor You this week. May our love abound more and more in knowledge and all discernment, so we would be able to approve what is right and be pure and blameless, growing and producing the fruit of righteousness until the day of Christ. For we ask it, Lord, in His glorious name. Amen.