

Turning Away from Half-Heartedness to Transformed Wholeheartedness

Pastor John Brackbill/Genesis 35/2.1.15

1:15 pm Bible Study Hour

Introduction:

- This afternoon we are turning to the close of another section in the book of Genesis.
- And more specifically to the end of the main section that deals with Jacob.
- From chapter 25:19 all the way through chapter 35 we have been considering the advancement of God's covenantal promises to Abraham through Jacob.
- We have seen Jacob the deceiver transformed through what I would call the ups and downs and all arounds of growth in godliness.
- He wanted spiritual blessing, but he went about it the wrong way.
 - He laid a trap for Esau when he was tired so that he might get the birthright
 - And he deceived his Father so that he might receive the blessing.
- The result of course was that he had to flee for his life
 - As he fled God met with Him at Bethel and promised Jacob that he would be brought back to the Promised Land and that God was His God and would bless Him
 - Jacob immaturely responded to that with a vow that did not believingly hold on to God's assured promises.
- So Jacob fled and escaped Esau only to be ensnared by Laban
 - And for the next 20 years God is working on Jacob to transform him through circumstances around him.
 - And in reality, circumstances many of which Jacob brought upon himself.
- But when he finally gets out of Laban's web of deceit, and starts to return to the Promised Land it is evident that God has blessed Jacob:
 - He has 12 children
 - He has many animals in his flocks.
 - And he has been transformed to the point where he is acknowledging God is the one that did that.
- He now needs to be reconciled to Esau, and there are ups and downs and all arounds in that process as well.
 - But right before Jacob meets Esau he wrestles with non-other than the Son of God in the form of a man
 - The Son of God did this not because He could not overpower Jacob, but so that Jacob would expend all his energy and then with one touch the Son of God would show Jacob his own weakness.

- And so Jacob went from fighting the Son of God to clinging to Him for blessing which he was granted.
- Jacob is reconciled to Esau through God's kind protection, but then Jacob deceives Esau and doesn't do what he says he is going to do:
 - He doesn't follow Esau to Seir.
- And that is the beginning of another period of backsliding as it were.
- We saw at the end of chapter 33 that Jacob actually regresses and goes back away from the Promised Land to Succoth and settles there.
- He then went to Shechem which is in the Promised Land but is 20 miles away from Bethel where he was supposed to return.
 - And if you remember we noted that as a Christian being in a place like Shechem is a very deceptive thing
 - Jacob had been brought back safely to the Promised Land
 - He now had a piece of the land in his ownership
 - He was worshipping the Lord there.
 - Shechem is deceptive because we think we are doing okay because there are evidences of some of God's blessing and we can point to certain things that we are doing that are in fact God's will.
 - But the whole time we know that we are saying no to something very clear in God's Word.
 - We justify why we are, in fact, our half-heartedness, causes us to think that God's clear command in that area isn't as clear as it truly is.
- What we saw in Gen. 34 were the results of Jacob's half-heartedness.
 - And it is one of the darker chapters in all of Scripture
 - We saw that half-heartedness leads to defilement
 - Jacob's daughter Dinah was too interested in the Canaanite women (1)
 - An interest that was modeled to her by her father.
 - Jacob's daughter Dinah was raped by Shechem (2)
 - Half-Heartedness when faced with defilement leads to defiling reactions (4-31)
 - Shechem wanted Dinah to be his wife
 - And what we see are sinful reactions
 - Jacob reacts with passive silence in the face of his daughter's rape
 - Jacob's sons, specifically, Simeon and Levi deceived Hamor and Shechem and while they were recovering from the stipulated circumcision they were slaughtered and their town plundered by Jacob's sons.
 - These were things that would not have happened had Jacob gone all the way to Bethel.
- But if there is anything that we have learned about God from the book of Genesis, it is that He does not leave His people in their sin.

- His grace works to transform and even to rule over and in and through the sin of His people to graciously advance His purposes of grace
 - And those purposes of grace are all about His glory and the good of His people.
- Which means, that we would expect after the dark chapter of 34, that 35 will shine the light of God's grace.
 - And that is exactly what we are going to see.
 - But because God gives grace to the humble, chapter 35 has much to do with turning away from the half-heartedness that lead to such disaster in Jacob's life and turning back to a transformed wholehearted worship of the Lord.
- So once again, I am going to assume that there are individuals among us that are in Shechem right now and you need to repent of your half-heartedness and turn back to the God of grace who gives His grace to the humble.
- And even if right now you are not entrapped in half-heartedness, you have been, and the sad reality is you will find yourself there again in the future and you need to know how to turn away from it and so do I.
- Over the next two studies are going to consider 5 truths about the aftermath of your half-heartedness toward the Lord as you turn away from it and back to Him.
- It was my intention to cover this whole chapter today, but as I got into it I realized how important it is for us to camp out in the first 4 verses instead.
- So we will consider 2 truths today about the aftermath of half-heartedness toward the Lord as you turn away from it and back to Him.

God is the One that takes the initiative in turning us away from half-heartedness (1)

- ✓ Notice the first phrase in verse 1.
 - "Then God said to Jacob"
 - That ought to be very encouraging to every one of us.
 - Because we are children of God, God takes the initiative in turning us away from half-heartedness.
- ✓ Often when we are ensnared in some disobedience to the Lord, we know we are and yet we don't have the strength in and of ourselves to say no to our flesh and yes to what God has said.
- ✓ But what if you knew that God took the initiative to bring you back to wholehearted worship and obedience?
- ✓ Wouldn't that invigorate you with hope that you can be transformed in that particular area?
- ✓ The remarkable thing is that we often miss when God is taking the initiative in our lives.
 - For the last three studies in this series we have been considering Jacob's half-heartedness.

- And each time God has been taking the initiative with anyone among us that is currently in disobedience to Him and half-heartedly following Him.
- Is your view of God that He is alive and at work in the world today?
 - Do you recognize that He speaks to you through His Word?
 - And that He providentially orchestrates passages of Scripture that are being preached to His people so that they might receive what they need to hear?
- ✓ How did God take the initiative with Jacob here?
- He commanded Jacob to return to Bethel to carry out his vow
 - Why do I say “to carry out his vow?”
 - **Genesis 28:16-22** When Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." ¹⁷ He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." ¹⁸ So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. ¹⁹ He called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz. ²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, ²¹ and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. ²² "This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."
 - Very clearly the vow that Jacob made had to do with returning to Bethel and worshiping God for bring him back to the Promised Land.
 - Yes, when Jacob made the vow he was immature in his faith, he should have said, God is my God, instead of if He does this then He is my God.
 - But the point is that Jacob made a vow, and now God is reminding him to keep his vow before Him.
 - Up until this point, Jacob has not done that.
- He commanded Jacob to dwelt at Bethel rather than Shechem
 - Notice God said “And live there”
 - The word “live” is the word “dwell” there.
 - He had “pitched his tent” in Shechem 20 miles short of wholehearted obedience to the Lord, and the Lord now says in essence,
 - Leave your half-heartedness in Shechem and wholeheartedly worship me in Bethel according to your vow.
- Specifically, He commanded Jacob to return to Bethel to worship
 - Notice the third thing that God commands Jacob
 - Yes, Arise and go to Bethel
 - Yes, Live or dwell there
 - But for what purpose?

- Yes to keep his vow, but specifically to worship God there in Bethel.
- He was to make an alter there to God.

Transition: There is just one more point that we need to consider here.

- ✓ This command to go to Bethel was a command to return.
 - ✓ But it wasn't a command to return to the worship that he had of God before.
 - ✓ No, Jacob was a different man, God had been transforming him.
 - ✓ Yes, he is to "Go back to Bethel," But of necessity that means go back and worship me as the transformed and being transformed man that you are.
- His command necessarily involved returning to Bethel for worship as a transformed man
 - Jacob was in Haran or Paddam-Aram, for 20 years
 - And since returning, it has probably been at least 10 years.
 - So around at least 30 years ago God had revealed Himself to Jacob.
 - In those thirty years God had done a great work of transformation in Jacob.
 - God is calling him to return to Bethel for worship at the same place, but not as the same man.
 - Application:
 - God took the initiative with Jacob and pursued him while he was entrapped in his half-heartedness
 - And the Lord is doing the same thing here today for us.
 - He is pursuing us and calling us to wholehearted obedience.

Transition: God is the One that takes the initiative in turning us away from half-heartedness (1)

- ✓ But next...

We must respond to His initiative by repenting of our half-heartedness (2-4)

- ✓ God's sovereign initiative is never reason for passive non-response.
- ✓ No, God's sovereign initiative is reason for a hope-fueled of repentance.
- ✓ God would not take the initiative to confront us in our half-heartedness, unless He was willing and able to deliver us from it.
- ✓ We must respond to His initiative and repent of our half-heartedness.
- ✓ And this will involve certain things.
- Which will involve spiritual leadership (2a)
 - Notice what the first phrase says in verse 2:
 - "So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him"
 - This is very different than the passive silence in the face of his daughters rape.
 - No, this is Jacob leading his family spiritually.

- God commands something, and Jacob immediately starts leading his family into obedience in response to that command.
- Men, if we want our families to be walking in obedience to the Lord, we need to repent of our own half-heartedness, which always involves repenting of passively following rather than leading in obedience to the Lord.

Transition: We must respond to God's initiative and repent of our half-heartedness, which will involve spiritual leadership...

- Which will involve repenting of idolatry (2b)
 - Jacob said "put away the foreign gods which are among you"
 - The Lord didn't say to do that did HE?
 - All the Lord said was arise and go to Bethel.
 - But Jacob knew something, he knew if he was to go to Bethel and worship the Lord he would have to lead his family to turn away from idolatry.
 - Certainly Rachel had taken some of Laban's idols when they left Haran.
 - But probably these are those that were in Shechem.
 - If Jacob's daughter Dinah was as interested in the women of Shechem as she was, then no doubt all of the family had become a bit too interested in the things of the Canaanites.
 - No doubt, they had had started to incorporate aspects of their idolatrous worship.
 - And we are no different today.
 - When we are living in Shechem as it were, not fully obeying the Lord, there is something that we are worshipping instead of Him, we are practicing idolatry.
 - We have idols of the heart.
 - We have desires that we are giving ultimate worthy to rather than giving ultimate worth to God as evidenced by obedience that contradicts our sinful desires.
 - As we saw recently in Col. Greed amounts to idolatry.
 - And Romans 1 is very clear that all sin is an idolatrous exchange.
 - It is a worshipping of something that God made rather than God who made it.
 - God is taking the initiative with us today, what idols do we need to repent of?
 - What idols of the heart do you need to turn away from in order to arise and go to Bethel?

Transition: We must respond to God's initiative and repent of our half-heartedness,

- ✓ which will involve spiritual leadership...
- ✓ which will involve repenting of idolatry (2b)

- Which will involve cleansing (2c)
 - Jacob says “purify yourselves”
 - If you remember, in Gen. 34, we were told clearly that half-heartedness leads to defilement.
 - No, if they were to turn away from that defilement, they would need to cleanse or purify themselves.
 - In this case, it is another way of saying turn away from idolatry, turn away from the sin that has been breeding in the atmosphere of half-heartedness before the Lord.
 - Later on in the history of the nation of Israel after the Exodus these instructions were given to them at Mount Sinai:
 - **Exodus 19:10-11** The LORD also said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; ¹¹ and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.

Transition: We must respond to God’s initiative...

- Which will involve putting off the old and putting on the new (2d)
 - Why do I say that?
 - Notice the next phrase: Change your garments.
 - Again, later on in the history of Israel, when God’s people were approaching Him for worship they would change their clothes.
 - **2 Samuel 12:20** So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed *himself*, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate.
 - In the NT, if we are to worship the Lord, if we are to return to whole-hearted worship of the Lord, we must do spiritually what the change of clothes was communicating in the OT.
 - We must put off the old, and put on the new.
 - **Ephesians 4:22-24** that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.
 - As NC believers this means, appropriating what is already true of us in Christ.
 - At salvation the Old Self was done away with.
 - And we were given a new nature.
 - So put off the old self and put on the new.
 - And return to worshipping the Lord in wholehearted obedience.

Transition: We must respond to God's initiative...

- Which will involve renewed informed worship (3)
 - Jacob speaks of going to Bethel and building an altar in worship.
 - And notice how He describes God:
 - God “who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone”
 - Even when Jacob in Shechem ensnared in half-hearted obedience.
 - This is who God was.
 - He was the God who had answered Jacob, He was the God who had been with Jacob everywhere he had gone.
 - But you see these are things that are forgotten when we are shackled in half-heartedness.
 - We forget who God is.
 - But when God takes the initiative and we respond in repentance we start to see clearly again and we are ready to worship God for who He truly is.

Transition: We must respond to His initiative and repent of our half-heartedness (2-4)

- ✓ which will involve spiritual leadership...
- ✓ which will involve repenting of idolatry (2b)
- ✓ Which will involve cleansing (2c)
- ✓ Which will involve putting off the old and putting on the new (2d)
- ✓ Which will involve renewed informed worship (3)
- ✓ And finally...

- Which will involve dealing with our sin decisively (4)
 - Jacob lead his family spiritually and they responded.
 - They gave the foreign gods.
 - Again, those idols that they had accumulated as their tents were pitched in Shechem.
 - And the rings which were in their ears.
 - Probably referring to either the earrings in the idols themselves, or earrings that were in the shape of pagan symbols.
 - But what does Jacob do with these?
 - He hides them under the oak which was near Shechem
 - In other words, he buried the idols.
 - Once again there is a great irony here.
 - There is only one true God and unlike idols that we have seen in the last several chapters in this book.
 - He cannot be stolen, sat on, lost, and buried.

- But these non-gods can be.
 - They can be stolen, sat on, lost, and buried.
- But the point we really need to grasp is that Jacob led his family to deal with these idols decisively.
- There was no playing around with these idols.
- They were done away with.
- I am reading and rereading Acts in preparation for the upcoming series and this reminds me of what happened in Ephesus when the gospel advanced:
 - **Acts 19:18-19** Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. ¹⁹ And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and *began* burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.
 - There was as decisive breaking off of sin.
- Jesus taught this very clearly:
 - **Matthew 5:30** "If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.
- Or what we have seen Paul teaches in Col. 3:5
 - **Colossians 3:5** Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.
 - Put to death those things in your life...
- There is a dealing with sin decisively.

Conclusion:

- ✓ Lord willing, in two weeks when we come to this passage again we are going to see not only...
 - God is the One that takes the initiative in turning us away from half-heartedness (1)
 - We must respond to His initiative and repent of our half-heartedness (2-4)
- ✓ But also we will see this in the remaining portion of this text...
 - God graciously blesses us as we repent of our half-heartedness and return to worshipping Him (5-15)
 - God rules over the results of our sin in the midst of His blessing (8, 16-26)
 - God advances His covenantal purposes from one generation to the next (27-29)
- ✓ But today, do you realize that God takes the initiative with you through His Word confronting you with your half-heartedness and calling you to repentance?
 - We worship the living God and this is one of His churches and Jesus is in our midst and as we have considered this text, God has been taking the initiative with us.

- ✓ How are we going to respond?
 - What ought to happen is repentance.
 - We ought to be willing to listen to the Spirit's conviction in our hearts and repent.
 - **Ephesians 4:30** Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
 - Respond to God's initiative in your life today.
 - **1 Thessalonians 5:19** Do not quench the Spirit;
 - Respond to God's initiative today.
- ✓ What is that going to involve?
 - ✓ which will involve spiritual leadership...
 - husbands, is there some spiritual leadership that you need to exert that you have been passive about in your family?
 - Moms, are you following your husband's spiritual leadership in the home?
 - And if your husband is not a believer, or is not spiritually leading, are you leading your family spiritually in appropriate ways?
 - Responding to God's initiative requires this.
 - ✓ which will involve repenting of idolatry (2b)
 - What are you worshipping right now that is so precious to you that you would say yes to it, and no to God?
 - The God who sent His only Son to redeem you from such enslaving idolatry.
 - ✓ Which will involve cleansing (2c)
 - Are you willing to turn away from the defilement of your half-heartedness?
 - ✓ Which will involve putting off the old and putting on the new (2d)
 - When we are halfhearted, there are certain things we are not doing in obedience to the Lord and there are certain things we are doing in disobedience to the Lord.
 - We need to put off the old and put on the new.
 - And the reason we can do so, is not because we are especially strong spiritually, obviously if we are repenting of half-heartedness, we are not spiritually strong.
 - But we can do this because in Christ, the Old has been put off and the New has been put on.
 - Even as I was preparing this message my heart was a bit heavy because I was sorrowing over how much more wholehearted I want to be and how much half-heartedness is still in me.
 - And then it dawned on me, this kind of passage is designed to show us our half-heartedness, not because the answer is in resolving to be wholehearted, but so that we might confess that half-heartedness to Jesus, accept the forgiveness and cleansing we have in Him, and trust in Him to enable us to grow in obedience to God.
 - ✓ Which will involve renewed informed worship (3)

- Jacob was resolved to worship once again, and it was clear once again in his mind who God was that He was worshipping.
- If you are waking up to your half-heartedness, repent of it and be renewed in your worship remembering that God has heard you again and again as you have called out to Him.
- And also remember, that God has always been with you ever since you trusted in Christ.
- He has been with you when things were going well spiritually, and He has been with you even during your half-heartedness.
- He loves you so, that is why He has taken the initiative with you to point out your half-heartedness.
- ✓ Which will involve dealing with our sin decisively (4)
 - Are you willing to deal with your half-heartedness decisively?
- ✓ Don't let another message from God's Word go in one ear and out the other.
- ✓ If you are one of God's children, and you are ensnared in half-heartedness, God is taking the initiative with you today.
 - Do not ignore Him.
 - Repent and decisively deal with your sin and half-heartedness.
- ✓ Do so by turning to Him in faith about that today.
- ✓ Maybe it would be helpful for you to tell someone what God has done in your life.
- ✓ Maybe you need the accountability of another brother or sister in Christ or myself as your pastor knowing that God has convicted you of half-heartedness.
- ✓ Whatever you need to do to not let this appeal from God to you drop to the ground do it.
- ✓ Turn to Him and He will enable you to leave Shechem and go back to Bethel a transformed person.