



Last week we studied Genesis 34.
It is a difficult chapter to read.

We feel grief for Dinah who at 16 years of age was raped,
we are frustrated by the response of her father Jacob,
we are angered by the cruelty of Dinah's brothers in murdering every
man in Shechem,
and we are shocked by the tragedy that befell the women and
children of Shechem who were taken as plunder.

If only this was a unique story; an incident that just happened once.

But we all know... this is a story that has been... repeated ...
countless times.

This chapter forces us to ask questions...



... not just about the problem of evil...

... but also, about God and the problem of goodness.

If tragedy has come upon you... or if someone has taken from you...
what is not theirs to take...



... are you, for the rest of your life, forced to live in the ruins of your
soul... or is there hope?

Can the LORD who is said to be near to the brokenhearted,
(Psalm 34:19) heal a broken heart?

Can the LORD save those who have been crushed in spirit?

Can the LORD restore what was wrongfully taken from someone?

In the face of senselessness, can God speak a sure and certain word
that functions like an anchor for the soul?

In Genesis 35, we will see that God did speak; and that God did
provide counsel; and that God did protect; and that God did work for
good.

With this as background let's now read the passage.



We don't know if God had been silent the previous ten years... of if he had spoken to Jacob during the time he lived near Shechem.

But in Genesis 35 God spoke and God gave clear direction.

“Go up to Bethel... and settle there...”

Jacob was not to have put down roots in Shechem.

He was to have gone to Bethel.

His disobedience ... cost him... and his family dearly... but it did not cancel God's purposes for him.

The LORD said to Jacob, **“Go up to Bethel and settle there... and build an altar to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.”**

This may surprise you.

But how God deals with our disappointments, our heartbreak, our troubles, and the questions that accompany them... is to restore our relationship with him and lead us to worship.

Thirty years earlier, at Bethel, God had appeared to Jacob in a dream... and made to him... very great and glorious promises.

Thirty years earlier, at Bethel, Jacob in response had promised that if indeed the LORD would watch over him and bring him safely back to Canaan... that he would return to Bethel and worship there.

Isn't it incredible?

Jacob, for whatever reason.... had put off returning to Bethel.

But God came to him and reminded him – at a moment that was very dark... “I am waiting there for you.”

Come and worship.

Jacob took immediate action.

v.2 says - he called together his family household and told them –
“get rid of the foreign gods you have with you.”

Jacob's family listened to and obeyed him.

They repented.

They gave him, look again at v.4, **“all”** the foreign gods they had.

Jacob took these idols and the rings that had been in their ears that symbolized their devotion to these gods, and he buried them.

As he spoke with his family, Jacob testified... who the LORD was.

They needed to hear this.

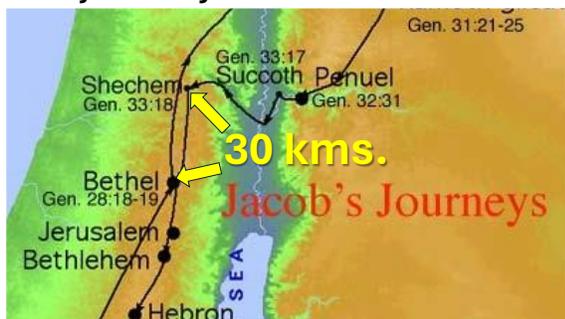
Jacob told them...the LORD is the God who answered me in the day of my distress.

Jacob was speaking... of his own experience 30 years earlier.

But also, of his experience that very day.

As the family broke camp, there was an air of uncertainty of what would happen to them.

The journey from Shechem to Bethel was relatively short.



But they would have had to pass through many Canaanites towns, who would have heard what Jacob's sons had done.

But God defended Jacob and his family as they journeyed to Bethel. What did God do?

He put into the hearts of the Canaanite people a terror that kept them from taking revenge.

What does that mean?

What God said to the Hebrew people after leaving Egypt explains in greater detail.

Exodus 23:27-28

I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run. I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way.

Because of what God did, no one pursued them.

When they came to Bethel, Jacob immediately built an altar... at the very place where God had appeared to him 30 years earlier.

There he and his family worshipped.

v.7 says that Jacob called the place "El Bethel."



The word Bethel means "house of God."

Calling the place "El Bethel" means "The God of the House of God."

As he had promised the LORD 30 years earlier, Jacob affirmed that El-Bethel was his God.

There as they worshiped... God blessed Jacob.

The LORD impressed upon Jacob his new identity – v.10...

“you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel.”

It's true God had given Jacob a new name 10 years earlier.

But the fact that God spoke of this says to us... that Jacob needed to hear God tell him this... again.

“You are no longer Jacob the deceiver. You are Israel.”

It is so important that as Jesus' followers hear who the LORD says we are.

Our identity is not our sin... or our failure... or the sin that was committed against us... or the troubles that came upon us.

The LORD says who we are... “You are my daughter; you are my son” ...othing we do, or nothing that is done to us, can change this relationship.

As they worshiped, the LORD revealed his character... to Jacob...



The LORD is the Almighty God, He is the all Sufficient One.

Regarding the questions that come to our heart and mind...
because of troubles... or because of evil...or because of
misfortune...

...such questions must never cause us to forget who God is...

he is the Mighty God, the All-Sufficient One...
or to forget what God has said in his Word...

For if we do forget.... like quicksand, those questions will trap and
suffocate us.

In the beginning, God commanded Adam and Eve... to not eat the
fruit... of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, warning them
that if they did, they would die.

But they disobeyed and opened...



... the Pandora's box of the mystery of the knowledge of good and
evil.

And when they did so... they and all humanity forfeited a great
mercy.

There are things that exceed human comprehension.

The knowledge of good and evil is one of them.

This is the point God makes in the book of Job.

And even though the book reveals things that were hidden to Job,
every reader of that book, nonetheless struggles to comprehend
why God permitted what he permitted.

What was particularly difficult for Job... was God's silence.
Job just wanted God to explain... why.

If you have read the book of Job, you know, that in the end, God broke his silence and spoke to Job.

But He did not answer Job's questions.

Rather, God asked Job, beginning in chapter 38 and going through to the end of chapter 41...



...questions that can be summarized into three.

Q1: Who created the universe?
Q2: Who controls the universe?
Q3: Who comprehends the universe?

The point impactfully made by God to Job... is this:
He who created, controls, and comprehends the physical universe,
also created, controls, and comprehends his moral universe.

In response to God's questions of him...

Job 42:1-6

Then Job replied to the Lord:

*"I know that you can do all things;
no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
You asked, 'Who is this that obscures
my plans without knowledge?'
Surely I spoke of things I did not
understand,
things too wonderful for me to know.*

"Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

It isn't that God is opposed to his people crying out to him with anguish and/or bewilderment over their suffering and tragedy. Even, Jesus cried out in agony from the cross,
"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

But the message of God to Job and in turn to all who follow the LORD is this: **even when you don't understand... trust me.** With God nothing is random; God is never careless with his own.

Psalm 119:75

"... in faithfulness you have afflicted me."

John 16:33

"In this world you will have trouble.
But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Acts 14:22

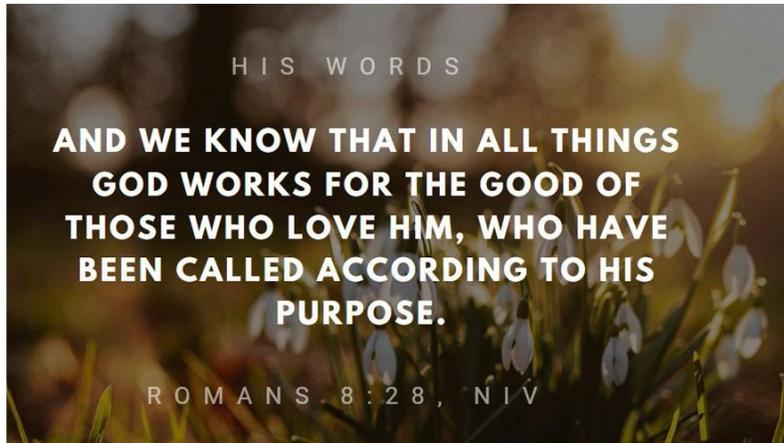
"We must go through many hardships to enter
the kingdom of God."

The psalmist wrote, Psalm 119:75
"... in faithfulness you have afflicted me."

Jesus told his followers, John 16:33
**"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart!
I have overcome the world."**

Paul and Barnabus, in strengthening the disciples of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, encouraged them to remain true to the faith, saying, Acts 14:22, **“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”**

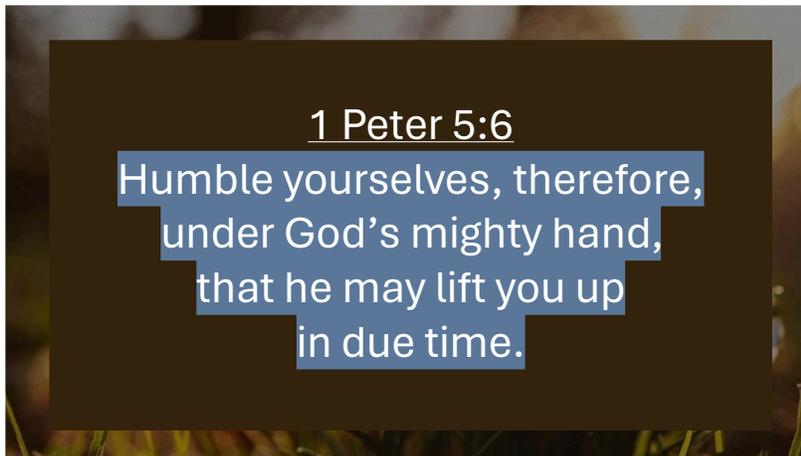
In all our troubles, God’s purposes are always redemptive.



This is the promise of the God whom we love and follow.
Our triune God...



Through the apostle Peter the Spirit of God gives this counsel, and it is particularly applicable when troubles come upon us.



There are times when we will feel the weight of God's mighty hand upon our lives; times when things will come upon us that seem greater than we can endure.

In such times, the follower of Jesus is confident of this – the things that touch our lives go through the Father's hands first. Remember Jesus' words to Peter.

“I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.”

This is why we humble ourselves... submitting to the Father's wisdom and power, trusting that in the right time, he will lift us up.

Because we are in Jesus Christ, the Father's silence never means he is unaware of us; or is indifferent towards us. But his mercy at times is severe.

We know this because when Jesus asked if it was possible to have the cup of suffering pass him by, the Father didn't take the cup away, but handed it to him.

This too was Paul's experience when he was tormented... by what he described as a thorn in the flesh. Paul asked three times for it to be taken away. How did the Father answer him?

He gave to Paul grace that was sufficient.

He gave to him power, Christ's power, that enabled him to live with his weakness, his difficulty, his hardship.

The grace that was sufficient for Paul is the same grace mediated to us by the Spirit of God.

So ... this passage would urge us to not live in the ruins of tragedy or trouble... but to draw near to God in worship.

In light of the companion passages we've considered, the Scripture urges us to read the Word as our very food... to read passages like Job 38-41 and in those passages to behold the Mighty God, the All-Sufficient One who is our Father.

I would say to all of us...

To run to the Father, not from him... with our questions.

He will answer us... in his time.

He will lift us up... in his time.

He will work out his good purposes for us... in his time.

He will heal our broken hearts... in his time.

He will restore our crushed spirit... in his time.

2 Corinthians 4:17

**For our light and momentary troubles
are achieving for us
an eternal glory
that far outweighs them all.**

He is God and we are not.

Rest in that truth... and be at peace.