

A Walk in the World

Genesis 34:1-31

In John Bunyan's classic book Pilgrim's Progress, Christian is on a journey to the Celestial City with a heavy burden on his back. As he travels along the way he meets a variety of other travelers as well. On this particular day in his journey he meets Mr. Worldly Wiseman. Let me read how the conversation went from the pen of John Bunyan.

Now as Christian was walking solitary by himself, he espied one afar off, come crossing over the field to meet him, and they happened to meet just as they were crossing the way of each other. The gentleman's name that met him was Mr. Worldly Wiseman, he dwelt in the town of Carnal Policy, a very great town, and also hard by from whence Christian came. This Man then, meeting with Christian, and having some inkling of him (for Christian's setting forth from the City of Destruction, was much noised abroad, not only in the town where he dwelt, but also it began to be the Town-talk in some other places). Master Worldly Wiseman therefore having some guess of him, by beholding his laborious going, by observing his sighs and groans, and the like; began thus to enter into some talk with Christian.

Worldly Wiseman: How now, good fellow, whither away after this burdened manner?

Christian: A burdened manner indeed, as ever, I think, poor creature had! And whereas you ask me, whither away? I tell you, Sir, I am going to yonder wicket gate before me; for there, as I am informed, I shall be put into a way to be rid of my heavy burden.

Worldly Wiseman: Has thou a wife and children?

Christian: Yes; but I am so laden with this burden, that I cannot take that pleasure in them formerly: methinks, I am as if I had none.

Worldly Wiseman: Wilt thou hearken to me if I give thee counsel?

Christian: If it be good, I will; for I stand in need of good counsel.

Worldly Wiseman: I would advise thee then, that thou with all speed get rid of thy burden; for thou wilt never be settled in thy mind till then: nor canst thou enjoy the benefits of the blessings which God hath bestowed upon thee, till then.

Christian: That is that which I seek for, even to be rid of this heavy burden; but get it off myself, I cannot: Nor is there a man in our country, that can take it off my shoulders; therefore am I going that way, as I told you, that I may be rid of my burden. Worldly Wiseman: Who bid thee go this way to be rid of thy burden?

Christian: A man that appeared to me to be a very great and honorable person; his name, as I remember, is Evangelist.

Worldly Wiseman: Beshrew him for his counsel, there is not a more dangerous and troublesome way in the world, than is that unto which he hath directed thee; and that thou shalt find, if thou wilt be ruled by his counsel. Thou hast met with something (as I perceive) already; for I see the dirt of the Slough of Despond is upon thee; but that Slough is the beginning of the sorrows that do attend those that go on in that Way: Hear me, I am older than thou; thou are like to meet with, in the way which thou goest, wearisomeness, painfulness, hunger, perils, nakedness, sword, lions, dragons, darkness, and in a word, death, and what not? These things are certainly true, having been confirmed by many testimonies. And why should a man so careless cast away himself, by giving heed to a stranger?

Christian: Why, Sir, this burden upon my back is more terrible to me, than all these things which you have mentioned: Nay, methinks I care not what I meet with in the way, if so be I can also meet with deliverance from my burden.

And so, Christian continued on his journey fraught with even more peril because of poor decisions that he will make along the way. Having been warned of his impending doom if he did not change his ways, he ran from his home and town covering his ears crying "Life! Life! Eternal Life!" and having escaped the Slough of Despond he journeyed on until he fell in step with Mr. Worldly Wiseman. As we consider our passage today in **Genesis 34**, we will see some similarities with Bunyan's Christian. Both Dinah, Jacob's only daughter, and Christian were in a vulnerable state. And it is also to this that I would like to draw some parallels to our own state in which at times we find ourselves vulnerable to walking apart from the path that leads us to godliness. **How is it that there are times we may fall to the surrounding temptations of the world?**

To one degree or another, we all have our pull by someone or something like Mr. Worldly Wiseman, that person, place or thing that subtly draws us away from loving the Lord as we should. One of the saddest verses is in **II Timothy 4:10** where Paul writes that Demas had left him, having loved this present world.

Genesis 34 is one of those chapters that after reading it you want to take an exacto knife and remove it from our Bibles. The actions and attitudes in this chapter should make us nauseated. They are degrading, despicable and detestable. In it we read about rape, deceit and murder. Much of it coming at the hands of the family God had chosen to be the line of the Messiah. There is no mention of God in it, yet the chapter has a bookend on either side where we see a walk of faith. At the end of **chapter 33** we note that Jacob built an altar and called it God, the God of Israel. In **chapter 35** God will speak to Jacob and tell him to return to Bethel and build an altar, but not here. This chapter is devoid of God, devoid of anything even remotely having to do with faith. God is out of the picture. No one is seeking Him.

Let me remind you also that back in **chapter 31** God had told Jacob to leave Padan Aram and return to his homeland and to Bethel. But then we read in **chapter 33** after Jacob and Esau had their little meeting Jacob didn't head to Bethel as instructed, but instead settled in Succoth where he built pens for his livestock because of the pastureland. After a while he moved to Shechem where he obtained property and settled there with his family.

We learn an important principle from Jacob in this. There are consequences when we do not fully or completely obey God. We see Jacob obeying halfway, which brings us to **chapter 34**. Had Jacob fully obeyed God and returned to his home, we wouldn't have this chapter in our Bibles. We wouldn't be repulsed by the sordid actions occurring here by those who were to be a light for God. But it happened and it's here and it's included in the canon of Scripture for a purpose, it's written for us to learn from.

Let me begin with a very important verse from the pen of the Apostle Paul. I'm reading from the Amplified Bible: **1 Corinthians 15:33** "Do not be

so deceived and misled! Evil companionships (communion, associations) corrupt and deprave good manners and morals and character."

Similarly, in the very first verse of the first Psalm we are encouraged to avoid bad company. "**Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers (Psalm 1:1).**"

If you notice it is what one describes as a "**progression of participation in their ungodly ways.**" They begin by walking, then standing and then sitting. They all imply companionship. Can two walk together except they be agreed? says Scripture. That goes for those whose walk is corrupt. In short, be ever so careful about who you hang out with, because as we just read bad company corrupts good morals.

From the wisdom of Solomon we read "**My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them...my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths' for their feet rush into sin, they are swift to shed blood (Proverbs 1:10, 15-16).**"

But that's what we see throughout this chapter. We begin by seeing in **verse 1** that Dinah, who was Jacob's only daughter by Leah has a desire to go out and visit the women of the land. Now you need to understand that this wasn't just a trip into town to check out what was happening. I'm not convinced that it was even out of curiosity. Dinah lived in a male dominated world with her father and 11 brothers. She was the only sister. She might have felt a bit smothered, that all the attention went to her brothers. The fact is, we don't really know how she felt. Was she naïve? Was she rebellious? Was she just plain ignorant of the ways of the world? Why was it important that she go out and get to know the women of the land? What was it she felt they could offer her? Why didn't her mother advise her about what she might expect? What did she think she was missing?

Driving is not as simple as just getting in the car, turning the engine on, putting the vehicle in gear and stepping on the gas. When Dad taught me and my brother, it was with a manual transmission so there was that whole clutch and gas coordination thing we also had to get right. But there were other things he taught us about road and traffic

awareness. He gave us advice about what to do in different scenarios. I couldn't respond with saying that we read about it in a book or I heard that from my instructor. We learned from observation and from listening and then obeying.

We don't get the impression here that there was much instruction going on about the pagan culture they lived in. So it could have seemed alluring and enticing and mysterious, something she wanted to know more about and who better than women her own age.

Here's something you should know. The term "**went out**" means more than just heading out for a little sightseeing trip. In the Hebrew it gives a sense of impropriety, like sneaking out without permission, going behind her parent's back. In that culture, a single woman of marriageable age didn't leave the tent alone. She was accompanied by a chaperone, someone who was dependable, someone who would keep a wary eye out so the younger person wouldn't get into trouble. Call the person a Jiminy Cricket sort of character. They were the voice of reason, the person who made sure you didn't do anything stupid. We are left to speculate if any such person accompanied Dinah.

Now whenever you spend any amount of time hanging out with the girls of the land, you can be sure that boys aren't too far behind. A group of guys notice someone new. Eventually the two groups connect maybe at a bonfire or at the local skating rink and one of the guys says to one of the other girls "hey, who's your new friend? Aren't you going to introduce us?" And it just so happened that the guy asking is the prince. Imagine him to be tall, dark, handsome...and rich. His name is Shechem. His dad happens to be the ruler of the area. We don't know if they started hanging out together at the local five and dime sharing a float or just how long of a time lapse between their meeting and what happens next. All we are told is that he took her and violated her. It's a word that means to force, oppress, mishandle, or treat with disrespect. Some translations say that he seized her implying a progression of brutality, and there is no easy way to say this, leading to rape. You also need to understand that the term in no way implies that it was consensual, that she agreed to it. We can't know for sure all that took place here.

Keep in mind that this is a pagan culture. There was no fear of God, no knowledge of God, at least not the Creator-God. Oh, for sure, they had their own religious system built around any number of gods, but none of the gods they worshipped had any sense of morality as part of their religious code where abusing another person in such a way was a violation. For all we know such actions were culturally acceptable practices of the people. Abraham had once described the people of the land as having no fear of God. That means they pretty much did what they wanted.

Prince Shechem may have thought he was well within his rights to behave in such a despicable way. Maybe he thought he loved her before he did what he did, so that's why he violated her. But it says that afterward he really loved her and wanted her to be his wife and told his father to get her for him to marry her.

That's when Jacob enters the picture. Jacob is quite a character. I'm not sure what to think of him. One day we look at him and admire his character and the next he's unlikeable, completely self-absorbed. Jacob is not where God wants him to be either physically because he is not in Bethel or spiritually because he isn't walking by faith. When you turn the pages of Scripture on Jacob you never know which guy you are going to read about. **Is it going to be the guy with faith or the guy who falters?**

In **verse 5** he seems to take a passive approach to the family even when a crisis occurs, as if he isn't sure what to do so he waits until his sons get home so they can decide together the next course of action. We don't know which sons are referred to here. Were all eleven sons out in the field? That seems unlikely since we read that when Jacob met Esau in the last chapter, we are led to believe that some of them were still young. Was it only the sons of Leah? We simply don't know. But whoever is being referred to here, their response is a normal one given the circumstances. The passage says they were filled with grief and anger at the same time.

The word "**grieve**" here means to be in pain, to be hurt or wounded or devastated. Their sister had been violated and they were in pain for her because of it. Maybe they felt that as older brothers they should have been there to protect her. And when

one feels such pain on behalf of another the second expected emotion also surfaces. They were angry about it. It carries the idea of being hot, furious, to burn with rage or to express violent anger. They were hopping mad as the text says “**because Shechem had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob’s daughter – a thing that should not be done (v. 7).**” Maybe they were also angry because their dad had done nothing about it.

Despite their feelings, Shechem’s father, Hamor, saw no wrong in the actions. He made no attempt to apologize for disgracing this family. There was no remorse or request for forgiveness for the actions of a foolish young man. It’s as if he condones his son’s actions. Instead, he talked about how much his son loved Dinah and wanted to marry her and wanted to make an agreement between their two people groups to intermarry. They could all be one happy family. Hamor was offering something to Jacob that God had already given him.

Hamor offered Jacob his people – give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. He offered Jacob prosperity – the land is open to you, live in it, trade in it.

He offered Jacob property – you can settle among us and acquire property in it.

Now that’s the thing about our spiritual enemy. He always wants to make us take the easy way out, to give us something that is counterfeit to what God has promised. When we are not where we should be in our relationship with God it will be easy to compromise with the world. As I stated earlier, there is no mention of God in this chapter and neither do we see any indication of seeking His wisdom, if this was even the right thing to do. What we do see implies was a willingness to agree with the arrangement.

Jacob’s weakness in this situation is also seen because it is the sons who speak up and negotiate the conditions of the agreement. They would allow it on one condition – all the males had to be circumcised. Even though other cultures performed that procedure, God made it a sign of the covenant between he and Abraham and his descendants. But Jacob’s sons used it in a deceitful way to lure this scum into a plot where revenge and murder were the ultimate goals. What was meant as a symbol of cutting away the sin of the heart in holiness to God

became the means to an evil end.

At a town meeting, all the men of Shechem agreed to the plan and three days later in a weakened condition due to the pain of circumcision, two brothers, Levi and Simeon stole into the town, slaughtered all the males and took the rest as plunder. Hearing about their treacherous act, Jacob lived in fear that this odious act would bring the people of the land together to attack him and wipe out his family. He seems more interested in his preservation than in the purity of his daughter, more interested in his protection than in the promises of God.

Had they not been taught that sinful actions would dishonor the name of God?

Had they not learned that if you disobey God, you put yourselves and your loved ones in danger?

Had Jacob been so lax in preparing them to deal with an ungodly culture in a godly way that they turned out much the same way as he had been?

They are certainly lessons for all of us.

This whole chapter is a tragic mess, a mess that could have been avoided had Jacob done the right thing in not settling there in the first place.

It could have been avoided if he had encouraged them to walk by faith and trust the Lord, that disobedience always results in a painful outcome. It could have been avoided had he taught them to love God with all their heart, soul, and strength.

Deuteronomy 6:5-9 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them the doorframes of our houses and on your gates...be careful that you do not forget...Fear the Lord your God, serve Him only.”

We can’t know all that was taught in the home, what was taught about God and how they should live in a land that had no fear of Jehovah God. My guess is they were living in a day and place that wasn’t all that different from our own. There will always be the prevailing philosophy or ideology of

a culture that believers if it feels good, go ahead and do it. There will always be people and societies who believe that morals are whatever you want them to be, and should change with the times.

Now I want to return to Dinah and Shechem for a moment. Maybe in the course of their conversations he persuaded Dinah that her father's morals and values were old fashioned and outdated. Maybe he convinced her that morals were relative and not absolute. Where have we heard that line of thinking before? It's all around us.

Schools teach situational ethics and moral relativism. Basically, it teaches that any given situation can determine the decisions you make and no one can say you are right or wrong in that decision given it's your situation. In the same scenario, they may choose to act entirely differently and they say that's okay because it's all relative.

They teach that in any given situation it's okay to compromise your morals or ethics in that situation. There are no absolute moral standards. A person is guided by their own ideals rather than on any unchanging universal code such as Biblical principles given by God in His Word.

Like I said earlier, we don't know all the circumstances that led to the immoral act committed by Shechem against Dinah. But his one bad decision, even if it was culturally acceptable, resulted in a cascade of other bad decisions. Dinah may have said no, she may have pushed back, but Shechem wanted what he wanted and took what he believed was his to have. But let's also remember that Dinah put herself in a position by going out to visit the women of the land. Now I'm not saying it's her fault, but keeping in mind the passage from **I Corinthians 15:33** – bad company corrupts good morals, she placed herself at risk. Had she not been where she wasn't supposed to be this wouldn't have happened, but she did and it did happen and the rest, as they say, is history.

Let me see if I can illustrate it with the current pandemic. For some time we have been under a stay home, stay safe mandate due to how easily the virus can spread. The more we venture out without using the proper precautions, the greater the risk of contracting the disease. For example, take the recent spring break in which carefree college

students threw caution to the wind and flocked to beaches knowing the risks only to find out there were about a dozen who tested positive with the virus. Who knows how many they exposed?

And just because you are asymptomatic or not showing any of the tell-tale signs of the virus, you can still be a carrier. I have read that the incubation period is anywhere from 1-14 days with the average around 5 days. The incubation period means the time from when you catch the virus and when the symptoms start.

Let me come back to our two travelers at the beginning of the message. There's Christian and Mr. Worldly Wiseman. The latter is trying to convince Christian that he doesn't need to take the very difficult way to get to the Celestial City. He knows a seemingly easier path. Follow the world, it will still get you where you want to go. Now consider for a moment the incubation period of this virus and the effects of worldliness on a believer. Someone like Mr. Worldly Wiseman comes along and tells you to try something or do something and you're not quite sure, but he says there isn't anything to worry about. So you do it and nothing happens, at least not yet.

Don Francisco wrote a ballad about the prodigal son who falls into company with a guy traveling to the big city. He fills the head of the prodigal with all kinds of stories of the things he has done. With a little sense of moral awareness, he asks his new companion if that was wrong to which the worldly wise man says no, it isn't that bad. It wasn't long before bad company corrupted good morals.

Such is the nature of worldliness on the believer lulling him or her into a belief that it's not all that bad. But the incubation period for sin is slow growing, and when the symptoms are in full swing it can be deadly if spiritual treatment is not sought.

Thinking about Christian in Pilgrim's Progress and Dinah in our passage or us journeying along the road of life, what makes it such a vulnerable time?

What makes the journey so vulnerable whether it is in the story of Christian or in the account of Dinah or for us is being alone. Later on the story of Pilgrim's Progress, Christian will have the companionship of another fellow traveler. When

we attempt to go it alone in the Christian life, we have a greater risk of succumbing to the temptations of the world, of becoming like the world. How important it is to have someone to journey the Christian life with, someone to whom we can be accountable. Proverbs reminds us that as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. The enemy finds great pleasure when we walk alone but we find great comfort and strength when we with someone who encourages us to keep going. We are encouraged from the words of the preacher in **Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, 12** that – “**Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!...A chord of three strands is not quickly broken.**”

If you want to stand in the battle as you journey along, don’t journey alone, find someone that will be your spiritual traveling companion.

Another lesson we learn from the scene in Pilgrim’s Progress is that the meeting between the two travelers was unavoidable. That they would cross paths was bound to happen. Even though their paths were leading them in different directions, Christian was going toward eternal life and Mr. Worldly Wiseman was headed towards the town of Carnal Policy and worldly living, their paths intersected. The path of Dinah was bound to cross sometime with the women of the land. She made it happen by going out to visit them. Our path will cross with those whose path is worldliness not godliness. Know that it will happen. Prepare for when it does happen.

Romans 12:1-2 give us some insight on how to prepare for that unavoidable inevitable meeting. If you want to prepare yourself for this meeting and come out victorious, **verse 1** says that we must give the Lord our body. Before we were saved, we did whatever we wanted. We gave into whatever sinful pleasures we thought were okay for us to engage in, much like Shechem. Whatever was culturally acceptable we did. But now that we belong to Christ what we do should bring glory to God. We read in **II Corinthians 5:17** that once we are saved, we become a new creation and the old things, the old nature has passed. According to **I Corinthians 6:19-20**, our bodies are now the Temple of God

because His Spirit lives within us.

In the Old Testament when the priest brought the offering to sacrifice on the altar it symbolized total surrender of the life of that animal. For the believer it means that we also surrender or yield ourselves up to the Lord. At salvation we have already yielded the inner man to God but He also wants the outer man and that is the surrender of our lives to Him – what we do, what we say, what we think or to put it another way, our mind, will, and emotions. Our eternal soul still resides in a body that can be given over to committing sin, so we need to yield our bodies to God or as the verse says present it to Him. The word “**present**” means a once and for all act. “It commands a definite commitment of the body to the Lord, just as a bride and groom in their wedding service commit themselves to each other. It is this once-for-all commitment that determines what they will do with their bodies” says Warren Wiersbe.

He goes on to remind us that just as Christ presented His body for the purpose of doing God’s will, so we as believers should follow His example and present our bodies as “**instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:13)**.

Paul gives two reasons. The first is that it’s the right response for everything God has done for us, referring back to His mercies shown toward us. The second is it’s our reasonable service or act of spiritual worship. When we are yielded to the Lord, every day is a time of worship in what we do.

But it isn’t just yielding our body to the Lord that helps prepare us when combating worldliness, **verse 2** tells us we are to yield our minds as well to Him. Think for a moment about all the things that are on television or what you hear on the radio or what you read in the newspaper or magazines. Much of it is designed to control your thinking, to get you to change your mind about things, including what morals or values you hold to. They want to make things seem normal. God wants instead to transform your mind, your thinking.

Ephesians 4:17-24

Philippians 4:8

Colossians 3:1-3

Again from the pen of Warren Wiersbe who writes: “This word transform is the same as transfigure in Matthew 17:2...It describes a change from within.

child of God.”

We are reminded in **Romans 8:5-8** that to be otherwise minded is to be hostile to God.

In the conversation between Christian and Mr. Worldly Wiseman, the latter sought to give Christian counsel regarding the burden that he carried. The world will often try to give you counsel about how the Christian should live, often beginning with something that sounds good. Worldly Wiseman began by telling Christian he should get rid of his burden and then told him how. **Psalm 1:1** and **Proverbs 1:10-16** imply that the counsel offered by the world system leads to sin and that the path they want you to follow is only meant to entice you.

I Corinthians 3:19 says that the wisdom or counsel of the world is foolishness. What good advice did the women of Shechem have to offer Dinah? We get into trouble as believers when we walk, stand or sit in the counsel of the ungodly. Now is all advice from a non-Christian bad advice? No, but be wary because somewhere along the way their counsel will be filtered through their own world view which leaves God out of the equation.

A.W. Tozer says that worldliness doesn’t necessarily rule God out, but their starting point isn’t God because their world view is about man and his wants, his desires, and his expectations, not what God wants. That can also be the mindset of a Christian who hasn’t yielded his body, mind and will to the Lord as we see Dinah’s brother take matters into their own hands rather than leaving it to God. They acted just like the world would act in the same situation. How important it is if we want to maintain a godly testimony to present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice that will in turn keep us from conforming to the world’s way of living.

The tragedy of **chapter 34** could have been avoided had Jacob yielded in obedience to God’s will. We will see in the next chapter that in spite of what happens here, God’s grace is extended to the person who will put himself back under the will of God. So as we all venture out into and at times have to interact with the world, prepare your body, mind and will by being transformed through the work of God’s Spirit as He using the Word of God to shape your character to be like His.

The world wants to change your mind, so it exerts pressure from without. But the Holy Spirit changes your mind by releasing power from within. If the world controls your thinking, you are a conformer; if God controls your thinking, you are a transformer.”

Such a transformation comes by reading, meditating and applying God’s Word. The transformation takes place no other way than through the Holy Spirit using the Word of God and according to **II Corinthians 3:18** doesn’t happen automatically or instantaneously, but gradually as we yield more of ourselves to His work.

To confront the worldliness around us we are to give the Lord our body and our mind and then Paul adds one more thing. We are to give Him our will. The mind controls the body, but it is the will that controls the mind and not the other way around. Victory isn’t in our own willpower, but only when we have fully yielded to God’s will. Remember that in the model prayer Christ gave to the disciples He said that we should pray for God’s will to be done and then He modeled it in the Garden as He yielded Himself to doing God’s will no matter how difficult it was knowing that it meant going to the cross to atone for sin.

Something I need to learn to do each day is to pray and yield my body, my mind and my will to God. **Do I yield my plans to Him and my time to Him?** That will be an aid when being confronted by the world to conform to its standards or compromise my values. That word conform in **verse 2** refers to something outward that doesn’t reflect what is within. It’s like wearing a mask or putting on an act and carries the idea of being transitory or unstable. The word implies that it’s something we allow to be done to us. So the verse is suggesting that we allow the world to mold us on the outside something that is different on the inside. Instead when we let the Holy Spirit transform us from the inside, then it is evident on the outside by what we say and do and think. It is written as a command and not a suggestion – **“Don’t let the world conform you.”** Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest translates the verse like this: **“Stop assuming an outward expression which is patterned after this world, an expression which does not come from, nor is representative of what you are in your inner being as a regenerated**