

Getting the Divine Push

Genesis 34:30 – 35:5

November 16, 2008

Wesley J. Gabel

Bethany Church

Dinah was the daughter of Jacob and Leah. She was young, confident, assertive, independent, and attractive. She went out alone to visit women in the neighboring community. While she went to their homes, she was observed by a young man, named Shechem. Shechem was the mayor's son. He confronted Dinah and violated her. In spite of his callous disregard for her will, he was impressed. He wanted to marry Dinah. He spoke tenderly to her and sought help from his father, the mayor, to gain her hand in marriage. However, Dinah and her family were neither sympathetic nor receptive. She had been violated, robbed of her freedom and dignity. Dinah's father was grieved, and her brothers outraged. Indeed, Jacob's sons returned early from their work when they heard the news, but little if any discussion with their father occurred before Shechem and his father came calling.

I bet the atmosphere of that meeting was so thick with tension that a hacksaw couldn't cut through. The mayor took the lead. He explained his son's love for Dinah and his desire to extend personal and political privileges to Jacob's family. His offers would have to be ratified by leaders of his community. Jacob didn't answer. His sons intervened. They misrepresented circumcision, claiming that it, not the covenant with God it signaled, was all that was required for their families to intermarry. When the Mayor convinced his community to go along, all the males were circumcised. Three days later while the men were healing, two of Jacob's sons initiated a massacre. They killed all the men, and seized for themselves their women, their children and all their possessions.

Jacob was appalled. He said to the two, “Are you out of your ever-living minds? What were you thinking? You just painted a bull’s-eye on us.” Actually, Jacob said:

You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to... the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed. (Genesis 34:30, NIV)

Jacob feared for his life and the life of his family. He had not asked for Shechem to rape his daughter. He had not asked his sons to kill and plunder his neighbors. However, he faced the devastating and certain consequences of their actions. He was a victim. Would he resign himself to the bitter legacy of a victim? What would he do?

Truthfully, we don’t just suffer from our own sins and actions. All of us suffer bitterly at times from the words, deeds, and the sins of others. From the day in school that you were penalized for classmates shooting spit-wads at the blackboard to the loss of a job through poor decisions of others or the rejection of a girlfriend or spouse, all of us have experienced betrayal, disappointment, and painful loss. I can hardly imagine anything more painful than what Wayne and Tonya experienced one day. I’ll let them tell you (Bluefish TV Clip, 4 ½ minutes).

In a world where evil has not yet been judged, we face terribly painful challenges, difficulties and losses that are not of our making. Wayne said a mouthful when he declared that his struggle was to be reconciled with the fact that: “*The one ultimately responsible for allowing this to happen is also the one I have to lean on to get me through.*” Instead of looking over God’s shoulder and deciding how he should govern the earth, Wayne and Tonya just looked to God for help.

Outspoken Christian and NFL coach Tony Dungy and his wife Lauren have done the same. Why didn’t God intervene before son James took his life at Christmas time three years ago? Tony and Lauren have chosen to lean on the one who could have intervened.

Certainly, God could have intervened with Jacob's daughter Dinah. God has intervened many times. God could have changed the time frame so that Dinah would have gone either unnoticed or not been alone for Shechem to take her. God could have changed the timing for Dinah's brothers so that they would have discussed their response with Jacob. However, God didn't alter the timing or circumstance, and things became exceedingly painful and dicey.

God's intervention came in a different way. God counseled Jacob, and Jacob acted on guidance he received in the midst of these circumstances. Jacob was getting a divine push. God was leading him out of his formerly comfortable situation into new situations.

Once before, Jacob had run for his life. He was escaping the vengeance of his brother Esau. God was now calling him to move his family to the place where he rested during that escape, a place where God had met him, a place where God promised him blessing and where he vowed his service to God. The Bible says:

So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." (Genesis 35:2-4, NIV)

At Bethel, Jacob planned to build an altar to God. Therefore, Jacob gave four commands to his family. (1) Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you. (2) Purify yourselves. (3) Change your clothes. (4) Come, let us go up to Bethel.

The family collected all the idols and associated jewelry (including what they had plundered to avenge Dinah), and they buried them near the site of the massacre. They then washed themselves and changed clothes. All of this was preparation to meet with God. (Brothers and sisters in Christ, this passage is the biblical precedent for washing up and dressing up for worship in our Sunday best. We dress up when we meet formally with the head of a

company, state or nation. People have even called the clothes *power suits* because something happens emotionally that affects decisions and destiny. Similarly, something happens to our faith when we prepare physically to meet with the Head of Creation. Although I want to love and convey welcome to everyone regardless of their dress, background or status, I experience a spiritual and emotional benefit in physically preparing for worship.) By ridding themselves of idols, purifying themselves with water, putting on clean clothes and moving to a place where God directed and where God had spoken, Jacob and his family purposely, practically and carefully focused their reliance on God. Consequently, something happened:

The terror of God fell upon the towns all around them so that no one pursued them. (Genesis 35:5, NIV)

A special divine protection came upon the family as they were pushed out of their comfortable circumstances. God used their pain as a divine push. He moved them from reliance on their possessions, money, skill, and idols, to a life journey of partnership with their Father in heaven. God pushed them into a new walk of companionship and redemption.

A divine push does not feel good. Even as a young eaglet may dislike the push out of the nest by its mother, we feel horrible too; but God's push is purposeful. God is worthy of all your trust and all of your attention.

When I experienced a divine push early in my life, God gave me this promise:

In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28, NIV)

This promise helped me look to God as my refuge and help. It can help you also. God will see you through. Indeed, he is grooming you to triumph as his mega-conqueror.