

WALKING DOWN MEMORY LANE FOR FAMILY REVIVAL

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Theme: Family revival is born of telling and retelling our stories of God's workings in our lives and in our families.

Theme Text: Is. 12:1-6

How many of you have ever gone down memory lane? A place, a song, certain objects or words might cause you to recall a pleasant experience. Then if you are alone the memory might make you smile to yourself, or talk about it if you are with company. My husband and I go down memory lane when we are driving and get the green of the traffic lights. When he asked my Dad's permission to marry me, my Dad had told him, "I give you the green light," meaning I happily consent to your marrying my daughter.

The message today is entitled, "Walking Down Memory Lane for a Family Revival." We will see what happened to Jacob and his family when he walked down memory lane. We will look at this topic under the following areas—Family Crisis, Down Memory Lane, Family Revival.

Family Crisis

It was love at first sight. When Prince Shechem saw Dinah, daughter of Jacob, he loved the young woman (Gen. 34:3). But, unfortunately, his sexual passion overruled and Genesis 34:2 tells us that he violated her. Rape is the ultimate violation that emotionally destroys its victim. The consequences of his impulsive act were severe both to his family and Jacob's family. Her real brothers Simeon and Levi sought revenge that ended in violence and bloodshed (Gen. 34:1-31).

Jacob was filled with horror and grief when he heard what his sons had done. "You have troubled me and made me stink among the inhabitants of the land . . ." Then in concern for the safety of his family he added, "And since I am few in number, they (the Canaanites) will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I" (Gen. 34:30). This was a family crisis.

All families today experience crises at different times in their marriage. In some families the birth of a child could create a problem. Children can be a source of enjoyment, but can also add stress to a marriage. The crisis happens because wives tend to neglect their husbands as they care for their children when they are young and worry over them when they are older. So wives, even though your children are important to you, guard against neglecting your husbands. Husbands, even though the temptation and opportunity to be unfaithful is great, instead of looking for an extramarital affair, seek to understand and support your wives.

Other family crises include loss of job, resistance to changing roles, children's behavior such as teen pregnancy and drug abuse, severe illness, divorce. Isolation, or the feeling of being excluded, is another malady. Many times we take our spouses for granted. We have many other "urgent" matters that need our attention. Our careers/jobs take priority. Soon meaningful

communication, which is the heart of the family and the key to relationships, gets less and less.

There is resentment; there is bitterness because of suppressed anger. Then we say, "I don't love him/her anymore." This is what a husband told a counselor about the relationship with his wife: "You just don't understand, I don't love her any more!" And the counselor replied, "Love her anyway for love is a verb not a feeling even though love has feelings." He showed his love by many deeds of love and saved their marriage. Family/couples enrichment programs of the church can facilitate expressions and deeds of love.

You know family crises can be a negative weapon in marriage, dividing hearts and destroying unity, or they can be opportunities for recommitment and new beginnings for families. This was the experience of Jacob and his family.

Down Memory Lane

God is interested in families and He is in the business of bringing healing to dysfunctional families. He did it for Jacob's family then and He can do it for our families today. Genesis 5:1 reads: "Then God said to Jacob, 'Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother.'" In other words walk down memory lane, Jacob. And Jacob remembered! Then, calling his household together, he shared his experience with them.

"I was a cheat," he began. "That is what my name, Jacob, means. I cheated my twin brother Esau of special blessing that goes to the eldest son in the family. I did not care too much for the material wealth. This special blessing afforded two-thirds of the father's wealth to the son receiving it. What I really wanted was the spiritual blessing—the privilege to commune with God as my grandfather Abraham and father Isaac. And so I joined with my mother and pretended to be Esau. I lied to my blind father. After my old father, Isaac, had eaten of my food, he gave me the blessing.

"My brother was angry and threatened to kill me when he realized that I had cheated him of this blessing. I had to leave home and travel many miles by foot to Uncle Laban. I tell you, my sons, cheating never pays. I never saw my mother again. The first night I felt scared and lonely. I was sorry for what I had done. I wept and confessed my sin. As I lay down to sleep on the ground with a stone for my pillow, I felt that God had forsaken me." (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 183.)

At this point Jacob's face lighted up as he said, "But God had not forsaken me! That night I had a dream! I saw a ladder reaching from earth to heaven and angels ascending and descending the ladder. And the Lord stood above it and made a promise to me (Gen. 28:13-15). It was the same promise that He had made first to Abraham and then to Isaac. Then I awoke, made a vow, set my stone pillow as a memorial and called the place Bethel. For surely God was in that place! That is what Bethel means."

And what does the "ladder" mean? In John 1:51, Jesus referred to Himself as the "ladder." He told Nathaniel, "you shall see the heavens open and angels ascending and descending on the Son of man." Ellen White also tells us that the "ladder represents Jesus." She explained that before man's rebellion God talked with Adam and Eve face to face. But their sin separated earth from heaven so that man could no longer have open communion with his Creator. Jesus is the medium of communication between God and man. Through His life and death, He bridged the gulf that sin had made so that ministering angels can hold communion with fallen man. Thank God for Jesus! (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 184.)

If you are a spouse cheating on your wife or husband or a youth lying to your parents and you are feeling lonely, thinking that God has forsaken you, take courage. You can be restored to the favor of God if you confess your sin like Jacob. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

If you have unresolved conflicts in your marriage that are tearing you apart, take a walk down memory lane. Remember the day you walked down the aisle with your beautiful bride or your handsome husband on your arm. Remember some of the challenges you faced and how you overcame. If you are grieved by the actions and behavior of your children, remind them of the good times you shared together as a family. If you are ready to give up on God, review your past life. Recall with gratitude the ways God has delivered you, supported you in trying times, and opened doors when all seemed dark. Walk down memory lane and revive your relationship with your spouse, your children and your God.

Ellen White puts it beautifully when she says,

When you look back into the chapters of your life [marriage] experience, do you not find some pleasant pages? Are not God's promises . . . growing beside your path on every hand? . . .

Thank God for the bright pictures which He has presented to us. Let us group together the blessed assurances of His love, that we may look upon them continually. . . . [T]hese are the pictures which God would have us contemplate. (*Steps to Christ*, p. 117, 118)

Family Revival

As Jacob reviewed the wonderful dealing of God with him, his own heart was softened, his children also were touched by a subduing power. Then he looked at his children and all his household and said in Gen. 35:2, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. This was a three-way call to repentance. First, put away the foreign gods. Jacob believed that somehow idolatry had invaded the camp and that there were false gods in his household. Rachel still had the gods she had stolen from her father Laban.

Second, purify yourselves. Wash yourselves of the blood of the Shechemites. Your outward washing is a symbol of inner cleansing from bitterness, anger and resentment. Change your garments as a sign of a change from cruelty and revenge to forgiveness and kindness. Then, "arise, let us go back to Bethel where the Lord answered me in the day of distress" (Gen. 35:3). This call to reformation was effective. Genesis 35:4 tells us, "So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak tree which was by Shechem." What a touching scene! The entire household experiencing a revival!

What about us today who are preparing for the coming of Jesus and face to face worship of God? Do we need the same call to repentance? What idols have invaded our lives and homes? Idols can enter the best family. So every parent, needs to look through your houses and ask, "Are there idols here?" Bad books, dangerous amusements, ungodly music and videos? Remember, anything that takes first place in our hearts above the Lord God is a strange god and an idol.

Then ask God to cleanse us of abuse, lust, anger, pride, criticism, self-sufficiency. Put on His garments of kindness and honesty. Express love. Affirm each other. Share feelings, desires and wishes. Build trust. Deal with conflicts. Evaluate how you communicate with each other and with the children. Spend quality time with the children. Plan together, play together, and above all pray together. Rebuild the family altar and begin again. Reformation begins with reconsecration. Family revival begins with repentance and forgiveness.

Genesis 35:9-12 tells us that when Jacob and his family put away their idols God did five special things for him. He protected them from the Canaanites. He again appeared to Jacob. He blessed him. He affirmed Jacob's change of name—no more Jacob the cheat, but Israel the Prince of God. God repeated to him the promises made to Abraham and Isaac.

God will bless our families also. We will have peaceful homes even in the midst of the storms of

life. Marriage vows will be repeated and new commitments made. The family altar will be restored and the old promises of God will be wondrously new. Promises of His love—"yea I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3). Promises of forgiveness of sins—"if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Promises of His soon coming found in John 14:1-3—"Let not your heart be troubled . . ."

I believe that Jesus is coming soon and He will make "all things new." Oh what a day that will be! No more family crises but a new home where there will be peace and joy forevermore. And we will see Jesus face to face and tell the story "saved by grace."

I want to be there. I want my family to be there. What about you? All those who would like to join me in saying, "Lord I want a revival in my heart and my family" would you stand with me? The call is to "put away the foreign gods . . . purify yourselves, and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel and make an altar to God." Walk down memory lane and renew your commitment to your spouse, your children and to your God.