

Scripture Reading: Genesis 29:15-30

“15 Then Laban said to Jacob, “Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what should your wages be?” 16 Now Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 Leah’s eyes were delicate, but Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance. 18 Now Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, “I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter.” 19 And Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me.” 20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her. 21 Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in to her.” 22 And Laban gathered together all the men of the place and made a feast. 23 Now it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. 24 And Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid. 25 So it came to pass in the morning, that behold, it was Leah. And he said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?” 26 And Laban said, “It must not be done so in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. 27 Fulfill her week, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years.” 28 Then Jacob did so and fulfilled her week. So he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife also. 29 And Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as a maid. 30 Then Jacob also went in to Rachel, and he also loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served with Laban still another seven years.”

"Jacob is Married... Twice!"

Well at long last we are back in the Book of Beginnings! Our break seemed to be about as long as the series has been, but since we are now at over eighty messages from Genesis I guess that is not the case!

We come this morning to a portion that I was quite honestly not sure what I was going to do with, but since we believe strongly in exegetical preaching, I am not allowed to skip over such portions of Scripture. Even Pastor Candlish in his commentary, who has provided many great insights that I have used in this series, seemed to struggle here saying at one point that it was a “painful narrative of subtlety and sin,” and it was “in many respects a dark and unsatisfactory subject of study.”

But all is not lost if we step back for a moment to remember where we have been and also where Michael and I will take things in the next few weeks. We are studying Genesis as the Book of Beginnings because we rightly believe and understand that it lays down the foundation for all that follows in God's grand story of salvation. In the early chapters we saw the glories of Creation, including man made in the Image of God. Sadly we saw the fall of man and the awful results, not only for Adam and Eve and all their heirs, but for the entire the creation as it was cursed because of Adam’s sin.

We were then given hope when the Gospel was first preached to Adam & Eve as the promise of the Seed of Woman who would crush the seed of the serpent! But then all seems to quickly be lost as we saw the sinfulness of sin making the world ready for utter destruction in just nine generations.

- God does destroy all living things with a world-wide flood and then again we have hope as faith is given to Noah and God promises to never again bring such judgment.**
- The Spirit of God begins His work of restraining the sin of man and the work of the Son is begun with the calling of Abraham!**

We saw how Abraham was given great promises regarding land, descendants, and nations and how all of them would come to fulfilment in the singular Seed of Abraham, who is Jesus!

At the center of all this is the promised line that would ultimately lead to Jesus, that promised Seed of the Woman.

So it is important to remember that we are watching the Grand Plan of salvation unfold with the faithfulness of God on the one hand, and the sinfulness of man still being played out on the other.

We saw this in Abraham as a man of great faith who certainly had his bad days or moments and again with his son Isaac. Now we are dealing with the life of Jacob which as I pointed out runs from where we began studying him in chapter 25 all the way to the end of Genesis where we see his death in chapter fifty.

- **We are going to see Jacob given the name Israel and bear the sons who will make up the nation of Israel and we should all know how central these are to God's story!**

So if the line of promise is going to continue, then Abraham needed a wife whose womb the Lord opened; Isaac needed a wife whose womb God opened and now Jacob needs a wife which leads us to our text.

Here we find Jacob getting not one, but two wives, along with two concubines who will also play a role in God's story! Now of course my task is to try and sort all of this out and explain how it relates to our own age where Biblical marriage is coming under major assault in our secular world!

- **This is especially important for us as we look around and see all of the children and young people God has blessed us with!**

Toward that end I am going to follow up this message with two topical sermons that are related by considering how we are to see marriage today and also how we can train and encourage our young people in the pursuit of marriage speaking about the subjects of courtship and engagement. And finally as most of you know we will be blessed to have a marriage ceremony following our worship service on February 14th! On that Sunday, Michael will speak to us about the Bride of Jesus in revelation and I will look briefly at the Apostle Paul's discussion of marriage in Ephesians chapter five.

So with that in mind as we go through our morning text, I will not be looking for ways to justify much of what was done, but rather to see how God accomplishes His plans even with sinful people, or as others have rightly said, how He can draw straight lines with crooked pencils.

We should remember that Jacob has left his home alone, fleeing from an angry brother and then had an encounter with God at Bethel. We talked about that being a type of conversion for him, but we will see there is still some of the old man that will haunt him!

- **And of course Laban seems to have almost no redeeming qualities, so with this toxic brew the results should not surprise us.**

And yet, as we will see with the actions of Joseph's brothers, God has no problem working for good the actions of people that are at the worst evil, and at best pretty stupid.

As we learned in our last message, Jacob has met and fallen for Rachel and is taken into their home and so we read at verse 15: "Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what should your wages be?""

- **From the start we can suspect that Laban is up to something because why would he not open his home to a relative and NOT require him to work?**

Perhaps he was looking to see if Jacob could produce the wealth that Abraham's servant had when he came looking for a wife for Isaac or he may have just wanted to rope Jacob into staying around and serving him as the good shepherd that he was.

Whatever Laban's motive, Jacob is quick to seize on the opportunity to get what he wants... Perhaps with a bit too much of his old man showing...

16 “Now Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 Leah’s eyes were delicate, but Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance. 18 Now Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, “I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter.””

I spoke a bit about these two daughters in my last message and will say a bit more in a moment, but Jacob has obviously fallen for Rachael and presents his labor as a way to show that he is serious and to provide what would have been common in those days, a dowry for the father.

So just as Abraham wanted his son married within his people Laban seems to think the same and it looks like the two are agreed: 19 “And Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me.” 20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her.

Again we seem to have the Hollywood type of romance here and so the time flies by for Jacob and then we read, 21 “Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in to her.” 22 And Laban gathered together all the men of the place and made a feast.”

- Well, so far so good, but then we begin to see a series of events that Pastor Candlish rightly portrays as subtlety and sin...

We are about to find out that Laban was not being completely honest with Jacob: Whether this was his plan from the beginning or one he hatched later in order to get more work out of Jacob, we are not told, but Jacob was certainly kept in the dark, pun intended.

23 “Now it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. 24 And Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid.”

Now of course this is going to lead us to one of the most famous portions of the Bible that is often quoted, but I am sure we all have to ask, just how was this possible?

- It certainly would not be with today’s standards where we have an open wedding and reception and the married couple going off to a honeymoon together!

While that certainly protects all of our young men from such deceptions, there might still be some lessons to learn. Some have thought that with the big party Jacob just got so drunk he did not know what he was doing, but the better understanding is that in those days marriage was considered a very solemn act and the bride was brought in the evening in darkness for the two of them to consummate the marriage.

At verse 25 we then read, “So it came to pass in the morning, that behold, it was Leah.”

Again the text is silent as to whether Leah was complaisant in the deception, but she certainly had to be involved even if it was only as an obedient daughter following her father’s commands. In either case we see the expected reaction from Jacob... “And he said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me?

Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?” *[Note the irony of this deception]* 26 And Laban said, “It must not be done so in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. 27 Fulfill her week, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years.”

We should understand here that Jacob did not have to wait another seven years to marry Rachael but that we have two marriages just a week apart. We will see in the coming weeks how these four women provide Jacob with eleven of his twelve sons in the next fourteen years. So Jacob agrees...

28 “Then Jacob did so and fulfilled her week. So he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife also. 29 And Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as a maid. 30 Then Jacob also went in to Rachel, and he also loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served with Laban still another seven years.”

Well the easy part is to say ‘boy what a mess’ especially when we consider what the Lord thinks about the institution of marriage that He created! The tougher part is to see if we have some lessons to learn.

Again, the easy one as we shall see in the coming weeks is that God works through all of our sins and shortcomings to accomplish His purposes.

- Jacob left Canaan alone and penniless and he will return with many children and riches!

Now there is a VERY wrong lesson we can take away from such accounts and that is to be thankful for the wrong things that we do in this life... Many relationships begin on ground that is sinful and God in His mercy works through it to give them a good future. Such couples should have a profound sense of God’s great mercy and should NEVER dare to say, boy I am glad we did things the way we did because otherwise we would not have the blessings we have today!

- We are to be thankful for God’s mercy and NOT for our sin!

Now that seems pretty simple until you apply it to the real situations in your life and find the flesh ready and willing to ignore God and justify your actions. This is often done with our characters here in this account and quite honestly I think we lack many of the details we would like to have so the focus remains on God’s faithfulness rather than the actions of the various characters.

With that said I will give you just a few takeaways that I think are important going forward: As we think about these men and women, it can be good to consider how the character we are playing in God’s story might relate to them... As I mentioned, there is not much good we can find with Laban... He seems to be a scoundrel and all of his actions seem to confirm this. First, he had no interest in what God had planned for the land of Canaan... Something he had to be somewhat aware of from his family.

- If he had, his interest would have been to give Jacob a wife to return with so he could serve the Lord where he was supposed to be serving.

IF Laban was in fact concerned about the customs of the day and wanted only to marry the oldest daughter first, then he should have been upfront and honest about that fact. And I think we will continue to see Laban as a deceitful & cunning man going forward.

- I think we should see Jacob as the typical Christian on their road to maturity!

I think he allowed his emotions to cloud his judgment with his infatuation with Rachael. He also would have known about the customs of that day and should have made sure that Laban was being honest in his offer, as well as being more focused on returning to the land where he belonged. And as we will discuss in the coming weeks, Jacob would also have known about God’s original institution of marriage, even though he had some bad examples in his family. On the morning that he discovered Leah in his marriage bed he had a Biblical choice to make: He could have accepted the consequences of Laban’s deception and been a loyal husband or he could have demanded an annulment because of the deception and pursued the woman he loved in a proper marriage.

And finally, we come to the women in Jacob’s life... Rachael is usually seen as the victim in all of this but as we will see in the coming weeks, she is not without her shortcomings as well. She too could have demanded that Jacob do the right thing by choosing either her or her sister as his one and only wife.

But she goes along with Laban’s wicked plan and becomes the second wife. While she has the love of her husband, she is barren for many years.

Of course in the end she does bear Joseph who will be the Savior of God’s people in the coming years so yes we do need to see that God is merciful as I pointed out just above.

And then there is Leah: At best she went along quietly with her father's deception and at worse was taking full advantage wanting to best her more beautiful sister. She too remains silent as Dad arranges for a second wife. God does bless her with many sons, including the son of promise: Judah.

Now I mentioned above that I see Jacob as the maturing Christian... Looking forward a bit I think we see this in the end with his actions toward Rachael and Leah... Rachael remained the love of his life as he remembered her near the end of his life in Egypt speaking with Joseph, and yet we also know that it was Rachael who could not leave behind her idols! And as I mentioned, Leah does bear the son of Promise who would lead to the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Jesus! She also bears Levi the ancestor of Moses and the priests and in the end Jacob has her buried in the family burial plot with Abraham & Sarah and Isaac & Rebekah!

So the bottom line is that we are to remember that NONE of this came as a surprise to God and that He was certainly able to work through all of these shortcomings to accomplish His purposes... The line of promise was preserved and Jesus would come to save His people from their sins. What we do not want to do is learn the wrong lessons! Don't be "glad" or "thankful" for sinful actions. I am sure we can all remember places where God in our lives has worked through times where we have sinned in small or even major ways... Again, we must give God thanks for His mercy and not credit our wrong actions with accomplishing what turned out in the end to be the good God promises for His people.

We must also beware despairing when we think that our sins have messed things up beyond repair.

➤ **Such thinking is both arrogant & proud!**

While we must bear with the consequences of our sins, as King David certainly did in his life, those sins are confessed and forgiven: Something we must never forget!

This is why the Bible uses such powerful images of our sins being cast into the depths of the sea or now as far from us as the east is from the west. Again we are at peace with God!

There are also important positive lessons to learn and remember from such accounts: First and foremost, we know that God is in control! While we can read these accounts and rightly think, 'what were they thinking' we must remember that NONE of this was a surprise to God.

And lest we forget, there is nothing that we have done in our lives that was a surprise to God either!

As He did with this "painful narrative of subtlty and sin" we have studied this morning, we know He WILL work all things for good... History goes exactly where God intends it to go! So whether we have past messes that comes to mind as we consider such things, or whether we are in such a mess currently, or even if we fear that we could mess things up at a future time... We must all remember the great comfort the Apostle Paul gives to all the Saints after explaining all the details of how God worked out His grand plan of salvation:

Romans 8: "26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

Communion Meditation: Romans 8

"37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." He reminds us of all this here...