

# Grace that Supersedes

*Grace from the Patriarchs*

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**Bible Text:** Genesis 29-30

**Preached On:** Sunday, July 12, 2015

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This has been a summer of an unusually large number of significant news stories. If you tend to be a news junkie, you've probably felt like you are on borderline overload the last several weeks for sure. Of course, here in the Midwest we have had the weather, did you notice that? And I hope as you drive by some of these waterlogged fields you think to pray for the farmers of our church and our community and others who work in the ag industry. Then there are all of the Supreme Court decisions and it has been challenging even to stay on top of all of the significant rulings that have been made and the impact that that's going to have on our culture. It just seems like day after day after day there is something important to follow.

But another story that captivated the nation's attention was the jailbreak at Clinton Correctional Facility in upstate New York. The more we learned about this event, the more amazing this story became. For example, the backgrounds of the escaped criminals, Richard Matt and David Sweat, were incredibly violent and so knowing people like this were on the loose would have put fear in the hearts of local residents for sure. Then there was the way they escaped because they had access to all sorts of contractor tools. Who would have known prisoners at maximum security prisons performed maintenance on their own building. They even took the time to leave a Post-it note on one of the pipes they cut through with a racial slur and a message that said, "Have a nice day." Isn't that amazing? Where did they get a pen and a pack of Post-it notes? I have trouble finding those in my office some days, they had them as part of their jailbreak routine, "Have a nice day."

Then there were the accomplices, Joyce Mitchell and her husband Lyle, and Joyce's plan to pick Richard Matt and David Sweat up at one of the manholes and drive them to Mexico after they had killed her husband, Lyle, although there seems to be a minor disagreement about whose idea that originally was but I'm not sure that gets her off the hook. "Well, it wasn't my idea, honey." "Okay, pass the pot roast." I mean, it's bad no matter who came up with it. It's an amazing tale including a number of prison officials now on administrative leave for things like sleeping on the job and all sorts of indiscretions. What kept the story in the news line was while these people were on the loose, thinking about what it would have been like to have to track them down and also

what it would have been like to be on the run because of your crimes, chased by people who intended to bring you to justice dead or alive.

Now, that part of the story, being on the run, people chasing to kill you, it's proof of Solomon's suggestion that there is nothing new under the sun because there was a man 3,000 years ago who also was on the run because of what he had done to someone else who now wanted to take his life. What is especially noteworthy is the pursuer was his own brother and the man was one of God's patriarchs. That part of the story screams a message that the Apostle Paul would later codify in Romans 5:20, "Where sin abounded," and it was abounding in this story for sure, "grace abounded all the more."

With that mind, please open your Bible now to Genesis 29. That's on page 21 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning. So Genesis 29 or page 21 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

We're doing a series this summer entitled "Grace from the Patriarchs," so this is a study of the lives of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph. Now, I realize for some of you you're new to studying the Bible but, frankly for all of us, we're getting to the place in this tale where the names could even be a bit confusing so I assume you're thinking about now, "I wonder if my pastor loves me so much that he'll ask his administrative assistant, Heather Smith, to put together a little chart to help me keep all of these names straight." Well, from "the more good news department," the answer is a resounding yes.

So think about this story up to the point of Genesis 29. Remember that Genesis 12 is one of the most pivotal chapters in the book so if you can summarize your way up to chapter 12, that's a good thing, so what are the 4 major events that preceded Genesis 12? Well, it's the creation of the world in Genesis 1 to 2. We sang about that this morning. Then the fall of man into sin, far as the curse is found would come from that section of Scripture. Then the worldwide flood and the salvation of Noah and his family in Genesis 6 to 10. Then the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. We could literally spend months and months and months studying each one of those sections of Scripture, so many lessons, which is why, by the way, the mockery of our culture often is focused on the truth that we would learn right there. But here's the big picture: we're left at the end of chapter 11 wondering how God is going to relate to sin cursed man and what the next step will be in the revelation of his plan and his character and, friends, the answer could not be any more delightful because in Genesis 12 we find the Lord coming to a childless, elderly man who at that time was named Abram, the father of many, and God did what? God made a promise to him, a covenant with a threefold provision of land and seed and blessing. He told Abraham and Sarah that he would make of them a great nation and he would bless them and through them the nations of the earth would be blessed. That is crucial and marvelous information about the nature of our God. Whenever you see the word "LORD" in the Bible in all capital letters, it's a translation of the Hebrew word "Yahweh" or "Jehovah" and one of the essential aspects of that name is that God makes covenants with people and God keeps his covenants with people and he, in turn, invites and commands men and women to exercise, what? Faith in the promises that he has made.

Now, by the time we get to Genesis 29, the promises are already being fulfilled, so much so that it's understandable if you're having trouble keeping the names straight. Do you realize that alone proves that God keeps his promises because you're having trouble tracking the seed, all the people who have been born to Abraham. Well, let's see if we can work it through. It starts with Abraham and his wife Sarah and God gave them a son and what was their son's name? Isaac. He's the one God later commanded Abraham to sacrifice and then at the last minute stayed his hand. That, by the way, was evidence of Abraham's maturing faith which is why the New Testament commentary on him was, "What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God.'" Did you this week? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace," that's a crucial phrase, "so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all." Paul says to New Testament followers of Christ as well, so a person is never saved by his or her works, it's always by grace alone through faith alone in the promises of God. But on the other hand, genuine faith produces evidence which is why James would later say that faith without works is dead. Well, Abraham's clearly was alive.

Now, another way and this detail matters when we get into Genesis 29, another way that faith was on display was the way Abraham very carefully asked the Lord to provide a wife for Isaac and the Lord did that, a person named, who? Rebekah and you can read about that in Genesis 24 if you would like to. So now we have Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Rebekah, however, the Bible tells us that Rebekah was barren and Isaac cries out to the Lord and Rebekah conceives but the pregnancy is going so badly that she laments for her own life so she cries out to the Lord and the Lord explains, "Two nations are in your womb." In other words, "You're about to have twins." We don't know for sure if she would have understood that at this point but she would have understood what God said, "Two nations are in your womb and two people's will be separated from your body. One people shall be stronger than the other; and the older," what? "The older shall serve the younger."

So now we have to add to our chart: what were the names of Isaac and Rebekah's sons? Jacob and Esau. Now, who was the firstborn? Esau was the firstborn, however, Jacob tricked his brother into selling him the birthright. Keyword "tricked," because that's the kind of person he was, he was a trickster. Esau was worse. I hope you're not like this, Esau despised his birthright meaning he really didn't care about his place in the outworking of the promises or the covenants that God had made. He just wanted to have, the text said, "a little bit of that red stuff."

Then it got worse, at the end of Isaac's life, follow your chart and remember who he is, at the end of his life he asked his favorite son, who? Esau, the hunter, to go out and kill some game and make him a savory meal so he could bless him and Isaac's wife, was who? Rebekah, heard that interchange and told her favorite son, Jacob, to go and kill a couple of goats and let her make the meal and then dress Jacob up in his brother Esau's clothes, take goat's skin and put it on his smooth skin to fool her husband, Isaac, in order to steal Esau's blessing which is exactly what they do. Well, when Esau finds out, the

Scripture tells us, "he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry." Can you hear that sound reverberating throughout the house? Then in case you wondered why I started with the introduction that I did, Genesis 27:41, "So Esau bore a grudge against," his brother, "Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.'" I will kill my brother, Jacob. It's like Cain and Abel all over again which is why when we open our chapter this morning Jacob is on the run for his own life because of the crimes he committed against his own brother.

Now, it might help us to add to our chart just a little bit more before we read these verses just to keep it all clear because here's what's about to happen: the trickster, Jacob, is about to find a wife. Now hear this: his wife's father is his mother's brother. I even got it mixed up. His wife's father is his mother's brother. What was that guy's name? Well, his name was Laban, remember that, Laban. So what was Laban's daughter's name who married Jacob? Well, that's a little complicated because there ended up being 2 of them: Rachel, whose name meant "lamb" and her sister, Leah, whose name meant "cow." Now, I'm sorry, I know I just offended a bunch of Leahs. I am sorry. You are beautiful. There has never been a more beautiful person than you. I mean, no question about that but in this text, that's part of this story. And you say, "That's weird, he married both of them?" He did and before it's all over, Leah and Rachel are each going to suggest that their husband, Jacob, have physical relations with their maids, Bilhah and Zilpah. You say, "How are we going to get that on this chart?" Well, Heather figured it out. There you go. There you go and while we are not going to make this any more complicated this morning, here's the point: Jacob with those 4 women conceived the sons who become the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel. Chew on that for a moment. Jacob through those 4 women conceived the sons who become the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel. What was it Paul said again? "Where sin abounds," thank God, "grace does much more abound." That's why we want to talk this morning about grace that supersedes.

Now, let's read this. I wanted to give you that much so that what we read from the Bible is easier to understand. I am going to read an extended text. Don't zone out on me, right? It's not time to be planning how many brauts you're going to eat at lunch. I would recommend 3 myself but that's not what this is for. Slather that baby with mustard. But anyway, here we go again, Genesis 29, beginning in verse 1.

"Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the sons of the east. He looked, and saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep were lying there beside it, for from that well they watered the flocks. Now the stone on the mouth of the well was large. When all the flocks were gathered there, they would then roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well.

"Jacob said to them," this is the trickster now, "'My brothers, where are you from?' And they said, 'We are from Haran.' He said to them, 'Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?' And they said, 'We know him.' And he said to them, 'Is it well with him?' And they said, 'It is well and here,'" wow, coincidence, "'is Rachel his daughter coming with the sheep.'

He said, 'Behold, it is still high day; it is not time for the livestock to be gathered. Water the sheep, and go, pasture them,'" which probably meant, "Hey, you guys need to get out of here because I want to talk to this girl alone." "But they said, 'We cannot, until all the flocks are gathered, and they roll the stone from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep.'

"While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. When Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob went up and rolled the stone," by himself, "Look at my muscles, baby." "And rolled the stone from the mouth of the well and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. Then," this is what seals, I think, what we're saying about this part of the text, "Jacob kissed Rachel," and you might say, "Well, so? That's no big deal." In that culture that would have been huge, to do it in that setting, in that particular way. "And lifted his voice and wept." I guess he did. "Jacob told Rachel that he was a relative of her father," eww, "and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father.

"So when Laban heard the news of Jacob his sister's son, he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Then he related to Laban all these things. Laban said to him, 'Surely you are my bone and my flesh.' And he stayed with him a month.

"Then Laban said to Jacob, 'Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?' Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah," do I need to say it again? "And the name of the younger was Rachel. And Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful of form and face. Now Jacob loved Rachel, so he said, 'I will serve you,'" here's the deal, here's my wages, "'I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.' Laban said, 'It is better that I give her to you than to give her to another man; stay with me.' So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her." Aw, that's what you all say there.

"Then Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife, for my time is completed, that I may go in to her.' Laban gathered all the men of the place and made a feast. Now in the evening he took his daughter Leah," uh-oh, "and brought her to him; and Jacob went in to her. Laban also gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid. So it came about in the morning," proof that apparently it was really dark and they had spent a lot of time drinking. "So it came about 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 with you? Why then have you deceived me?'" Jacob is going to ask anybody why they deceived him? "But Laban said, 'It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also for the service which you shall serve with me for another seven years.' Jacob did so and completed her week, and he gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife. Laban also gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid." You say, "What do these maids

have to do?" Oh, just keep reading. "So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and indeed he loved Rachel more than Leah, and he served with Laban for another seven years.

"Now the LORD saw," here's where the 12 tribes of Israel come in, "Now the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Leah conceived and bore a son and named him Reuben, for she said, 'Because the LORD has seen my affliction; surely now my husband will love me.'" Isn't that terrible? "Then she conceived again and bore a son and said, 'Because the LORD has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also.' So she named him Simeon. She conceived again," a third time, "and bore a son and said, 'Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.' Therefore he was named Levi. And she conceived again and bore a son and said, 'This time I will praise the LORD.' Therefore she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing."

Well, I thought there were 12 tribes? Keep reading. "Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister; and she said to Jacob, 'Give me children, or else I die.'" You see, Jacob. "Then Jacob's anger burned against Rachel, and he said, 'Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?' She said, 'Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children.' So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her. Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. Then Rachel said, 'God has vindicated me, and has indeed heard my voice and has given me a son.' Therefore she named him Dan. Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. So Rachel said, 'With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and I have indeed prevailed.' And she named him Naphtali.

"When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took her maid," because we need to get 4 women in this, "she took her maid, Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. Then Leah said, 'How fortunate!'" I guess. "So she named him Gad. Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. Then Leah said, 'Happy am I! For women will call me happy,'" or something, "So she named him Asher."

Now, you say, "This could not get any weirder." Oh yes it could. We haven't talked about the mandrakes yet. "Now in the days of wheat harvest Reuben," so now Reuben is probably a teenager, "went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, 'Please give me some of your son's mandrakes.' But she said to her, 'Is it a small matter for you to take my husband? And would you take my son's mandrakes also?' So Rachel said, 'Therefore he,'" Jacob, our husband, "'may lie with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes.' When Jacob came in from the field in the evening, then Leah went out to meet him and said, 'You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes.'" Yeah. "So he lay with her that night. God gave heed to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. Then Leah said, 'God has given me my wages because I gave my maid to my husband.' So she named him Issachar. Leah conceived again and bore a sixth son to Jacob. Then Leah said, 'God has endowed me with a good gift; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne

him six sons.' So she named him Zebulun. Afterward she bore a daughter and named her Dinah." Remember that name.

"Then God remembered Rachel, and God gave heed to her and opened her womb. So she conceived and bore a son and said, 'God has taken away my reproach.' She named him Joseph, saying, 'May the LORD give me another son.'"

I'm not going to take the time to read the rest of the chapter but what ends up happening is that Jacob says to his father-in-law Laban, "Listen, it's time for me and my tribe to go." And Laban says, "No, I want you to stay." So Jacob concocts this plan where when they are able to go, his animals are going to be strongest and just look at verse 42 for sake of time, "when the flock was feeble, he did not put them in; so the feebler were Laban's," Jacob is still up to things, "and the stronger Jacob's. So," here's what's amazing, "the man," Jacob, "became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys."

We're talking about grace. This story needs some grace. We're talking about grace that supersedes and with the time we have left let's talk about 3 lessons regarding grace in the midst of human frailty. First of all, whenever human beings are involved, sin and heartache are not far behind. Is that the understatement of the day from this text? And remember that one of the first questions we always ask of any passage of Scripture is: how would that have impacted the original audience? What was the point to them? And one of the answers is: the powerful and repetitive reminder of the sinfulness of man. No one would read the book of Genesis and walk away thinking, "This is a story of the marvelous deeds of our perfect ancestors." No, it was more likely they would respond as the hymn writer eventually did, "No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground." We need a King, that's what we need. We need a perfect Savior. "He comes to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found." And it's far. "Far as the curse is found." We desperately need a perfect King who eventually is the point of all of this anyway.

Now, think quickly about just some of the sin and the heartache in this text. You have Jacob's lack of spiritual depth and leadership and we're not going to take the time to do so this morning but it's very interesting to compare the way Jacob went about pursuing Rachel and the way his grandfather, Abraham, had previously gone about finding a wife for Jacob's father, Isaac. But in point after point you see Jacob, the trickster, manipulating the situation or at best using human methodology to fill his emptiness and his loneliness with little or no prayer and little or no focus on God and his plan and what ends up happening is one of God's patriarchs has allowed his family to get so out of hand that he ends up siring the 12 tribes of Israel through 4 different women.

Then there is Laban's treachery. The examples of the duplicitous nature of this man are everywhere like the way he treats his daughters. It's interesting, he gives them names that allude to animals because that's certainly the way he treats them. Then there's the way Laban connives over and over. In fact, at the end of this narrative, Jacob is able to say, "These 20 years I have been in your house. I served you 14 years for your 2 daughters

and 6 years for your flock. You have changed my wages 10 times, you conniver." That's what sometimes happens apparently when your boss is your uncle. See how far the curse is found.

Then tragically Leah and Rachel's rivalry. What a sad situation when the men in the family have placed them in this unprincipled mess. I mean, you wonder what their relationship would have been like even before Jacob appeared; how the lamb and the cow related to one another growing up. Now each one has what the other person wants. Leah can have children but is unloved by her husband, Jacob. Rachel is loved but can't conceive. Jacob went into Rachel also and indeed he loved Rachel more than Leah. He served with Laban for another 7 years. I wonder if the conversation around the supper table ever became tense? Then you throw in a couple of maids and you just shake your head at the misery that sin brings to a family. And you understand that all of this is driving to the point that this is the ancestral root of the 12 tribes of Israel and I assume if you study your Bible at all, you recognize the names of these sons. They are going to figure rather prominently into the Joseph story that takes up a significant portion of the remainder of the book of Genesis but every one of their names points to this rivalry and this division between these sisters.

So for example, the firstborn, Leah conceives and bears a son and names him Reuben for she said, "Because the Lord has seen my affliction, surely now my husband will love me." The name Reuben literally means "See, a son." See, a son. See, a son. And you can almost imagine Leah calling Reuben's name as many times as she possibly can in Rachel's presence. "See, a son, See, a son, come here. See, a son. See, a son. Rachel, what do you have? Oh, no son." And how pitiful, "Surely now my husband will love me."

Or 2 sons later she conceived again and bore a son and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me because I have borne him these 3 sons, therefore he was named Levi," literally "my husband will now cling to me." Can you imagine putting this on the 12 tribes' website in this section that gives the brief summary of your history? "Thank you for your interest in the tribe of Dan. We began when our father's mother suggested he have physical relations with her maid, Bilhah." There is not enough full color processed photographs in the entire Promised Land to pretty this story up on the website. And what's the point? What is the point? Why is this in the Bible? We human beings are desperately in need of redemption. If the Lord had to wait until we figured everything out before he could or would accomplish his plan, he would be waiting an awfully long time. The depth of our depravity is real and multifaceted.

Now, let's not be too hard on our ancestors. We have a lot more truth than they would have had at this point in the revelation of God but most importantly, we stand on this side of the cross so the promises of God culminated in the promised Son of God and his death and his resurrection make it possible for families to live far differently than what we are seeing this morning. You see, they needed a great King, we have a great King. "Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound."

So we've been seeing that work its way out this summer in all sorts of ways where you have Christ centered individuals and Christ centered families being looking for ways to embrace their birthright unlike Esau. Their place in the plan and the program of God and growing in godliness as individuals and families and then serving the Lord together and inviting other people to join this adventure of faith. People who are unlike Jacob and unlike Esau and unlike Laban by the grace of God. Let's take VBS, vacation Bible school. Had some very godly single men and women and in some cases people who might desire to be married someday but they are using this time of singleness not to be bitter and not to be jealous but to seize and to find their joy in Christ and then faithfully serve alongside their brothers and sisters in the church.

Then there are moms and dads who could have come up with all sorts of reasons not to serve at vacation Bible school or not to serve in the community picnic or not to serve in one of our other community outreaches but so many times it starts with a man, a husband, who is allowing Christ to transform him into being an anti-Jacob, becoming a godly man and trying to lead his family down that same path. Not that his family is perfect but a lot different than what we are studying this morning. Then he takes the bandwidth because you realize the way of the transgressor is hard. All of this sin takes up a whole lot of time and bandwidth in the family and if you let Christ, the Lord of grace, transform your life, that provides you with bandwidth and many times they channel that extra time and energy into growing and serving Christ together. What I'm saying is, just because this is the way it was during the life of one of the patriarchs doesn't mean that has to be the way it is in a follower of Jesus Christ's life today because of grace that supersedes. "Joy to the world, the Lord has come. Let receive her King."

Now, secondly, God often uses the principle of power and the power of cause and effect. We would be asleep at the Bible study wheel if we missed one of the obvious points of this text. Jacob is being out-Jacobed by his uncle. Now, by the way, you know, that sounds kind of clever. Can we all just agree right now that any time I ever say something that sounds rather clever it's because I got it from somebody else? That's actually exactly what one of the commentators, K. A. Matthews, says about all of this. Jacob is being out-Jacobed by his uncle. But here is a man who tricked his brother into selling him his birthright. You know, he could have just shared the red stew with his hungry brother for nothing and then who tricked his father by pretending to be Esau even to the point of allowing his mother to place his brother's manly smelling garments on him. Then attaching animal skins to his hairless hands and neck. The trickster and now it is time for that chicken to come home to roost which is why Paul would later write to the Galatians and say, "Don't be deceived. God is not mocked." That's one of the lessons that come screaming out of this text. "Whatsoever a man sows, that will he also reap." What's amazing is there is no indication that Jacob started to connect the dots. "Oh, God is helping me see that my uncle is doing to me exactly what I did to my brother and my father." That will happen, by the way, next week when Jacob has a little extended wrestling match but I don't want to get ahead of the story. Here's the point: God's superseding grace doesn't eradicate cause and effect. God often uses that principle but in a way that is balanced and appropriate even when his children have been reckless and deserved far worse.

Now, there is another piece of this puzzle and that is the inter-generational lessons here. You see, tell me again, what was the relationship between Rebekah and Laban? The answer is: Rebekah and Laban were brother and sister. Well, think about this: where did Jacob learn to be such a trickster? Where did Jacob learn to be such a conniver? Where did Jacob learn to be such a deceiver? Here's at least part of the sad answer: on his mama's knee because his mama was just like that and when you look at Rebekah and Laban, it would appear that that was part of her extended family's DNA. Cause and effect. Sometimes inter-generationally.

By the way, Rebekah paid a heavy price for this. After the scheme where they tricked Isaac into giving Jacob the blessing instead of Esau, Rebekah advised Jacob to leave town for a while but how long did she think that would be? Verse 43 of Genesis 27, "Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise, flee to Haran, to my brother Laban! Stay with him a," what? "A few days." You are my favorite son, I want you back. "Stay with him a few days, until your brother's fury subsides, until your brother's anger against you subsides and he forgets," seriously, mom? "He forgets what you did to him. Then I will send and get you from there. Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?" What Rebekah failed to calculate was she was sending her son into the arms of a man, namely her brother, who was every bit as much a conniver as she was and it would be not a few days. It would be 20 years before Jacob left that place and as far as I can tell other than a couple of ancillary references that don't advance the story at all, this is the last time in the Bible you read Rebekah's name. You see, believing her deception would only cost her a few days away from her favorite son when it appears to have cost her far more. What I'm saying is: yes, God's grace supersedes but not in a way that entirely removes the power of cause and effect. The trickster was severely tricked as a means of eventually helping him see himself for who he really was.

Now, do you want some good news? You see, this is not a very happy sermon. Oh, there is some good news to this and that is: cause and effect works both ways. You see, you want to get cause and effect working in a positive direction in your life which is why Paul explained to the Galatians, he said, "For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption." We're seeing that here but, but, "the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." Don't be afraid of cause and effect. It can be your friend. "Therefore let us not lose heart in doing good for in due time we will reap," we will, "if we don't grow weary. So then while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people." That's the kind of sowing you do, "and especially to those who are of the household of faith." You see, you can read this portion of the Jacob narrative and say, "Now wait a minute, what if I chose to be the opposite? He's sowing to the flesh and reaping to the flesh, what if I try to lead my family to sow to the Spirit? If I try to live for the Lord and lead my family to do the same, isn't it possible in the sovereign plan of God that he is going to bless us just like he chose to judge Jacob?" What is the answer to that? Absolutely.

Here are some ways that is true. Often in the summertime, parents who live in other places usually at or near retirement age will come to Faith and the reason they are here

just for a Sunday usually is because they are visiting their adult children who are faithful members at our church. That gives me the opportunity to thank them for faithfully raising their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord unlike Rebekah. And I often say to such men and woman, "Our church in general and our pastors in particular are enjoying the benefits of your faithful parenting." That's true. "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old, he will not depart from it." And that doesn't always work that way but those elderly parents can now rejoice in the satisfaction of their adult children living faithfully for the Lord and making an eternal difference in one of Christ's churches. Cause and effect. They sow to the Spirit and they are reaping to the Spirit which is why John said, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth." Cause and effect.

Another way that plays out is when a family here has a child who decides the Lord wants him or her to be in some kind of full-time vocational ministry. I love being able to say to kids like that, "I hope the Lord gives you church members who are as faithful to your church as your parents have been to ours. They have been such a help, such an encouragement, such a blessing to our pastors and our church for all these years. We're going to pray that God gives you some people just like them." And he often does. "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap." Frequently inter-generationally. Now, on the other hand, I have to be honest with you about that particular point: there has been a person or 2 over the years where I have thought or even in a case or 2 said, "I hope for your sake that one of your children is not called into full-time Christian ministry because if the Lord populates your child's church with members like you, that will be a very difficult ministry assignment and I wouldn't wish that on anybody, especially on your children." Cause and effect is a powerful principle that God has built into his world.

There are also corporate implications of this. I am so glad, these are some pictures that were taken from a youth ministry project down on the north end and our youth leaders and our young people are investing time because our mayor asked us to, in ministry, down in the north end. They could be doing all kinds of things this summer but what are they doing? Sowing to the Spirit. Sowing to the Spirit. Not being weary in well doing, believing that God will keep his word regarding cause and effect. Looking to reap in the Spirit young people and others in that part of town who will place their faith and trust in Christ. Powerful principle.

Now lastly, God accomplishes his purpose through flawed people and metes out consequences in a way that is perfectly balanced. There is some good news, huh? Cause and effect in grace. Perfectly balanced. You see, you read some of these verses and you think the Lord could never use these people in the accomplishment of his plan. They are far beyond the possibility of ever being blessed in any possible way which is why it is so curious that the very end of all of this is Jacob being, what? Jacob being blessed. "So the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys." You read that and say, "Seriously? God allowed that to work? Why? Why?" What is the answer? Because he is a God of grace. He rules the world. Don't you feel like singing it? Put up the Christmas tree. He rules the world with truth

and grace and makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness and the wonders of his love, the wonders of his love. The wonders, the wonders of his love.

And I realize you might say, "You know, I think Jacob should have gotten his comeuppance right then and there." Or maybe with some of these contemporary stories in the news, "I think some of those Supreme Court justices..." Well, think about this: do you really want to be the one who decides when God should use full-blown cause and effect and on the other hand, when he should extend grace? I hope you don't. What is it that Paul said in Romans 12? "Vengeance is," yours, do you want it? You had better never want that. "Vengeance is mine says the Lord." Here's the point: let's thank the Lord for the principle of cause and effect but let's thank him more for grace that supersedes.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

*Father in heaven, we do praise you and we praise you for putting verses like this in your word because it shows us or reminds us of our own depravity. And Lord, thank you that you have built cause and effect into your world and I pray that we would be rightly challenged by it but we especially praise you that there is more to the story than that. Thank you for grace that supersedes because we desperately need it. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.*