

Genesis 29 A Providential Mess 8/5/18

Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east. ² As he looked, he saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep lying beside it, for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, ³ and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place over the mouth of the well.

⁴ Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where do you come from?" They said, "We are from Haran." ⁵ He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" They said, "We know him." ⁶ He said to them, "Is it well with him?" They said, "It is well; and see, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep!" ⁷ He said, "Behold, it is still high day; it is not time for the livestock to be gathered together. Water the sheep and go, pasture them." ⁸ But they said, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep."

⁹ While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. ¹⁰ Now as soon as Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. ¹¹ Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. ¹² And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father.

¹³ As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, ¹⁴ and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month.

¹⁵ Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" ¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. ¹⁸ Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." ¹⁹ Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to

any other man; stay with me.”²⁰ So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

²¹ Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.”²² So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast.²³ But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her.²⁴ (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.)²⁵ And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?”²⁶ Laban said, “It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.²⁷ Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.”²⁸ Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife.²⁹ (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.)³⁰ So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years.³¹ When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.³² And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, “Because the LORD has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me.”³³ She conceived again and bore a son, and said, “Because the LORD has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also.” And she called his name Simeon.³⁴ Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, “Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.” Therefore his name was called Levi.³⁵ And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, “This time I will praise the LORD.” Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing.

(Pastor prays)

Often, starting over sounds really good. New friends, new job, maybe a new spouse, a change of scenery will do you some good. The problem is that, wherever you go, there you are. You might be able to run from your past, but you can't run from yourself and you certainly can't run from God.

Today, we are dropped back into the Odyssey of Jacobs life. By the time we pick him up in chapter 29, he's been through a lot. He has had a strange encounter with God back in chapter 28 that lifted his spirits and gave him hope. But hope has a way of leaking out without someone or something to fill it back up.

Jacob's life is empty again. Jacob never actually had the love of a father. His brother can't stand the sight of him, and his mother is so overbearing that even though she's not in this story, she still controls him. Jacob is like many of us here. He made a colossal mess of his life, and instead of facing the damage and changing his course, he runs. At least he thinks he does, not yet knowing, in the words of Dallas Willard, God is the divine conspirator working out all the events of your life to bring you to a full-hearted yielding to Jesus Christ as Lord.

Life is Not as Chaotic as You Think It Is

There are no chance happenings with God.

No accidents, no coincidences, no luck, no right time, no right place. This passage before us lays out the doctrine of God's providence. So, what I read in Luke yesterday where Jesus says, "the hairs of my head are numbered," that means something. There can't be a chance happening in a world that is governed by the living God. Let's see His hand in the narrative.

Look at Jacob in verses 1-3. He's traveled hundreds of miles on foot. He's looking for his Uncle Laban from Haran. He runs into some shepherds in verses 2 - 3 and look what he asks in verse 4. *4 Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where do you come from?" They said, "We are from Haran."* God put him there.

It gets better in verses 5 - 6 . He asks if they know his uncle. They respond, yeah, we know him. In verse 6 they say, there's his daughter now. Providence. In verse 9, Rachel comes up, she is a shepherdess. In verse 10, Jacob decides to show his strength and moves the stone. In verse 11, he kisses her and breaks out weeping. Verse 12, she goes to get her father. I have a lot to cover and several people to point out. What does this scene tell us?

God Keeps His Promises

In chapter 28 Jacob has a dream. God said He would be with him and keep him. He's traveled hundreds of miles and God has brought him to his relative's place. There is a promise of love. Every promise is fulfilled in Christ.

God is Interested

All of this is dominated by a sense of going somewhere, and along the way God is in the details. A journey, shepherds, a stop at the well. God is with Jacob and Emmanuel means “God is with us.”

Don't See Life in Fragments

Jacob's life has all these things and events that seem disconnected. Birthright, blessing, Jacob's ladder in Chapter 28. And each segment seen alone doesn't mean much. Just like a stray piece of a jigsaw puzzle sitting alone has no value. And if you live your life in fragments, you deny God. It's what A. W. Pink said: history in fragments denies God.

None of your life up to this very moment has been an accident. Your life is not a snapshot, it's a movie. The plot is God's glory. The protagonist is Jesus Christ and the theme of that movie is redemption through the cross. All of life has been pressing you to see the emptiness of your heart and the love of God found at the cross of Jesus. There are no chance happenings with God.

There is No Escaping the Discipline with God.

If you think of Jacob's life in fragments, it's easy to forget the disaster he left back at his father's house. He dishonored his dad, he cheated his brother, and now is estranged from his mother. There doesn't seem to be any remorse, no regret, no repentance, only running. And it looks like he's going to get to go away with it. That is until Laban shows up. Let's rejoin the story. Jacob embraces Rachel and she goes to get her father Laban, and that's where we picked up. Let's read verses 13 – 14. *As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, ¹⁴ and Laban said to him, “Surely you are my bone and my flesh!” And he stayed with him a month.*

It sounds so happy until verses 15-25. Let me read with comment and maybe come back with some possible application. ¹⁵ *Then Laban said to Jacob, “Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?”*¹⁶ *Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. ¹⁸ Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, “I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.”*¹⁹ *Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than*

that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.” ²⁰ So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

²¹ Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.” ²² So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. ²³ But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. ²⁴ (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) ²⁵ And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?”

Being *spiritual* and being *emotional* are not the same thing. In verse 11 there is weeping. In verse 18 there is a quick, extravagant decision because he is obsessed with Rachel. Be guided by the Word, not emotions.

God disciplines those He calls and loves. Discipline and punishment are different things. All those who reject the free offer of Salvation through Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross, if you reject that, then you reject the fatherhood of God. You are not His child and you will, sadly, be punished in Hell.

But those of us who have repented and turned to the cross, are redeemed by the blood of Jesus and adopted as God's children. But we still must be disciplined. Laban, in this text, is there to discipline Jacob. The trickster is tricked, the deceiver is deceived. Through this man Laban, Jacob drank deeply of his own medicine, reminding us once again that outside the cross of Jesus, whatever a man sows, so shall he reap. And God uses people in our lives, sometimes hateful people who don't have our best interest in mind, He uses them to shape and discipline and restrain us and teach us. Jacob would spend 20 years under the authority of a liar. God put Laban there to discipline him.

Deep Disappointments Drive Us to Christ

Verse 11 says, Jacob loved Rachel. Verse 18, Jacob loved Rachel. Verse 20, Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her. He does not have a real sense of God's love. All of his desires and longings are fixed on Rachel. That is a mistake. All of the freight of his heart, all of his needs, all of his longings are placed on Rachel. In verses 22 - 25, Jacob thought he went to bed with Rachel but he woke up with Leah. Derek Kidner said that verse 25 is a miniature of our

disillusioned experience from the time of the fall of the Garden of Eden up until now. Going to bed with Rachel and waking up with Leah. Whether it's a marriage, or a job or a new town or a new haircut or whatever makes you think, "Finally, this is gonna fix it. It is going to be great from here on out. This is going to fix my life and make me happy."

In the morning, it's always Leah. That is, until you meet the bridegroom Jesus Christ who laid down his life for sinners that we might be reconciled to God. I think C. S. Lewis said it best. He said, "If I find in myself a desire that no experience in the world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." We were created in the image of God, for the glory of God and can be redeemed by the son of God.

There Is More To Life Than What You See

I'll close by thinking about Leah. She's the oldest sister but has always been outshone by Rachel. Rachel was so pretty. But Leah wanted what we all want but what she was doing with Jacob, Jacob was doing with Rachel.

Leah had four children and she thought with each one that they would make Jacob love her. In verse 32 Leah names her first son Ruben and thinks "maybe now my husband will love me." The second is named Simeon because she thinks the Lord has given him to her because her husband hates her. All of her affection is put on Jacob. Now with Levi she hopes her husband will be attached to her. It doesn't work, though. Judah. This time she says, "This time I will praise the Lord."

Judah. In the New Testament there is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Jesus Christ is the son of Leah. Leah is the Gospel. Keller called her the girl that nobody wanted, but she gave us the man that nobody wanted. Born in a manger. He had no beauty that we should desire him. He came to visit and His own received him not. He was stricken, smitten of God and afflicted.

(Now is a good time to join me praying.) He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon Him was the chastisement that brings us peace and with His wounds we are healed.

This morning, if you will confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. God has been working in all of your life to bring you to this moment.

(Pastor prays)