

## Midweek Meditation, December 9, 2020, week of December 6

Genesis 29:15-30

Now, you may remember from last week, after Jacob had his dream about the stairway leading to heaven, he continues on his journey until he arrives at the homeland of his mother's family, which was his destination. He was sent by Isaac, his father, to go to the house of Rebekah's brother, Laban. And he is encouraged by his father and his mother, to choose a wife from the children of his uncle, Laban. So, when he finds out that those shepherds at the well know Laban, he is happy. His journey is complete. He then meets Laban's daughter, Rachel, and it seems as though it is love at first sight.

Laban takes his nephew into his house, and Jacob stays there for a month. All that time, Jacob has pitched in to help his uncle, Laban, with his fields. After a month, Laban says to Jacob, "Just because you are a relative of mine, it doesn't mean that I shouldn't pay you for your work. Tell me what your wages should be." And Jacob said that he would give Laban seven years of faithful service, if he would give to Jacob the hand of his younger daughter, Rachel.

And then Laban says, "It is better that I give her to you than to some other man." So, Jacob turned in seven years of service to Laban in exchange for the hand of Rachel, who he clearly was head over heels in love with. Jacob says, in our passage, that the seven years that he served was like only a couple of days because of his love for Rachel.

But as you know, Laban had in mind a different plan than Jacob did. Laban came to realize that he was becoming wealthy because of Jacob; partly because Laban believes that God's blessing is with Jacob, and partly because Laban is not actually paying money for Jacob's labor. He is receiving the benefit of Jacob's labor for the hand of his daughter. So, Laban devises a scheme to further take advantage of the fact that Jacob is willing to do almost anything in order to be joined in marriage to Rachel. Laban figures that if I was able to get seven years of free labor for one daughter, maybe I can get another seven years of labor for my other daughter.

So, at the end of Jacob's seven years of labor for the hand of Rachel, Laban throws a huge wedding party for what Jacob believes to be, the union between him and Rachel, but Laban sends his oldest daughter Leah into the wedding chamber, and Jacob is joined in marriage to Leah instead of his beloved Rachel. And he didn't realize it until it was too late. Jacob must have had the same feeling in his heart as Isaac did when Isaac realized that he had given the family birthright to Jacob instead of Esau.

Obviously, Jacob is furious with Laban when he finds out that he had been tricked into marrying Leah instead of Rachel, and he says to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?"

Well, Laban gives an excuse, that it is not our custom to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older daughter. Then Laban amends the original deal. He says to Jacob, finish out the bridal week for your union with Leah, and then you may have my younger daughter, but only if you will give me another seven years of service. Laban knew that Jacob would comply with this new deal, because he wanted to be with Rachel so badly. At the end of Leah's bridal week, Laban gave Jacob Rachel's hand in marriage, and Jacob worked another seven years, just like he had agreed to. Perhaps the next seven years didn't seem only like a couple of days like the first seven years did, because this second seven years was a lot more complicated, thanks to the dishonesty and insincerity of Jacob's uncle, Laban.

Jacob originally agreed to work for seven years, marry his beloved Rachel, and then, return home to his family. Now, he had two wives, one who he desired, and one who was imposed on him; one who he loved, and one who he didn't. And, his two wives were sisters, so there was awkwardness between them. Also, he was now working for a man that he probably despised because of this new deal. Now, he was working for a man that he could not trust.

Let's think about the people in this story. Laban was completely about enriching himself, without regard to the feelings of his daughters. He had no regard for the feelings of his nephew. He was completely willing to take advantage of Jacob's love for Rachel. Laban understood that Jacob was willing to do almost anything because of his love for Rachel. Laban had no desire to do business with integrity. He clearly did not live up to his end of the bargain that Jacob and he had struck. What is worse, I don't think that Laban had any regard to what God's plan was for Jacob, Rachel, or Leah, or even himself. He wants blessings, but not the kind of blessings that are going to lead him up the stairway that Jacob recently dreamed about.

I think it is interesting that there are so many similarities between this situation that Jacob is facing and the situation with Jacob and Esau from several chapters ago. Just like there were awkward and difficult feelings between Jacob and Esau, there were now difficulties between Rachel and Leah. And in the coming passages, things are not going to get better for them. Another similarity is that the difficulties between Rachel and Leah, and Esau and Jacob, are imposed on them, at least in part by their parents. Also, from all of the awkwardness and hard feelings, in the end, what we see is God's will emerge. I believe that this whole situation is something like Abraham's experience of being asked to sacrifice his son, Isaac. This is a difficult stretch for Jacob, but over the course of this 14 years of service, Jacob and perhaps Rachel too, are being molded into the people that will be able to lead the nation Israel.

Now I have to ask, what lessons can we learn from this passage? Laban is completely focused on himself. He has no regard for anyone around him. Sometimes we are like Laban. This story paints a stark picture of what happens when we are too focused on ourselves, and not enough on those around us, and on God. Now, this is a stark example, but I think we can all remember a time when we put ourselves first, at the expense of others. We can remember a time when our indifference to the feelings of those around us, has created awkwardness and hurt feelings. What if Laban had had compassion for his daughters instead of whatever it was that he had in his heart?

Perhaps Leah and Rachel and Jacob would all have been happier, and more fulfilled in God's purpose, rather than being beholden to Laban's purpose. But, like I said before, it is God's will that emerges from the chaos. Because of Uncle Laban, Jacob, Rachel and Leah are better able to be who God created them to be, in spite of Laban's wrong-doing.

We don't really see emotion from the others too much in this passage. Leah is forced to marry a man who she knows is in love with her sister. Yet she complies with her father's wishes without complaint. We don't really know if Rachel's love for Jacob is as intense as Jacob for her. And we don't really get a sense of anger and frustration with Jacob at his uncle. Perhaps we will get a clearer picture of the emotions in response to this horrible circumstance that Laban has imposed on Rachel and Leah and Jacob in later chapters of this story. And a part of that story will begin to emerge as the blessing of children comes into Jacob's life. And we will have that discussion next week as we pick up with that last part of the 29<sup>th</sup> chapter. Let us pray...