

SERIES: Unwavering Faith (Genesis Vol. 3)

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One of the ways vividly portrayed in this particular story is with this whole discussion related to this large stone that covered the well. It seems to be a fairly prominent issue in this story, and we find ourselves wondering, *Who cares? Who cares if there's a stone on the well and how many people it takes to move it so the sheep can drink?* But you remember, in the previous story there was a great emphasis on the stone, the big rock, that Jacob had put by his head, because that was his protection in the night. But at the end of the story, when he believes that *God* will be his protection and God's presence will be with him, he in a sense sanctifies that stone as a way of saying, *I now know God will be my protector and God's presence will be with me.*

So now Jacob's taking this journey and here's this large stone on this well. We're told in the story it was so big that it took a number of shepherds or shepherdesses to lift it together. That's what they said: "We have to wait until lots of the flocks are here and we have enough people to move this stone." But Jacob decides to do it himself.

Now just picture that scene of Jacob moaning and groaning and grunting trying to get that stone off the well so that Rachel's sheep can drink. There's a picture there that that's still where Jacob is at. He's still on his own, operating in his own strength and his own power. If you can visualize what that would look like, it's an imagery of where Jacob is still at in his thinking. He's still trying to do this himself.

Do you remember that great story where Jacob has this dream of a ladder coming down from the Heavens right to his feet? We find out in the New Testament that ladder is Jesus Christ Himself, the Messiah, and He is that connection between a holy God and sinful people. It's the very power and presence of God that descends that ladder and actually comes into our lives, and He dwells in His people personally—that He might lead us and guide us and direct us in a very personal and intimate way. But Jacob still doesn't understand that.

But isn't that often how we live out our Christian lives? God has promised that when we trust Jesus as our Savior: "I give you My very presence. I live within you. I promise I'll lead you; I'll guide you; I'll direct you every step of the way." But so often we just continue to navigate as if He's not there, just like we did before. We're lost and we're guessing and we're making bad decisions—and we're living with the consequences of that. Just like Jacob, sometimes we just don't get it. And there's a price to pay for that.

Well, Jacob meets Rachel. He introduces himself, gives her a kiss (not a romantic kiss, but more like a "we're family" kiss). She runs back to Laban, and Laban dashes down to meet Jacob. Now I happen to think Laban had dollar signs in his eyes—because the last time this transaction happened where Abraham had sent someone to negotiate for a wife, Laban became a very rich man: ten camels full of wealth. So he hears "another relative of Abraham" and he's all over

that. He runs down there; and probably much to his dismay, he finds Jacob with *nothing*. But he invites him into the house and he's still going to *get* something from Jacob.

So the story goes on:

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, 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 seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.” Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than 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. (Gen. 29:15-20)

Whenever you see a word or a phrase repeated often in a Hebrew narrative, you want to notice that—especially if it feels like it's repeated in an unnatural way. From Verses 15-30, the word “serve” is repeated seven times. The writer is trying to make a point that this one who is the Promised Seed, where the older would serve the younger because of his choices, now finds himself as a servant of his uncle Laban. There's a price to pay for his choices. So they're going to work out this deal.

Leah is described as one with “weak eyes.” That could be translated “soft or tender eyes.” It doesn't necessarily mean that she was a homely girl. As a matter of fact, it may be a statement of her beauty. It just says of Rachel that she was beautiful in form and face. She was exceptional. Jacob loves her and says, “I want to marry her.” So he's going to work out a deal.

Now the going rate for a wife was 30-40 shekels. A shepherd made about 10 shekels a year. So Jacob is paying about double what the going rate would be. It's a very generous offer. But the end of Verse 20 is such that it's just this beautiful love story. It seemed to Jacob to be nothing—these seven years—because he was in love. At the end of Verse 20, we should just sigh and say, “Ahh, [Laughter] it's so nice.” And I think we're supposed to kind of feel like this is all working out—he's in love; it's lovely—because about the time we're in that mood, Verse 21 really strikes us. Verse 21 is as crude as Verse 20 is beautiful:

Then Jacob said to Laban [*now seven years have passed here*], “Give me my wife, for my time is completed, that I may go in to her.”

It appears there is a level of frustration at this point in Jacob. Apparently the seven years have passed and Laban hasn't come forth with his daughter. Jacob is getting frustrated and finally he says, “Hey, give me my wife; it's time.”

I do find it interesting in Verse 19 that when Jacob offers to purchase Rachel, Laban's endorsement is not really a ringing endorsement. It's kind of like, “Well, better you than somebody else.” So you get this feeling something is up here. But now we know something's up. Now we have a bad feeling. Now we know something's not going to work.

The story goes on:

Laban gathered all the men of the place and made a feast. Now in the evening he took his daughter Leah, and brought her to him; and Jacob went in to her

[uh oh]. Laban also gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid. 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?” But Laban said, “It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the first-born. (Vs. 22-26)

In that culture, they didn't really have a wedding ceremony. They had a wedding party, a wedding feast. At the end of the first day, the bride would be brought out; she'd be veiled; and the marriage would be consummated. And then they'd all have a party for a week. So it's late in the evening, it's dark; the bride comes out veiled. It's probably likely Jacob had celebrated quite a bit. [Laughter] You put all those together and he spends the night with Leah. He wakes up in the morning; and lo and behold, this isn't Rachel!

So he goes to his uncle and he says, “Why have you done this to me? What kind of a monster would deceive his own family?” [Laughter] He's outraged. And Laban says, “Hey [*it's my translation-Laughter*], we don't do it that way here. In this place we don't honor the younger over the first-born.” Notice it doesn't say “the younger over the older.” It says, “the younger over the first-born.” In other words, the writer is making sure we're connecting this to what Jacob did to his father and what he did to his brother. And suddenly, Jacob is looking in the mirror and seeing himself and what he has done.

Now there isn't much he can say at this point. I mean, he has no platform. Laban did to him what Jacob did to his father. So Jacob's response is pretty mild. What's he going to say?

So in Verse 27 Laban says,

“Complete the bridal 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. So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and indeed he loved Rachel more than Leah, and he served with Laban for another seven years. (Vs. 27-30)

The end of this story just gives us this tension, enough to tell us we've got a problem here—and that problem is going to be a consequence now for years to come. Jacob loves one wife more than the other, and it's just enough to say there is trouble coming. But before we talk about that, let's think about this story a little bit. Jacob has got himself in a mess.

Now I think Jacob's intentions were good; I think his motives were good. But the problem is he does not yet understand what it means to trust God. And we would have to say that what has transpired *was not necessary*. If Jacob and his mother, Rebekah, would have just *trusted* God and *waited* for God, this whole story wouldn't have been necessary. He could have very well traveled like Abraham's servant—with an entourage, with that wealth, he could have worked out the deal. But because of his choices, he's living with the consequences. And now he, as the Promised Seed, will be a servant to Laban for 14 years. As a matter of fact, it will be a full 20

years before Jacob ever gets to go back home. And we have to understand, that wasn't necessary.

But we live with the consequences of our choices, and when we don't understand what it means to practice the presence of God—and maybe with very good motives and very good intentions—we're out there on our own. We're going to make bad choices. We're going to make bad decisions, and we're going to live with those consequences. Sometimes we find ourselves saying, "Why would God do this to me?" And we have to accept the fact: God didn't do this to you. *You* did this to you.

The whole point of this series is trying to understand what it means, in a very practical sense, to be a person of faith. God has put His very presence within us that He might lead us and guide us and direct us day by day, to make wise choices and to direct the pathway of our lives—if we just understand that and listen to Him.

It's also true that oftentimes God uses not only circumstances but difficult people in our lives to teach us those lessons that we need to learn. And sometimes what we see in those people is a glimpse of ourselves—just like Jacob saw himself in Laban, and will for the next 14 years. I am convinced that sometimes we have to see the ugliness in ourselves before we're able to see the beauty in others.

The story is told of a cruel and tyrannical Baron Rascas and his beautiful and kind wife, the Lady of Rascas. When the Baron was summoned to the Crusades by his king, he was so concerned that his wife would turn to another that he commanded his wizard, Malagan, to make her ugly just after his departure, and then for the wizard to join him in the Crusades so the spell could not be undone. It was done as the Baron commanded, with the result that the good Lady had the face of a horse. Despite her condition, she managed the lands of the Baron well during his absence, and people grew to love her with no thought of her appearance.

After seven years, the Baron returned without Malagan and was repulsed by his wife's ugliness. Without Malagan, there was no way to reverse the spell, and the wife was utterly rejected by the Baron, who, if it were possible, had become even more insufferable since the wars. Word was sent far and wide offering a reward to any wizard or magician who could reverse the spell. Many tried; none succeeded.

One day a poor beggar arrived at the gates and, after gaining admission to the Baron's presence, identified himself as Malagan. He recounted before the entire court how the Baron abandoned him when he had been wounded and left him for dead. Years of slavery followed, and he lost most of his skills before he was finally able to regain his freedom. He had now returned to remedy the situation.

When the Lady of Rascas was called into the king's presence, the wizard's words proved not to transform the Lady to her earlier beauty, but instead, transformed the Baron into a similar horse-faced appearance. It was only in this condition that the Baron finally learned how to love and cherish his wife and become the kind and caring lord he should have been from the start.

- As summarized by John H. Walton in *Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary*, Zondervan, 2001, pp. 595-596.

You know, that's a lot like the story of Jacob. He finally saw his ugliness in the deception of Laban and would begin this process of changing.

It's probably a safe guess that every single one of us has a difficult person in our life. For you, it might be a work associate, or a boss, or an employee, or a parent, or a child, or a friend, or a schoolmate. And your prayer may consistently be, "God, *change* that person."

Maybe that's not the right prayer. Maybe God has allowed that person into your life because *you* need to change, because you need to learn something, maybe even see some of the ugliness of your own heart. Maybe the prayer this week needs to be, "God, *change me*. Through this person, let me see what it is in me that needs to change, and let me have a teachable heart."

And maybe when *we* change, then maybe God will go about changing that difficult person in our life. Sometimes we have to see the ugliness of our own hearts before we're able to see the beauty in others.

Our Father, we are thankful that You are a God who dwells within His people. Lord, You're a personal God and Your presence is there to lead us and to guide us and to direct us, as You so clearly did for Abraham's servant. But Lord, we're struck by the absence of that in Jacob's life—not because he's rebelling, not because he doesn't want to do the right thing—he just doesn't yet understand what it means to practice Your presence.

Lord, it's easy for us to identify with that. So often we go through our days with little thought as to Your presence in our lives. Lord, help us to understand what it means to be led and directed by You—that we would make wise decisions.

And Lord, for each of us as we think about difficult people in our lives, help us to have teachable hearts. Maybe You've allowed that person into our lives that You might teach us something we need to learn; Lord, maybe even that we might see the ugliness in our own hearts, and that we might change. Lord, we pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Nat: This story about the Baron and his wife, it just hit me upside the head, because it seems like so often we are unable to see our own bad behavior, until someone treats us the very same way.

Bryan: Yeah, right. It's totally different to be on the receiving end of bad behavior. I read an article once by a nurse who became a patient, and she wrote the whole article basically apologizing to people for what they do to them in the hospital. And it's like, you just don't realize that until you're on the receiving end of this stuff. So the key is to see it. I mean I think sometimes people, they are so offended by behavior, that's the same behavior they're doing, but it's just hard to see in yourself.

Nat: Yeah. It's getting a dose of your own medicine, I think is what they call it. [Oh, that's good.] Yes. It's interesting to think about how different Jacob's story might have been had he and Rebekah trusted God by faith, instead of being driven by, well, by their fears. And I could say the same is true for my life too.

Bryan: I think it is so interesting to think about how different this story could have been. So we've talked about the relationship between God's sovereignty and the choices we make, but this is going to turn into a disastrous story for Jacob, and you think it could have all been different, all the way back to Isaac and Rebekah, and the choices with Jacob and Esau. So, they've made a lot of choices out of fear, and it's turning into a disaster, and it will be something they'll have to live with the rest of their lives.

Nat: Right. It's true God could have intervened in these stories and in so many different ways to avoid the messes, but yet He allows Jacob to learn so much the hard way. And I think the same is true for us today. It's true for you. It's true for me. It's true for our listeners. So why do you think that God doesn't intervene more?

Bryan: It's a great question Nat, and I loved the line, God allows Jacob to learn the hard way. Another way you could word that is, He allows Jacob to learn. So I'm just going to assume that Jacob wouldn't have learned it any other way. So God lets him learn the hard way. So it's a little bit like with our kids. Sometimes rescuing them isn't necessarily helping them. So God allows these things to happen in order for Jacob to learn what he needs to learn, to be faithful.

Nat: So good and so hard to watch. Thanks Bryan.