

## Deceiver Deceived

Take your Bibles and turn to Genesis 29. Last week, we saw Jacob as a man on the run. He was running for his life from his brother who wanted to kill him. As he set out on his journey to Paddan-Aram, he had an encounter with God. The Lord met Jacob and gave him the greatest promise of all. He promised to be with him wherever he went, and to bring him back to the land he was leaving. Jacob set out from Bethel feeling like he was on top of the world. Have you ever had one of those mountaintop experiences in your youth? They are invigorating moments, but they are usually pretty short-lived. I remember going to summer camp every summer in high school. We would go to Hume Lake Christian Camps deep in the heart of Sequoia National Forest.



It's one of the most beautiful places I've ever been. It was a retreat from the worldliness that we teenagers were so immersed in. On the last night of the week, they would have all the students gather around a campfire and share testimonies about what God spoke to them on the mountaintop. They called it "Victory Circle," and it was always a moving, stirring time to hear students share how they wanted to take the fire down the mountain with them. Yet, almost inevitably, it would not take long to get right back into the valley of the old patterns we wanted to leave behind on the mountaintop.

We often walk away from those times of profound encounter with God feeling invulnerable. But the truth is we may never be more vulnerable than when we are riding high on the momentum of our experiences with God. I think this is particularly true for those who are younger. There is a naivete that accompanies our youth, which often blinds us with over-confidence. I think Jacob probably had a strut in his steps after God met with him. He set out from Bethel with a renewed sense of empowerment, and he felt like he could conquer the world.

He was about to have a head-on collision with reality. God's promise to be with him did not mean that he was invulnerable. It did not mean that he was no longer a weak, sinful human being in need of God's constant grace and guidance. It did not mean that no trouble would ever come his way. Which leads us to Genesis 29. Look at verse 1.

Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east. <sup>2</sup> 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, <sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where do you come from?" They said, "We are from Haran." <sup>5</sup> He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" They said, "We know him." <sup>6</sup> He said to them, "Is it well with him?" They said, "It is well; and see, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep!" <sup>7</sup> 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." <sup>8</sup> 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." (Genesis 29:1-8)

Jacob's long, 550-mile journey to Haran was now complete, and he came to a situation that should sound somewhat familiar to us. He arrived at a well. Who else arrived at a well after the long journey from the land of promise to Mesopotamia? We don't have to go that far back to remember a similar situation. Back in Genesis 24, Abraham had sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac from his own kindred. The parallels are difficult to miss, but so is one glaring difference between the two narratives. Listen as I remind us of what happened back in Genesis 24, and keep your ears open for what is different between the two events.

Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. <sup>2</sup> And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh, <sup>3</sup> that I may make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, <sup>4</sup> but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac." (Genesis 24:1-4)

Skip down to verse 10.

<sup>10</sup> Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. <sup>11</sup> And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. <sup>12</sup> And he said, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. <sup>13</sup> Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. <sup>14</sup> Let the young woman to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master."

<sup>15</sup> Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder. (Genesis 24:10-15)

Did you catch the major difference? Here's how Sidney Greidanus unpacked this contrast.



“The narrator’s emphasis can’t be missed. In His providence the Lord has led the servant to his future wife for Isaac, but where is the Lord in the wedding narrative of Jacob? Jacob never prays to the Lord for guidance. He never thanks the Lord for leading him to his relatives. Is Jacob the deceiver seeking to fulfill the Lord’s promise of numerous offspring with his own ingenuity and scheming?”  
-Sidney Greidanus

The obvious contrast between these two biblical passages is that Abraham’s servant prayed and relied upon the Lord for guidance, but Jacob seems to go without any sense of need for divine guidance. One of my old pastors said, “It’s possible to have a relationship with the Lord, but to completely take prayer for granted.” When we go through our lives without praying, we are basically telling the Lord we don’t think we need Him. If we don’t think we need wisdom from God, we are greatly overestimating our own ability to plan and prepare for the future. James tells us where we ought to turn when seeking wisdom.

<sup>5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. (James 1:5)

We tend to think we can figure these things out on our own. When we forget to pray, things tend to go awry. When we choose to go it alone rather than relying on the Lord, we tend to run into trouble.

<sup>9</sup> While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Then Jacob kissed Rachel

and wept aloud.<sup>12</sup> 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. (Genesis 29:9-12)

It's hard to miss the machismo of Jacob here. As soon as he sees Rachel, the testosterone kicks in and he goes into full Atlas mode. He puts the world on his shoulders and puts on a show for his prospective bride. The text implies that the stone that covered this well was large, and probably usually took more than one man to roll away. But Jacob, with youthful passion rolls it away with his own strength. He was probably quite weary from his journey, but the adrenaline kicked in and he watered the whole flock of Laban on his own. Then, in his exuberance he kisses Rachel and weeps for joy.

This is the first time in the Bible we have specific mention of a man kissing a woman, and it's not clear whether this was customary or not. Based on the exuberance of Jacob, I have a hard time seeing this as simply a customary, cordial act of civility. I think he likely got a little overly excited by the prospect of meeting his future bride, and let his emotions get the better of him. This is not an uncommon thing for a young man to do when overcome with desire for a woman. It is very easy to be driven by the passions of the flesh. We are not meant to be servants of our passions, but to be servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only as we see ourselves more and more as Christ's servants, that we grow in the fruit of self-control, and learn to abstain from the passions of the flesh. Young men and women, it is very wise to exercise patience when courting a prospective spouse. Song of Solomon makes this very clear with its thrice-repeated refrain,

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases. (Song of Solomon 2:7)

There may be no more powerful desire than the desire of physical attraction between a man and a woman. This is a warning to be very careful with it. It is like playing with fire to kindle physical intimacy with someone before the time is right. In our sex-obsessed culture, it has never been more difficult to patiently wait to awaken love until marriage. Be careful, young men and women.

Picking up with the passage,

<sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month. (Genesis 29:13-14)

We encountered Laban a generation ago, when he was just a young man, when Rebekah ran to tell her family that Abraham's servant had come to them. Laban was the first man to go out and meet Abraham's servant. The servant had met with Laban and Bethuel, his father, and they had both agreed to send Rebekah away with Abraham's servant to marry Isaac. Just to refresh our memories, here's what transpired those many years earlier.

<sup>50</sup> Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, “The thing has come from the Lord; we cannot speak to you bad or good. <sup>51</sup> Behold, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken.”

<sup>52</sup> When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the Lord. <sup>53</sup> And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. (Genesis 24:50-52)

I can't help but wonder if Laban remembered those costly ornaments that he had received from Abraham's servant when he laid eyes on Jacob. As we get to know Laban better over the next few weeks, we will learn that he has quite an affinity for worldly possessions. What a difference between the full array of jewelry, silver, gold, and garments with which Abraham's servant had come and the nothing with which Jacob came to Laban's household. Jacob told Laban the story of why he came empty-handed. He told him “all these things,” likely telling the whole drama of the way he deceitfully gained the blessing of his father, and consequently had to run for his life from his father's house. He spilled the beans about his own trickery in order to explain why he came to Laban with no gifts.

At first, Laban graciously received Jacob into his own house, saying, “Surely you are my bone and my flesh.” This is an ironic statement in light of the kind of person we will see Laban is. Laban uses the language of Genesis 2, when Adam first laid eyes on Eve, indicating to Jacob that he feels the strongest possible kindred connection with Jacob. I can't help but wonder, though, if this is just the beginning of Laban's deceitful ways with Jacob. Based on the story Jacob told him, he now sees an opportunity to take advantage of this young man. He is going to take Jacob in to his home not as an act of service to Jacob, but in order that Jacob might become a servant to him.

<sup>15</sup> Then Laban said to Jacob, “Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?” <sup>16</sup> Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. <sup>17</sup> Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. <sup>18</sup> Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, “I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.” <sup>19</sup> Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.” <sup>20</sup> So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. (Genesis 29:15-20)

Laban's offer of wages seems to be a generous act of kindness towards his young nephew. He has clearly earned Jacob's trust. It is not clear whether or not Laban already had intentions to deceive and take advantage of Jacob, but I believe that is the implication of the text. Again, I believe the absence of God from these events is quite significant. There is no mention at all of Jacob's communion with the Lord. No mention of his seeking God for guidance. The guiding impulse of Jacob's decisions is his love for Rachel. That's it. He is a man being driven entirely by his emotions, and it seems he has lost touch with the God who is with him. He seems to have forgotten the revelation he had at Bethel, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know

it.” (Genesis 28:16b) He has forgotten that God is with him, not only at Bethel, but wherever he goes. When we forget the fact of our communion with the Lord, it leads to foolish decisions. It leads to over-confidence in our flesh and in our ability to make plans and decisions. When we make decisions without seeking the Lord, we set ourselves on slippery slopes.

Let’s talk about Leah. Jacob loved Rachel, but he clearly did not love Leah. The text tells us that Leah’s eyes were weak, which likely means that she was just not as pretty as her younger sister. In our Hollywood, rom-com worldview, our hearts likely flutter a bit when we hear that seven years seemed like a day to Jacob as he served to win the hand of his true love in marriage. We love these sentimental, romantic tales of what we falsely call “true love.” But what is easily overlooked is the hurt that is being carried by Leah.

Again, the things that are missing in this text are very telling. God is absent, and so is any mention of the character of these young women. Does this text not seem shallow? These women are only identified by their physical features. Listen ladies, you are not defined by your physical appearance. We live in a world where women are so often told that what matters most about them is what they look like. I want to tell you that you are so much more than your looks. Don’t buy the lies of the culture. Your beauty is not in your eyes or your body. It is what is inside of you that makes you precious and beautiful. You are loved, not because of your external beauty, but because God has made you in His own image as a beautiful creature. Listen to how the Scriptures describe your beauty.

<sup>3</sup> Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— <sup>4</sup>but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. (1 Peter 3:3-4)

The description of an excellent wife that is provided in Proverbs 31 makes no mention of physical beauty. Every quality is connected to her character, and not to her appearance. The summary of the description is found in these words,

**Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. (Proverbs 31:30)**

Ladies, don’t let the enemy tell you that your worth is in your appearance. You are living in a culture that tells you that the only thing that matters is what’s on the outside. Physical beauty is vain and ultimately fleeting. You are precious and beautiful just the way that the Lord made you. Your fear of the Lord is what makes you praiseworthy, so pursue Him, not the external adornments of the world.

Men, what are you looking for in a potential wife? It’s so much easier to make a foolish decision based on what your eyes tell you than it is to be wise in choosing your wife. Don’t be allured by what the world tells you is beautiful. Rather, find what is truly beautiful in God’s eyes, and pursue that.

This whole situation is already a mess, but it is about to get even messier. Things are about to get really, really weird. If you think your family has issues, read Genesis. The family God chose to be the family through which He would bring blessing to every family is an absolute trainwreck.

<sup>21</sup> Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." <sup>22</sup> So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. <sup>23</sup> But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. <sup>24</sup> (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) <sup>25</sup> 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?" (Genesis 29:21-25)

This scene could rival anything you might see on a soap opera today. It is a striking reversal of roles for Jacob. He has gone from being the deceiver to being the deceived. It's really the same trick Jacob had pulled on his father. Laban used the same tactics to deceive Jacob that Jacob had used to deceive his father. Jacob had taken advantage of the blindness of his father, and he had clothed himself in his brother's garments and covered himself in goatskins to trick his father into thinking he was Esau. Now, Laban sends Leah to Jacob in the dark of night when his eyes would be blind on account of the darkness, and he clothes her in a veil so that Jacob could not see her and would think he was lying with Rachel.

In the morning, he is awakened to quite a shock. As the words came out of Jacob's mouth to Laban, "What is this you have done to me?" they must have stung with a sense of ironic justice. It is just what Jacob had done to his own father. Now, he knew the pain of the crime he himself had committed. Until this moment, he didn't have a grasp of the full weight of his own sin. But now, he knew in experience the pain he had caused to his father so many years earlier. However unrighteous Laban was in scheming this plot, Jacob could not help but acknowledge that the Lord was righteous. Jacob was reaping what he had sown, and it hurt.

There's plenty of hurt to go around in the shambles of these shenanigans. I hurt for Leah in this. I don't think she asked for any of this. This was not her plan. She was caught in the middle of a deceitful plot as an unloved, unwanted daughter and now wife. Her father was clearly just using her as a tool to get what he wanted out of Jacob. This should break our hearts because it is a breakdown of God's design for the family. God didn't intend for a father to treat his daughter like this, and he didn't intend for a husband to treat his wife like this. When God's design for marriage is abused and maimed, the consequences are always painful and terrible. Aren't our deepest wounds from those closest to us?

Again, notice the absence of God in this text. Jacob has not sought the Lord, even though the Lord has promised to be with him. We are meant to see the messiness of life when God is left out of the picture. He is the one who holds things together, but when we move away from Him, things fall apart. Laban's response to Jacob is loaded with sarcastic irony.

<sup>26</sup> Laban said, “It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.

Remember, Jacob had told his uncle all that had transpired with his family situation, which led him to flee from home. In essence, Laban is saying, “You’re not in Kansas anymore, Toto. My house, my rules. You may have gotten away with the blessing as the younger son in your family, but we don’t do that here. Here, we abide by what’s right.” I wouldn’t be surprised if Laban felt completely justified in this treacherous deception simply because he felt like he was doing the right thing. We can easily justify sin by leaning into the cultural customs and mores of our day. The ends justify the means. Laban probably figured Jacob wouldn’t have actually married Leah if he had told him this beforehand, so why not just trick him? Jacob needed to learn a lesson anyway. We all ought to carefully examine our own deeds under the microscope of God’s Word. Not by what the culture says. Let the Lord shine his light upon your life, and you won’t be so quick to justify your actions.

Laban then laid out his terms for Jacob to marry Rachel. It’s interesting to notice that the text did not say that Laban had ever agreed to Jacob’s terms for marrying Rachel. After Jacob, naively driven by young love, offered seven years of service to Laban, Laban simply said, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.” Notice what is absent there. The agreement was never sealed. Laban was being shrewd, leading Jacob to believe he intended to meet his terms, while knowing he was going to fleece him in the end. Jacob would have been wise to get this in writing to make certain of the terms of his arrangement. Now, seven years later, and a day too late, he is finally going to find out what Laban’s terms really are.

<sup>27</sup> Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.” <sup>28</sup> Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. <sup>29</sup> (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) <sup>30</sup> So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years. (Genesis 29:26-30)

Jacob was duped into marrying multiple wives, and it is not going to make his life any easier. This would be the beginning of a family dynamic that is anything but healthy. Dysfunction of the highest degree is about to ensue. Just a hermeneutical note here, just because the Bible contains instances of polygamy, obviously doesn’t mean that God condones polygamy. This is an important rule for us as we interpret the Word of God. Narrative passages, such as this, are not prescriptive. More often than not, the narratives of the Old Testament are written to warn us. What Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10 applies to so much of the Old Testament, “<sup>6</sup> Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.” (1 Corinthians 10:6) Be careful about ever establishing doctrine about God’s righteous decrees based on narrative passages. His commandments are crystal clear, particularly about marriage.

<sup>4</sup> [Jesus] answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,<sup>5</sup> and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and



hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? <sup>6</sup>So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matthew 19:4-6)

There is no command provided in Genesis 29. As I mentioned, God is not mentioned at all in this text. He is present, and Jacob knows it not. That's what's going on. His presence is being missed completely because no one is seeking Him, and it is leading to what can only be described as complete chaos for Jacob's life.

It's leading to tragic pain and trouble for all the parties involved. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. Sadder words have rarely been spoken. A man is not meant to love two women. Can you imagine the pain of Leah as the wife who is loved less. It is a wound so deep that only the grace of God can cure it. That's a spoiler alert for next week's message, which is how I'd like to close.

God has been absent in this chapter thus far. But He is still there with Jacob. He is still going to work in the midst of this horrendous mess to bring about something beautiful. In fact, He's going to bring about the most beautiful thing imaginable through unloved Leah. I won't spoil it tonight, you'll have to come next week to hear what that is. But just know that no matter how much of a mess you feel like you've made of your life, God is there to redeem you. God is there to bring beauty out of the ashes. He is there to make you His workmanship. You can't earn it, you can't buy it from Him, but by His grace, you can be made new.

Surrender tonight. Give Him your life and let Him work as only He can. Give Him the glory and the praise and let Him rewrite your story in such a way that all the mistakes, failures, and blemishes come out beautiful in the end. He is able, but you must repent. You must confess that your life is a mess. You must call upon Him to save you. He will do it because He is always faithful.

If you've been trying to go it alone like Jacob, pray tonight. Tell the Lord you're sorry for trying to live without Him. Tell Him you can't go on any further without His presence. Ask Him to meet you here tonight, and you will find Him right where you are. He's ready to bless you in Christ. Trust Him. Put your full weight upon Jesus tonight.