

“What Comes Around Goes Around”

Genesis 29:1-30

January 8th, 2017

In a daring escape from a Sydney, Australia jail, a prisoner climbed in the back of a truck. At the trucks' next stop, he climbed out and found himself in the yard of another prison 4 miles from the first.

Some time ago, the *Oregonian* newspaper reported of a man who had built a Roman Catholic Church building in Mexico. He used inferior materials in order to make more money. At the dedication of the building, the roof collapsed, killing many of the worshippers, including the contractor's brother who was the priest of the church.

The Old Testament's take on such matters is **Numbers 32:23**, "...you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out." Unless you turn from your sin, and plead for the grace of God in Jesus Christ, you can expect God will uncover your sin at some point in time.

The New Testament's take is found in the Apostle Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia – "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." (**Galatians 6:7**) What you invest your time and effort in will be what you gain.

We return today to our continuing study of the Bible's first book, Genesis. The series is *The Book of Beginnings: God's Grace in Genesis*. When we gathered on Christmas morning for worship, we studied the dream that Jacob had while sleeping one evening on his way to Haran. *Do you remember why he was traveling away from Isaac and Rebekah?* Rebekah warned Jacob that his brother Esau was looking for vengeance, desiring greatly to kill his younger brother Jacob for stealing his birthright and blessing.

Jacob's fugitive existence was due to deceiving his brother Esau twice, and his father once. As it is often put in our day, "What comes around goes around." It's sometime called "poetic justice." The text before us today will show how Jacob reaped his deception in spades.

Genesis 29:1-30:

"Jacob traveled on, finally arriving in the land of the East. ² He saw in the distance three flocks of sheep lying beside a well in an open field, waiting to be watered. But a heavy stone covered the mouth of the well. ³ (The custom was that the stone was not removed until all the flocks were there. After watering them, the stone was rolled back over the mouth of the well again.) ⁴ Jacob went over to the shepherds and asked them where they lived. "At Haran," they said.

⁵ "Do you know a fellow there named Laban, the son of Nahor?" "We sure do." ⁶ "How is he?" "He's well and prosperous. Look, there comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep."

⁷ "Why don't you water the flocks so they can get back to grazing?" Jacob asked. "They'll be hungry if you stop so early in the day!"

⁸ "We don't roll away the stone and begin the watering until all the flocks and shepherds are here," they replied.

⁹ As this conversation was going on, Rachel arrived with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess.

¹⁰ And because she was his cousin—the daughter of his mother's brother—and because the sheep were his uncle's, Jacob went over to the well and rolled away the stone and watered his uncle's flock. ¹¹ Then Jacob kissed Rachel and started crying! ¹²⁻¹³ He explained about being her cousin on her father's side, and that he was her Aunt Rebekah's son. She quickly ran and told her father, Laban, and as soon as he heard

of Jacob's arrival, he rushed out to meet him and greeted him warmly and brought him home. Then Jacob told him his story.

¹⁴ "Just think, my very own flesh and blood," Laban exclaimed. After Jacob had been there about a month, ¹⁵ Laban said to him one day, "Just because we are relatives is no reason for you to work for me without pay. How much do you want?" ¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters, Leah, the older, and her younger sister, Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah had lovely eyes, but Rachel was shapely, and in every way a beauty. ¹⁸ Well, Jacob was in love with Rachel. So he told her father, "I'll work for you seven years if you'll give me Rachel as my wife."

¹⁹ "Agreed!" Laban replied. "I'd rather give her to you than to someone outside the family."
²⁰ So Jacob spent the next seven years working to pay for Rachel. But they seemed to him but a few days, he was so much in love. ²¹ Finally the time came for him to marry her.

"I have fulfilled my contract," Jacob said to Laban. "Now give me my wife, so that I can sleep with her."

²² So Laban invited all the men of the settlement to celebrate with Jacob at a big party. ²³ Afterwards, that night, when it was dark, Laban took Leah to Jacob, and he slept with her. ²⁴ (And Laban gave to Leah a servant girl, Zilpah, to be her maid.) ²⁵ But in the morning—it was Leah!

"What sort of trick is this?" Jacob raged at Laban. "I worked for seven years for Rachel. What do you mean by this trickery?"

²⁶ "It's not our custom to marry off a younger daughter ahead of her sister," Laban replied smoothly. ²⁷ "Wait until the bridal week is over and you can have Rachel too—if you promise to work for me another seven years!"

²⁸ So Jacob agreed to work seven more years. Then Laban gave him Rachel, too. ²⁹ And Laban gave to Rachel a servant girl, Bilhah, to be her maid. ³⁰ So Jacob slept with Rachel, too, and he loved her more than Leah, and stayed and worked the additional seven years."

These verses can be separated into two distinct halves:

MP 1 – Jacob Finds a Wife (v. 1-14);

MP 2 – Jacob Finds another Wife (The Deceiver Deceived) (v. 15-30);

Not only was Jacob fleeing Beersheba because of Esau's threats, Jacob was headed to Haran because his mother Rebekah's family lived there. Isaac and Rebekah agreed that Jacob should find a suitable wife among his mother's distant family, and not from among the pagan peoples where they dwelt.

It's important for us to remember that God does not have marriage in mind for everyone. Some of His children are called to holy singleness, which, among other things, allows such faithful servants to devote an extraordinary amount of time to the work of God's church. But, the success of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob depended on Jacob finding a wife, and with her build a family through which God would bring His Redeemer into the world.

Jacob's journey from Beersheba, where the events of the previous 2 ½ chapters took place, to Haran was somewhere about 660 miles in distance, and 4 weeks in duration. As he arrives, Jacob see three flocks of sheep and shepherds lying around a well. Their conversation, as recorded for us in verses 4-8, and the subsequent arrival of Rachel on the scene, reveals some amazing things.

It is something we almost take for granted, God's sovereign work in our lives, that is. Look at what's taking place in the first half of this chapter - Jacob happens upon a field with sheep in it;

the field happens to have some workers who just happen to know Laban; then Rachel, the daughter of Laban, just happens to be coming to the well in that very field with sheep to be watered. Just as Abraham's servant had met Rebekah at the well (back in chapter 24), so now here in chapter 29, Jacob met Rachel there. This is not mere coincidence, friends, nor is it karma, or good luck. It is at the decree and by the appointment of Almighty God, who ordains whatsoever comes to pass, for the good of His people, and His glory. God is the One working to bring Jacob and Rachel together, even as He brought Isaac and Rebekah together.

Puritan author and Presbyterian pastor John Flavel has written, "Some providences, like Hebrew letters, must be read backwards." The same is true of any Christian life. We need only look back over time to see the hand of God working in even the most mundane and trivial matters of our lives.

Have you realized, dear ones that your very presence here today is because God has worked in your decisions and actions to bring you here? Look back at how you came to live and/or worship here in Aledo, as members and friends of Trinity Church. If you are married, God brought you and your spouse together to bring His purposes for you to pass. If you are a widow or widower, God is working in you and through you to share your experiences and wisdom with others. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, it's not because of your doing or even your decision. If you are a Christian, it is because God has set His favor upon you, and determined to bring you spiritual life, even though that thought hadn't even crossed your mind.

Rachel, whose name means "ewe lamb" comes onto the scene in verse 9. She was a shepherdess, the lamb with her lambs. Jacob sees her, and it must've been love at first sight. He summons what had to be incredible strength to move the stone from the mouth of the well (the other shepherds either *couldn't* move the stone, and thus were weak; or they *didn't*, and thus were lazy). After Rachel's sheep are watered, Jacob kisses Rachel and explains who he is, and why he is there. Rachel dashes off to get her father, and he rushes out to meet his nephew, kisses him, and insists that he stay with them.

The story now moves from the first act, Jacob's **finds a wife**, to the second one, where Jacob receives a **second wife!** A month later, Laban asks Jacob the price for his work for Laban. Jacob is not interested in wages; he's interested in finding a wife. Evidently, Jacob didn't have the bride price to give to Laban for the hand of Rachel in marriage. He didn't come to Haran with treasures of his own. Thus Jacob offers to work for 7 years to earn her in marriage (v.18).

In the course of this conversation, we learn that Rachel has an older sister, Leah. We'll come back to her in a moment. Laban agrees to the arrangement. Verse 20 summarizes the next 7 years from Jacob's perspective – the time flew by because he was head over heels in love with Rachel. It's been well said that true happiness consists of having someone to love, something to do, and something to look forward to. Jacob had all three.

With verse 21, we see the 7 years have passed, and Jacob goes to Laban seeking Rachel's hand in marriage (after all, he's worked very hard for her!) Laban calls for a feast (v. 22) and Jacob and Rachel's honeymoon is at hand...or so he thought! We learn that it wasn't Rachel

who Laban had given to Jacob, but Leah instead! *Can you imagine what was going through Jacob's mind when he learned that it wasn't Rachel, but Leah whom Laban had given him?*

Verse 25 reveals Jacob's words – "What is this you've done to me? Was it not Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?"

Laban's reply in verses 26 & 27 shows he's a pretty crafty guy himself. He tells Jacob that he must work for Laban another 7 years, and then he'll have both Leah and Rachel as his wives. (It was later forbidden to marry two sisters in each other's lifetime (**Leviticus 18:18**). The Deceptive Laban would get to keep both his daughters another 7 years, and also the labor of Jacob. For sure, he was a pretty sleazy guy.

Now Jacob would understand how Esau had felt. "The man who deceived his father was deceived by his father-in-law, and the man who passed himself off as the firstborn son now receives Laban's firstborn daughter to be his wife." (Wiersbe, 39)

Proverbs 22:8 – "He who sows iniquity will reap sorrow..." **Proverbs 11:18** – "The wicked *man* does deceptive work, but he who sows righteousness *will have* a sure reward."

Jacob is an illustration of these two proverbs, and the Scriptures at the beginning of the message. What came around by Jacob's deception of his brother Esau and father Isaac, has now gone around like a boomerang and hit him hard!

As the chapter ends, we see the providence of God is still working even in the midst of sin and disappointment. Leah would bear six sons for Jacob – Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. Of course, it is the lineage of Levi that becomes the priesthood of the Old Testament people of God, and the descendants of Judah produce the monarchy of David, which is fully realized in Jesus Christ, the Messiah of God.

The moral of this story is that one's sins find one out, and return on one's own head in punishment. Perhaps you'll remember Haman from the Book of Esther. He built a gallows in order to hang the righteous Mordecai, only to be hung on those gallows himself.

As we bring this message to a close, we see a tie to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We read in the 4th chapter of John's gospel account, Jesus traveling through Samaria and coming to a well – Jacob's Well, near the city of Sychar (**John 4:5-6**). He meets a woman there and asks her for a drink of water from the well.

In the course of their conversation, Jesus identifies Himself as the Living Water. In **John 4:13 & 14**, He says these challenging words – "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

¹⁵The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

Friend, have you drank deeply from the well of living water Who is Jesus? If not, will you come to Him today? Turn from your sin and trust fully in Jesus.