

November 25, 2018

Lesson 13: God Blesses Jacob and Rachel

Scripture: Genesis 30: 22-32, 43

Context:

The last lesson of the series for the Book of Genesis and the fall study is on the birth of Joseph, the son of Jacob and Rachel. By the end of the lesson, we see Jacob mature from a mischievous boy to a very savvy businessman. Some things may change and take shape in a different form as we mature with age. The same goes for the patriarch Jacob.

Our text jumps ahead from our last chapter as Jacob is married to two daughters of his relative Laban. Leah is the oldest daughter and Rachel is the youngest daughter. The story of how Jacob marries both of them reveals that he is not the only trickster in the Bible. In order to marry the daughter, Jacob is required to work for seven years only to discover the morning after his wedding that he has married the daughter Leah and not the beloved beautiful Rachel who had captured his heart. Talk about a bad start to a honeymoon!

So Jacob works seven more years under Laban to marry his beloved Rachel. Unfortunately though, the marriage to both is difficult. Leah is able to conceive and give birth to multiple sons while Rachel remains unable to conceive. There is great tension and discord as all parties struggle in the arrangement. Leah is able to give birth, but Jacob does not favor her. Rachel is Jacob's beloved, but she cannot give birth. Jacob continues to be in a land that is not his home. All of this takes place as Jacob lives with his father-in-law adding another strange twist to the family dynamics.

This chapter though becomes a turning point in the story of Jacob. In the midst of it, Rachel is able to give birth to a son named Joseph. The birth begins a catalyst as Jacob makes the decision to go home. He has spent the years in labor for his brides and now that they have children, it is time to go. Yet before he goes, he needs the financial security to begin the trek home and to have something in his possession before he returns back to the land that God has promised him.

Jacob has one last trick up his sleeve. Before he leaves, he demands that Laban pay him for all his hard work. Laban wants him to stay so he tells him that he will give him anything he wants to remain there.

Jacob doesn't name silver or gold or household idols as his price. Instead he asks for a random assortment of the livestock. At first glance, it would seem that Laban is getting the better end of the deal. He will still have the livestock as Jacob remains there with his daughters and grandchildren.

Laban agrees to the payment. So Jacob comes up with his version of a breeding technique and begins to accumulate vast numbers of sheep and goats. Before long, Jacob possesses more animals and more of the stronger ones than Laban. Pretty soon he is a very rich man complete with large flocks, female and male servants, camels and donkeys. He came to Laban with nothing to show and will leave wealthier than his father-in-law. Just as he took the birthright from his brother, Jacob will take the wealth from his father-in-law and make it his own. This is the patriarch, the father of Israel through whom God will continue the covenant made to Abraham.

Application

For some who might read this story, there might be a focus on the misdeeds of

Jacob and how he tricked his father-in-law. However, I think to do so misses the point of the narrative as a whole. What if we are to read this part of the Jacob narrative and to see humor as a gift from God?

This text tells us that Jacob got a dose of his own medicine when it came to his marriage as Laban “tricked” him. Jacob though took it in stride and continued to return the favor after years of waiting to do so. As a result of it, he prospered along with his wives and his children. They were able to return back home and Jacob’s story continued with him as the patriarch.

We’ve already discussed how Jacob was redeemed by the grace of God for his trickster behavior. I think this story reminds us though that we do things that are cunning and downright laughable. Jacob took a situation and turned it to his advantage. Some might say he took advantage of Laban, but he also worked for the man for fourteen years for his daughters plus the years following it as they started having children. Jacob was due his money and probably due a laugh as well.

Often I think some of our best experiences in life are moments where we can maybe fail or mess up and then look back and laugh at the situation. At the time it may not have seemed humorous, but later something happens and the event is hysterical. Humor may break the situation and lead to laughter for all parties.

Or we may do something that may be mischievous and sneaky. It could be a prank on someone or something we do by accident and it brings a laugh to someone else. I once had a seminary professor who once told me that the best preachers are those who are a bit of a rascal. To whom he was referring to when he said that statement, I have no idea.

How do you see God in strange situations? Do you think God gives us moments to laugh upon later? How might a rascal have the traits needed to do God’s will? Who are the Jacobs in your life? I hope that like Jacob you can find humor in situations and even see it as part of your blessing from God.

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