

Scripture Reading: Genesis 30:25 – 31:4

“25 And it came to pass, when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, “Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my country. 26 Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know my service which I have done for you.” 27 And Laban said to him, “Please stay, if I have found favor in your eyes, for I have learned by experience that Jehovah has blessed me for your sake.” 28 Then he said, “Name me your wages, and I will give it.” 29 So Jacob said to him, “You know how I have served you and how your livestock has been with me. 30 For what you had before I came was little, and it has increased to a great amount; Jehovah has blessed you since my coming. And now, when shall I also provide for my own house?” 31 So he said, “What shall I give you? And Jacob said, “You shall not give me anything. If you will do this thing for me, I will again feed and keep your flocks: 32 Let me pass through all your flock today, removing from there all the speckled and spotted sheep, and all the brown ones among the lambs, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and these shall be my wages. 33 So my righteousness will answer for me in time to come, when the subject of my wages comes before you: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and brown among the lambs, will be considered stolen, if it is with me.” 34 And Laban said, “Oh, that it were according to your word!”

“The Prosperity of Jacob”

As I mentioned last week we have come to a turning point in our story and we see the beginning of Jacob’s return to the Promised Land. The text that I read sets the stage for his departure, but as we shall shortly see there is more to the story...

Genesis 29: ““25 And it came to pass, when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, “Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my country.”

‘And it came to pass’ is a transitional phrase here in the Book of Beginnings and I would argue that we now see a return to the faithful Jacob who met God at Bethel! A man who is maturing as we often do in our walk with the Lord: From this point forward we see faithful actions on the part of Jacob, in much the same way that we saw with Abraham and his father Isaac before him. Again, these men are given as our examples with good lessons for us to follow today. Jacob is a man who remembers the promises that God has made to him. He has been blessed with many children and now wants to return to the Promised Land that his grandfather Abraham journeyed to many years earlier.

➤ His first request is for his wife and children!

“26 Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know my service which I have done for you.” 27 And Laban said to him, “Please stay, if I have found favor in your eyes, for I have learned by experience that Jehovah has blessed me for your sake.” 28 Then he said, “Name me your wages, and I will give it.”

This becomes an interesting exchange with these two men and we will learn next week Jacob had a bit of an advantage...

God had given him a foretaste of his prosperity in dreams and visions and so Jacob in some ways is merely giving Laban enough rope to hang himself as they would say in the Old West.

➤ Laban sees how God has blessed him through the presence of Jacob’s chosen family!

➤ This should remind us of how the coming of Jesus and the growth of His Church blesses the whole world!

29 “So Jacob said to him, “You know how I have served you and how your livestock has been with me. 30 For what you had before I came was little, and it has increased to a great amount; Jehovah has blessed you since my coming. And now, when shall I also provide for my own house?”

Jacob has his wives & children but no real wealth or possessions of his own and so his negotiations begin... 31 “So he [Laban] said, “What shall I give you?””

And here Jacob gives him an offer that he cannot refuse, knowing of course the kind of man he is dealing with in Laban. “And Jacob said, “You shall not give me anything.”

- That certainly would have gotten Laban’s attention!

““You shall not give me anything. If you will do this thing for me, I will again feed and keep your flocks:”

- And of course this is exactly what Laban wanted so it appears to be a win-win for him!

So Jacob says, 32 “Let me pass through all your flock today, removing from there all the speckled and spotted sheep, and all the brown ones among the lambs, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and these shall be my wages. 33 “So my righteousness will answer for me in time to come, when the subject of my wages comes before you: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and brown among the lambs, will be considered stolen, if it is with me.”

The sheep and goats of that time and region were the major sign of one’s wealth and influence...

- This is how Laban knew that he had prospered under the skilled shepherding of Jacob.

Jacob knows that Laban is not about to just give him a part of his wealth and so he makes a deal... He will stay and continue to shepherd Laban’s flocks and thus Laban is pleased to have Jacob continue to increase his wealth. Jacob is willing to do this and asks only that he be given sheep and goats that are not the normal single color. Since these would make up a minor part of the growing herd it seemed like a good deal on the surface: But Jacob sweetens the pot if you will to make sure that Laban goes along...

At the beginning he agrees to have all the sheep that would have belonged to him removed from the herds so that he is in a sense starting from scratch.

- When I read this, it reminds me of how Elijah poured water on the wood and altar before calling on God to consume His sacrifice!

Jacob is confident that God is going to bless his efforts and thus makes sure that God gets all the credit!

Of course it is an offer that Laban is more than willing to accept, and so he says in verse 34 “Oh, that it were according to your word!”

- And immediately we see again the shady character of Laban who is not willing to trust Jacob so we read:

“35 So he removed that day the male goats that were speckled and spotted, all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had some white in it, and all the brown ones among the lambs, and gave them into the hand of his sons. 36 Then he put three days’ journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban’s flocks.”

I am sure that Laban felt very confident about the deal that he had negotiated and carried out, but God had other plans...

Now as we read about what happened it is important to remember that just as we saw with the opening and closing of a woman’s womb, the source of Jacob’s prosperity is not some magic trick or craftiness on his part, but rather his confidence in what God had promised Him at Bethel and in later dreams.

Jacob knows that he is now dependent on God and these actions that he takes as a shepherd are to be seen in the same way that we sometimes saw Jesus act in His earthly ministry. Rather than simply heal a leper He would tell them to go and wash in a particular way, which is something we saw the prophets do with folks in the old testament.

- Remember the blind man that first had mud made with spittle placed on his eyes by Jesus!

This is what we now see in this account:

37 “Now Jacob took for himself rods of green poplar and of the almond and chestnut trees, peeled white strips in them, and exposed the white which was in the rods. 38 And the rods which he had peeled, he set before the flocks in the gutters, in the watering troughs where the flocks came to drink, so that they should conceive when they came to drink. 39 So the flocks conceived before the rods, and the flocks brought forth streaked, speckled, and spotted. 40 Then Jacob separated the lambs, and made the flocks face toward the streaked and all the brown in the flock of Laban; but he put his own flocks by themselves and did not put them with Laban’s flock. 41 And it came to pass, whenever the stronger livestock conceived, that Jacob placed the rods before the eyes of the livestock in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods. 42 But when the flocks were feeble, he did not put them in; so the feeble were Laban’s and the stronger Jacob’s.”

It should be obvious that the major blessing comes directly from God as the sheep begin to produce the kind that will go with Jacob against all odds! Of course, as we often see, God also uses human actions to further his work and thus we see Jacob separating out those that were spotted & speckled so that more of them could be bred AND he arranged for the strongest and healthiest animals to be the ones producing his stock. And so we then read:

43 “Thus the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks, female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.”

Now obviously we are not given all the details of everything that happened over these seven years, but as I pointed out the size of one’s flocks indicated a man’s wealth and thus it expanded for Jacob into a large workforce of servants and other animals as well. Of course such a major shift does not go unnoticed in the end and thus we are introduced to the events that we will study at length next week:

31 “Now Jacob heard the words of Laban’s sons, saying, “Jacob has taken away all that was our father’s, and from what was our father’s he has acquired all this wealth.”

- While I am sure that the sons of Laban rejoiced when Jacob brought blessings; they now see him as a major threat to their inheritance!

2 “And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, and indeed it was not favorable toward him as before.

3 Then Jehovah said to Jacob, “Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you.””

Next week, Lord willing, we leave Laban behind and Jacob will return to the Land of Canaan and have an unexpected family reunion with his brother Esau.

- So what are the lessons that we are to take from this passage?

While there can certainly be many, I want to focus on what we can learn about what is called a vocation!

We have spent a good deal of time discussing marriage as well as courtship and engagement the past few weeks. An important part of the preparation that is needed for both the man and the woman going into a marriage involves some very practical things...

A desire to be a virtuous wife who sees the woman of Proverbs 31 as her model cannot just assume that all will fall into place once she is married.

She could wait until she is married and just learn as she goes, but how much wiser to enter that first day of marriage with years of preparation under her belt! This is why we encouraged Hope Chests for our daughters and had them attend woman's Bible studies long before they were thinking about the right man or that wedding date! And of course once in a marriage they can see how the lessons from our account can give them encouragement and conviction...

As Christians we know that we are fully dependent on God's blessings... It is He Who provides the foundation of stone AND it is He Who provided the blessings down through the years, whether it be children or material blessings. And yet, just as we saw with Jacob, there will be the daily duties to be carried out faithfully as Jacob did in shepherded the sheep that God blessed him with.

Sadly today we often relate vocation only to a job and the making of money, but whether we look at the Proverbs woman of the Old Testament or the extensive teaching about marriage and family in the New Testament, we should see and understand how the building of a home is one of the most important vocations!

- **However, with that said, vocation can also be seen as the practical provisions for the home as we see again in our account!**

Jacob fully understands his responsibility to provide for these women and children, and thus we see his appeal to Laban for the opportunity to gain wealth of his own. As with our young ladies, there is great wisdom in having our sons begin to focus on this at a very early age. As a Church we have provided, or will provide for some of our newer arrivals, a copy of a workbook entitled "Prepare Thy Work" by Daniel Forester. We have encouraged parents to read through this material while they are still infants or toddlers to have a better idea of the journey that lies ahead in raising them in the fear and admonition of the Lord. We suggest that these young sons first read it when they are about ten so they too can start to see what lies ahead and then of course depending on their maturity and passion they should begin to work though the lessons seriously a few years later on their own! At this point it is not only the parents, but also the other members of the Body that get involved which is why we appreciate this particular work.

We have also made available to Dads and sons a series of sermons done by Pastors Wilson and Tuuri on the principles of vocation to help them understand how we as Christians are to function in the workplace.

Our young men and women also need to learn the important lesson from our account with regard to keeping the proper balance between trusting God for His provision & being diligent in our work!

Jacob believed that God was going to provide for him, but that did not mean that he just left the sheep and goats to find food and water on their own. Jacob believed that God would have the flock produce many strong spotted and speckled sheep and goats and yet he went to great lengths with those trees!

Next week we will see Jacob leave with great wealth and the wealth of his family will continue to grow until they are ready and willing to actually conquer the land of Canaan many years later.

- **BUT we know that this was not a smooth upward trend line!**

As I mentioned last week, I am pretty sure it was difficult for Joseph to remember that he was going to rule over his own brothers, and far more, in just a few years as he sat in a pit or later in prison.

Even Jacob with all his wealth and family was near despair as the famine went on for years and years, and yet God knew where things were going! That is the trust that must have in this life as well...

- **We must remember that all we have comes from the hand of God AND that it is still His and He can do with it as He pleases!**

I was reminded by several events, as well as the preparation of this message about how I have learned those lessons down through the years I have lived as a Christian.

Early in the week I was struck by a meme posted with a quote from Pastor John MacArthur, where he said, “I stopped listening to you right after you said, ‘God told me.’”

- Now I certainly agree with his point that God is no longer giving new revelation to His people: We have all that we need right between the pages of this Bible!

BUT at the same time I do know that I and I hope all of us have learned things in our Christian walk...

- And that sometimes it does seem that God is speaking directly to us!

That can happen in a quiet moment as we study our Bibles or in a sermon or message that we hear or read. Well next came the pastor luncheon on Thursday and a speaker who was encouraging folks to listen when God is speaking to us in the “now.” Again he was not suggesting that we will hear new revelation, he was simply saying that God often puts a rather sharp point on what we are reading or hearing and that we should not fear to trust Him at that time.

It struck me that the two most critical times where I would testify that God made such an impression on me both related to the very practical area of vocation and providing for one’s family that I was dealing with in this message! So I want to close by sharing them with you as an encouragement that God does give us guidance, and perhaps as a warning that God will not always impress upon you to move in a way that seems best from a human standpoint.

The first came way back in the 1970’s when I was a young Christian working on putting the pieces back together from the mess I had made of my life and family. He was blessing Linda and I with a whole new relationship and we had begun to work on getting ourselves out of a huge financial mess we had created.

- Much more I than we!

We made the necessary decisions and the plan was to be debt free in I think five to seven years... Yes it was a BIG mess I had created! Well, I was feeling pretty good about all of this when the Lord intervened during one of my commutes home on the old Dumbarton Bridge! I won’t say that I heard an audible voice, but it was certainly one of the clearest things God impressed on me and I found myself arguing with Him much as I had done on the walk where I was saved just a few years earlier!

- His message was very simple and Biblical: It was a reminder that I should not forget His tithe!

Now of course my reaction was something like “Lord have you looked at my finances and what a mess I have made!?” Well, of course I lost this argument just as I did the first thankfully, and had to go home and explain to Linda that it would take a few more years than we thought to dig out because we had to start tithing! I suspect you can guess the end of that story, because we saw events over the next year that we could not have anticipated and as a result we were completely out of debt about a year later!

Now I would like to say we have been debt free ever since, but sadly I have also followed some of the bad examples we see in the Bible, but in the end God has been faithful and we are where I think we should be today!

- But again we did not get here the way I would have planned it out over the past forty years!

In fact the second major encounter came at a time when I was rising quickly as a young executive with Long’s Drugs. A situation had come up where they needed to downsize our department and rather than let the two youngest and most junior buyers go, they instead wanted to force one of the older gentlemen into retirement. I knew it was a bad move on their part, but hey, I had a young family to feed and what could I do about it anyway?

Well as I have often shared, Francis Schaeffer has always had a great influence on my life and again the Lord was going to use him to make a BIG impression on me... As I made a visit to one of the Longs stores I was listening to a lecture by Dr. Schaeffer as I often did in the car...

- And as he often did he was stressing the importance of practical Christian living.

One of his points that day was that IF we really believed that men and woman were made in the image of God, then we had to treat them as such AND when they were not being treated properly we needed to stand against it even if such action came at a great cost...

- And then of course as if he were giving that lecture just for me at that particular moment, he said again that such action must be taken even if it came at a great cost.

Well, after much prayer and discussion over the next few days, Linda and I decided that such action was necessary and so I resigned my post in protest, even though my immediate boss was a Christian as well.

Needless to say, God did care for our family and that change led to a series of events that brought us to Sacramento some years later and of course here I am today as your pastor!

Now obviously, neither of these decisions were 'correct' in terms of the immediate financial situations I was facing from a human perspective!

- And yet I knew they were what God wanted done at that time and I had to trust Him.

I am sure Jacob felt somewhat the same as he watched Laban go through the flock removing any animals that might have produced those spotted or speckled sheep and goats.

- Our important lesson is to trust God knowing that he knows where He is taking history AND our lives!

God loves to bless His people and in that sense the prosperity Gospel folks of today have a point to be made. BUT we must also remember that there came a day that none of the material wealth meant anything to Jacob if his family starved and later we know that Job, a man greatly blessed by God, had everything taken away from him as part of a broader agenda that God had in a heavenly battle that Job knew nothing about.

Linda and I are comfortable today...

- But Lord willing we will always remember that God could take it all away tomorrow!

The important thing that we must remember is that whether it stays, grows or goes away, it must not affect our relationship to God...

- Other wise, it has become an idol in our lives!
- Lord willing, we will all learn to be content in any situation, knowing that He is faithful no matter what our circumstances might be today or tomorrow!

Communion Meditation: Mark 8:22

“Then [Jesus] came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him.

23 So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything.

24 And he looked up and said,
“I see men like trees, walking.”

25 Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up.

And he was restored and saw everyone clearly.”