

**Genesis 29: 1-12; "Rachel's coming with the Sheep", Sermon # 84
in the series - "Beginnings", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on October 8th, 2006 in the Morning Worship Service.**

We have seen in the past few sermons that Jacob has found mercy from God in his conversion on the way to Haran; an event which he did not look for, and which he was unworthy of; but it made him glad and gave him a joy and a spring in his step as he walked the rest of the way to the place where he will begin a new life. Conversion is just the first event of a new and glorious life of knowing God and walking with God. It says in verse 1, "So Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the East." The original Hebrew says, "He lifted up his feet"; he went the rest of the way with a light step. He had been given the promises that God would be with him, and would keep him wherever he went; that He would not leave him to his own resources, which were few anyway. But what more does a young man need than God by his side, God working in his heart, God showing him the way? He finally completed the 500 mile journey and came to this "land of the East." He had found that God was real and true to His promise thus far, and now he wondered, "Will I find a wife?" Well, God is going to show him that He is the God of Providence, and although there is a mystery of Providence there is also a great plan that is behind it. Since Jacob has received the blessing of the promised Seed, Jesus Christ, in the blessing that was given to him by his father before he left, and in the revelation of the ladder set up between earth and heaven; there will be a meaning and a significance to Jacob's life beyond simply himself. He is to be the father of physical nation and he is also to be the father of a spiritual nation within that physical nation. And so, many things that he will do and many of the things that will happen to him prefigure things of spiritual significance in relation to the Church of Jesus Christ, both Old Testament and New.

Jacob and Rachel, meeting in the way that they did, by a well, so that the sheep could be watered and so that they could find each other, shows God great power to providentially order all of the greatest events in our lives and in the life of our church, both present and future. This meeting of a shepherd and a shepherdess and their concerns for watering these sheep, also shows forth to us today in tangible ways, the relationship of Christ and his bride-to-be, the Church. The work that goes on in relation to the spiritual sheep that need to be fed and watered with the gospel and the word of God, is done by believers who are spiritual shepherds. We are not

only speaking of the elders of a church but the family unit itself in conjunction with the local church. So what we are asking this morning from our text is this. "What is the meaning and significance of Jacob and Rachel's meeting in this marvelous, providentially ordered way?" There was a meaning and a significance for Jacob and Rachel who were shepherds, and there is a meaning and significance for us today in the church, in the following 4 ways.

1st- The well with the large stone on it has real significance to those who shepherd sheep. (Verses 1-3)

Jacob "looked, and saw a well in the field; and behold, there were 3 flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks." "A large stone was on the well's mouth." "Now all the flocks would be gathered there; and they would roll the stone from the well's mouth, water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the well's mouth." Jacob is looking at one of the realities of his future occupation. He was going to become a shepherd of sheep, and goats, and cattle for Laban. And he would be doing a lot of watering of sheep. This is the first place that God led him to when he came to the land of the East. It was probably the place where, most generally, if you were seeking for someone, or something in particular, that you would go there to inquire about it; for the shepherds would congregate there. It is very fitting that Jacob became a shepherd; this patriarch whose name would be changed to Israel. And it is also fitting that it was at this well that he was to meet his future wife Rachel. Jacob, in the future, was to become a man who would be "exceedingly prosperous," he would have large flocks, it says in Genesis 30: 43. He would raise and care for sheep in a family setting. This is significant to us who are heads of households today, because believers in both Old testament and New are called sheep. Unbelieving people are called sheep without a shepherd. The gospel itself and the promises of the blessings of salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit are all spoken of as a fountain of life. The water of life is taken from the wells of salvation and given to the sheep of God that they might drink and be saved, and that their souls would be satisfied. Psalm 23 says, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." "He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters." "He restores my soul." This was the type of life that Jacob was now entering. "All the flocks of sheep are gathered there at the well "of salvation, looking for a drink.

And this is the type of life that the Christian enters into after conversion. He is a sheep cared for by the Shepherd of Israel. Ezekiel 34: 31 says, "You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men, and I am your God, says the Lord." The pure water of the gospel and pure water of

the word of God is given us to drink by our Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ. The reason that there is a stone on the mouth of the well in Jacob's day was to keep the well from being polluted with dust and rubbish, or from being poisoned by enemies. These were real considerations in that day. And they are real considerations in our day with regard with regard to the gospel as well. The Philistines of Isaac's day had filled the wells that his father had dug, with earth and rubbish, so that they could not be used. And people of our day who do not like the pure truths of the gospel and the pure word of God will attempt to throw much that is harmful and much that is rubbish into the well that we would drink from as well. They would pollute or stop up the well of the Holy Scriptures. But the Lord Himself will see to it that no false shepherd will come and pollute the waters with a false gospel or false doctrine. The under-shepherds of the Lord's Word are given the instruction to keep the stone on the mouth of the well, that is to protect the purity of the gospel and God's word, to give the sheep nothing that will bring spiritual sickness or death to the Lord's people. In Ezekiel 34: 15, in speaking of what he would do to protect his flock, the believers among His flock of Old Testament Israel, God says, "I will feed my flock, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God." "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment." "And as for you, O My flock, thus says the Lord God: Behold I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats." "Is it too little for you to have eaten up the good pasture, that you must tread down with feet the residue of your pasture--and to have drunk of the clear waters, that you must foul the residue with your feet?" "And as for My flock, they eat what you have trampled with your feet, and they drink what you have fouled with your feet." But then comes this great promise in verse 22 and following, "Therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep." "I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them--My servant David." "He shall feed them and be their shepherd." This is speaking of what the Father would do through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, for believers in His promises. David is the type of the Lord Jesus Christ in these verses. It says in Hebrews 13: 20 and 21 that God would make believers in His promises "complete in every good work to do His will, working in us what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Jacob is to become a shepherd also, in the sense that he is about to become the head of a new household in marriage, and to have a large

number of children that he will care for and look after. He will take care of them even as a shepherd does his sheep. So does every Christian father do the same thing. He will become their shepherd in leading them to drink waters that are clear and pure and satisfying in terms of the truths that he gives them from God's Word. Let me ask you, fathers, are you the shepherd of your household to your wife and children? Do you feed and water them with the promises of God? Do you give them the 10 commandments and explain them in the spiritual sense of heart obedience that Christ the great Shepherd and Good Shepherd intends that they should be explained? Do you live this out in front of them? Do you teach them what is rubbish and unprofitable, and do you warn them of what is false or dangerous? This is your duty as the family's shepherd. Your children are sheep and they need Christ to be their shepherd. But in order to really know Christ, they need to receive the pure water of God's word from you in order to have spiritual life and to know what is good for them to drink. You need to water their lives. You need to promote their Bible reading and prayer. You need to promote good books and good activities, not those that are polluted with the rubbish of the world or the poison of Satan's lies. You must be a good shepherd to them. They are sheep, and they are lambs. This is the significance of the well with the large stone on it, both to Jacob and to you.

2ndly- The conversation which Jacob had with the shepherds at the well has a real significance to it. (Verses 4-8)

"My brethren," Jacob says to them, "where are you from?" "And they said, "We are from Haran." "Then he said to them, 'Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?'" "And they said, 'We know him.'" "So he said to them, 'Is he well?" "And they said, 'He is well.'" "And look his daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep." "Then he said, 'Look, it is still high day; it is not time for the cattle to be gathered together." "Water the sheep, and go and feed them." "But they said, 'We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and they have rolled the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep." I think that the reason that Jacob said these things to the shepherds that were at the well was in order to find out more information about this place that he had come to, especially that information about his uncle Laban that would allow him to find him quickly. He calls them "brethren" because they are fellow human beings and shepherds as he was. He was friendly and open with them. A person who would have friends, it says in the book of Proverbs, must show himself friendly. He asks them about Laban; if they know him, and whether everything is well with him. They answer him in the affirmative and then they tell him that it is Laban's daughter Rachel that is coming towards him with her father's sheep. At this

point, I think that Jacob's heart skipped a beat or beat wildly for joy. "Could all this happen so quickly," he thinks to himself? "Could this possibly be my future wife that I am seeing coming toward me?" But he will not presume that he knows what only God knows. And now, having the knowledge that this is Rachel, he probably thought that it would be good if he could speak to her by himself. He says to the shepherds, "Look it is still high day; it is not time for the cattle to be gathered together." Water the sheep, and go and feed them." "But they say, 'We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and they have rolled the stone from the well's mouth.'" Jacob is not going to get a private first meeting with Rachel.

We need to understand from this that ultimately our lives are not lived to ourselves, and cannot be lived to ourselves. God would have people to know us and to observe us at critical and delicate points of our lives. There will be, and should be, times of privacy with people whom we may like or wish to get to know, but we will not always be able to control all the circumstances of our meeting them or getting to know them. What is beautiful about this, is that it is shepherds who are the ones to witness this first beautiful and providential meeting of Jacob and Rachel. This is indeed appropriate. Young person, when you first meet the person that you will marry, it will probably be in the presence of others, perhaps of parents or chaperones, or in the company of others who will witness what you will do and what you will say. Will you allow this to become a discouragement to you? Will you become cold and sullen in your mind and heart because you cannot be alone with them? You will ruin everything that will be remembered by that special person that you like, if you do. Perhaps you cannot say everything that you want to say to her, but there will be time for that later. Jacob's witnesses and chaperones are 3 flocks of sheep and some shepherds, but he will not allow the warmth of his holy feelings to be suppressed for long in this situation. The shepherds there at the well do not believe that the stone can be rolled away and the sheep be watered until all the flocks and cattle are gathered together later in the day. But Rachel's coming seems to contradict all of this, in Jacob's mind. And this is my third point.

Rachel's coming with her father's sheep has great significance to Jacob.

(Verses 9, 10, and 11)

"Now while he was speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess." Jacob must have truly been amazed when he saw Rachel for the first time. Here was a woman who he could get to know. She is doing the same things with the sheep and the flocks that he

had done in the past. She was a shepherdess. It awakened in him some very strong emotions of remembering the times when he was involved in shepherding activities with his mother, and how close he had been to her, how much he loved and missed her. As he looked at Rachel he remembered all the time that he had spent with his mother, and the many conversations that they had together. Do you notice the repetition of the words "his mother" three times in verse 10? "And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother." Jacob now understood that God had gone before him and had brought him to someone who would be like his mother in that she would have similar thoughts and a similar perspective on life, as his mother did.

Young people, I wonder if you will see with me this morning the importance of what is being described for you here right now. If your mother or father is a godly person, and you are close to them, and you have come to love and see the importance of those good and godly qualities in them, will you not be looking for those same graces, and that same wisdom, and those same qualities of thoughtful caring and responsibility that you saw in them; in the one whom you consider as the person that you might marry? I urge you to do so. You need to find someone of similar and compatible earthly interests, and you need to find someone of similar and compatible heavenly interests as well. Think long and think hard about what that person is like that you will consider to be your partner in marriage. You may not be able to see as much as Jacob saw about Rachel when he first met her. But you can believe that God will lead you and guide you and show you who it is that you should marry if you will remember the shepherding qualities of your godly parents.

What is the significance of Rachel's coming with the sheep? What is the significance of her being a shepherdess? The significance is for their future. It is that, after they married; both, as parents in their family would be not only be shepherds of sheep, but they would be shepherds of their children's lives, under the good superintendence of the great Shepherd Jesus Christ. The wife and mother in the family is just as much needed to be one who shepherds the children as the husband. They need to work together in this good work and not be separated in their perspective of what they are trying to accomplish. This is the significance of Jacob and Rachel, the shepherd and the shepherdess marrying each other. This is why Jacob kissed Rachel. This is why he wept. It was because he saw the compatibility of their lives before the Lord who had saved him. He saw that God knew how

to do great things by His providence. This was not a sensual kiss that Jacob gave to Rachel. His weeping at this time proves it. It was the holy kiss of recognizing what God was doing in bringing them together in the right way; the way of his leading, in accordance with his truth, and by His Spirit. I hope that you will not conclude that this kiss that Jacob gave Rachel was in any way an indication of what young people should do when they first meet each other in a courtship relationship. It is not a kiss of romance, although it was a kiss of love. It was the kiss of a relative. It was a "brotherly kiss". It was showing the right kind of affection in the right way, realizing that God had done this great thing and had brought him to Rachel and to her father's house. Laban, when he hears from Rachel that Jacob, "his sister's son, had come, "ran to meet Jacob, and embraced him and kissed him." This is a similar kind of display of affection. There should be a holy affection among the saints as well.

Then 4thly- Jacob's drawing near and rolling the stone from the well's mouth has significance also. (Verses 10-12)

The shepherds had said in verse 8 that they "could not water the sheep until all the flocks were gathered together." But after Jacob meets Rachel and realizes what God has done for him, it says in verse 10 that "Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth." Let us receive the meaning that God has for us here in these words. It was not the custom of these shepherds to water their flocks until later in the day when they were able to gather all the flocks. But Jacob was saying with his actions that he would assume responsibility for Rachel and her flock when he rolled the stone off the mouth of the well. This is what any young man does when he says that he will care for his wife-to-be and goes to her father seeking for her hand in marriage. He is saying that he will assume responsibility for her care and the care of the children that they will have. He will roll away the stone from the mouth of the well. He will provide for their needs and deal with the obstacles that are too great for the woman, who is the weaker vessel, to deal with. He will water the flock at all the times that they need it, not just when the flocks of others are gathered together at the well. This should show us that the father and the husband is responsible and should, because of his great love to his wife and children, want to water his flock spiritually at all the times that they need it, and not just the times when all the flocks are gathered together as a Church at the well of the Scriptures. A father must be a good shepherd of his sheep and water them when they need it at other times, every day. Jacob is a good example of taking holy initiative at this point. You notice that the other shepherds did not stop him in doing this. They did not rebuke him and tell him to wait. They may

have even helped him to roll the stone off the mouth of the well. But it is certain that Jacob did take the initiative to do this, and he did so out of love and concern for Rachel. Let us learn to do what Jacob did, all of us who are strong young men, all of us who are heads of houses; all of us who bear a responsibility to feed and water Christ's sheep. Jesus says in Revelation 21: 6, "I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts." And in chapter 22: 17, it says, "And the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'" "And let him who hears say, 'Come!'" "And let him who thirsts come." "Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely." And let all those who would be shepherds in the church and shepherds in their family roll the stone away and water their flock.