

YOU LIVE AND LEARN
GENESIS 29:1-30

From Bethel Jacob turned his face toward the East. The Hebrew makes an interesting suggestion about his journey. It literally reads that “Jacob lifted up his feet.” There seems to have been a new spring in his step and smile on his face when he turned from the experience at Bethel toward the East. This would not be surprising because God had said to him, “I will be with you.” Anyone with a promise that God will be with him has reason to pick up his feet as he walks along.

However when you read the 29th chapter of Genesis about his journey to the East, there is no specific reference to God being with him. What you have is the report of a series of things that happened in his life that on the surface seemed to have no relationship with God. But we should read this chapter with the understanding that God is with Jacob. Specifically, God is with him as the sovereign teacher of the lessons of life. We should read this chapter with the understanding that God is the teacher and Jacob is the pupil. You have heard the expression that we “live and learn.” There is a lot of truth in that little expression. We do or at least should live and learn. If we are teachable there are some specific lessons that we will learn as God gives us instruction through the events of life.

There are at least three lessons that God taught Jacob in the things that happened to him in this passage. They are lessons that God is seeking to teach each of us. Hopefully, we may have already learned these lessons and we are now conducting our lives in light of these lessons.

I. LESSON ONE: GOD IS IN CONTROL.

When Jacob left Bethel with the memory of his encounter with God fresh in his mind, he traveled 450 long miles to the land of Haran. In the providence of God his journey brought him to a well in the midst of a field. When he arrived at that well there were already three flocks of sheep gathered there with their care takers waiting to get water from the well. This particular well had a large stone, which covered it. This stone was probably there to keep some intruder from polluting the well. Jacob approached these shepherds and asked them, “My brothers, where are you from?” They answered him; “We are from Haran.” Then he wanted to know from them “Do you know Laban, Nahor’s grandson?” They acknowledged to Jacob that they knew Laban, the grandson of Nahor. Jacob asked them, “Is he well?” They responded by assuring Jacob Laban was well and they said to him, “And here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep.”

When Jacob turned and saw Rachel approaching with her father’s flock in the distance, he wanted to know why they had not rolled the stone away from the well. They told him that it wasn’t time to roll the stone away until everyone was there with their sheep.

Jacob greeted Rachel warmly and informed her that he was the son of her father’s sister. Jacob was so energized by the encounter with Rachel that he went to the well and rolled the stone away by himself. And then he watered his uncle’s sheep at the well.

The record then reads, “Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud. He had told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah so she ran and told her father.” Can you not see this weary traveler standing by that well with this beautiful young shepherdess by his side weeping? But why was he weeping? I think he was weeping because he was overcome with a profound sense of the providence of God. The God, who had said to him at Bethel, “I will be with you,” was indeed with him. The chance encounter with the daughter of Laban at the well had to be of God. Jacob may have had in mind how the servant of Abraham had found the family of Sarah at a well in a similar circumstance. The relationship that his mother, Rebekah, was to have with his father Isaac had been initiated by providential encounter at the well. Now God has done it again! He has ordered the steps and directed the ways of Jacob to the family of his mother. He stands now in the presence of a young woman that something in his heart tells him, “She is to be your wife!” It is almost too much for him to take in. Obviously God is in control.

Has God been able to teach you that He is in control? He may and probably does use some other circumstance in your life but the outcome is the same. As the events unfold in your life you become aware that someone greater than you is directing your steps. Someone else is arranging things in your life. Someone else is looking out for your welfare. In the midst of this you are made to acknowledge “God is with me!”

II. LESSON TWO: THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE NEVER DID RUN SMOOTH.

We have before us in this passage a great example of true love. It may well have been at least for Jacob love at first sight. Typical of records of that particular generation there is no reference to the feelings or the response of Rachel. Everything is given to us from Jacob's perspective. One of the great English writers, Coleridge, observed, "No man could be a bad man who loved as Jacob loved Rachel."

We find in this beautiful love encounter an example of how true love waits. When Jacob had spent a few days in the house of Laban and Laban had opportunity to observe the ways of the young man, his uncle offered him a job. They negotiated an agreement whereby Jacob would work as a shepherd for Laban for seven years and in return he would receive the hand of Rachel in marriage. When Jacob came to the house of Laban he brought no dowry with him. He was not financially in a position to be able to afford marriage to a beautiful young woman like this. So for seven long years he worked taking care of the sheep of Laban, anticipating the day when they would be joined in marriage. During those seven years he was preparing himself mentally, emotionally, and physically to be joined to his beloved in marriage.

Our generation of young people should read this lesson again and again. Here is an example of true love and it works and waits for seven years. There is no attempt to break the rules or to change the circumstances. Rather true love waits. It believes that what is out there at the end of the wait makes the wait worthwhile. So for seven years Jacob worked and waited.

But unlike some modern romantic stories not everything runs smoothly. The love of Jacob is not deterred but finds it put in a terrible circumstance. On the night that he thought he married Rachel, due to the deceit of his father-in-law he found himself married to Leah, her sister. The scriptures contrast these two sisters by giving a suggestion concerning their appearance. Evidently Leah was a rather homely lady, while Rachel was a beauty queen. Jacob had not been blind to the difference between the two when he asked for the hand of Rachel in married. It was a great disappointment when he woke up after his wedding night to find himself married to Leah.

When he confronted Laban with the deceit, Laban gave a flimsy explanation concerning the customs of the day, and promised him Rachel's hand for seven more years of labor. To the credit of Laban it can be said that he did not require Jacob to wait seven years to be married. All that he required was that he fulfill the obligatory marriage week with Leah and then he could have Rachel's hand in marriage. But you can imagine the disappointment to Jacob and the disappointment to Rachel. They were finally married, but the beautiful dreams they had connected with their marriage were all tarnished.

Just because you find the person that you love, it does not mean that everything will go smoothly. There will always be some bumps in the road. Some times the bumps are relational. The girl you want to marry may have a father who is very difficult or the young man you want to marry may have a mother who is very possessive, or there may be financial difficulties that put a bump in the road, or some of you of another generation have discovered, true love often had to wait until a young man finished his military

obligation. The government put a bump in the road of your true love. But the test of true love is what you do when you find bumps in the road.

Just because you run into a bump in the road does not mean you are on the wrong road. It may simply mean that you need to check your directions, and if everything seems to be right, continue in the same direction. God is at work in the midst of life's circumstances teaching us the nature of true love.

III. LESSON THREE: YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW.

Someone has wisely observed "God has no favorites." This means that every human being is equally subject to the law of the harvest. God accepts responsibility to help us become aware of this profound and sobering truth by using the things that happen to us in life.

What would you think was the besetting sin in the life of Jacob? Based on what we know from the earlier chapters in Genesis, it would seem to be the inclination to manipulate people and to deceive. In fact his very name means, "heel catcher." From before his birth he was trying to get ahead at the expense of someone else. He was trying always to take advantage of his brother, Esau. That is the kind of seed he sowed in the family setting back in the land of Canaan. He had deceived his own father in order to gain the blessing that belonged to his brother. The law of the harvest is that you reap what you sow. Since God has no favorites, God will teach Jacob this truth by the things that happen to him life.

What happens when he gets to the house of Laban? His uncle, Laban, proves to be better at deception than Jacob. He gets seven years of hard work out of Jacob for the hand of Rachel only in the end to give him Leah instead. Jacob felt totally deceived when he woke up after his wedding night to find himself in the bed with Leah instead of Rachel. As he jumped out of that bed it may not have occurred to him that he was reaping what he had sown, but somewhere along the way the truth must have come home to him. Do you remember that question that he threw at Laban on the morning after his wedding night? “Why have you deceived me?” He had sown deception and now it is time to reap.

And the law of the harvest is that you always reap more than you have sown. When you look at the consequences of Laban’s deception it is obvious that Jacob has reaped even more than he has sown. Laban’s deception resulted in the marital relationships of Jacob being affected for the rest of his life. That law of the harvest was in full play. Has God been able to teach you this lesson? Once you learn this lesson, you will be more careful about your sowing.

As you step back and take a look at your life, what is God teaching you? Life is a classroom. God is the teacher and you are the student. He has something to teach you through everything that happens in your life—both the good and the bad. The effectiveness of God’s teaching depends on us having a teachable spirit. May God grant to us such a spirit! It was a long time before Jacob truly developed a teachable spirit.

(ALTERNATE OUTLINE)

I. LESSON ONE: GOD IS IN CONTROL.

- 1. The Providences of God are invisible.**
- 2. The Providences of God are good.**

**II. LESSON TWO: LIFE IS A MIXTURE OF JOY AND
DISAPPOINTMENT.**

- 1. Our greatest disappointments come from people close to us.**
- 2. Some of our greatest joys come through our disappointments.**

III. LESSON THREE: THERE IS A LAW OF THE HARVEST IN LIFE.

- 1. You reap what you sow.**
- 2. You reap more than you sow.**