

God's will prevails

Genesis 29:15-28

Before we dive into the story of Jacob and his two wives, I think a little backstory may be helpful. Jacob was the younger twin, born with his brother Esau, to Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac and Rebekah played favorites with their sons, Isaac preferring Esau and Rebekah favoring Jacob. Right from the get-go we are working with a dysfunctional family.

With Rebekah's blessing, Jacob disguised himself to deceive his father, managing to steal the blessing meant for Esau, the first-born son. Jacob was then forced to flee the wrath of his wronged brother. Under the ruse that she did not want her son to marry a local girl, Isaac sent Jacob to his Uncle Laban, Rebekah's brother, where he would be well received. This is where we pick up Jacob's story this morning.

Having been welcomed by his Uncle Laban, Jacob likely set to making himself useful around the house, while falling head-over-heels in love with his cousin Rachel. We do not know if Jacob came bearing gifts for his uncle or with only the clothes on his back, what we do know is that in ancient times a man wishing to marry would offer a dowry to the woman's father. Having little resources of his own, when Laban offers him the opportunity to earn his dowry price, Jacob jumps at the chance. Laban is likely aware that the young man is smitten and readily accepts

Jacob's offer to work for seven years for Rachel's hand. This would have been an extraordinary dowery price, in any age. But take note, Laban's response to the request for Rachel's hand is ambiguous. He does not say, "You will have the hand of Rachel." He says, "It's better that I give her to you than to someone else." Did he already have Leah in mind?

History is mixed in its depiction of Leah, whose name is said to mean "cow". Some scholars say she was attractive, but not as attractive as her sister. Others say she was plain with weepy eyes, not likely to be snatched up before, or perhaps even after her sister, Rachel, whose name means "ewe." Rachel was reported to be beautiful not only in appearance but in how she handled herself. Rachel would be the hands down winner in any marriage derby. Luckily for Laban, the prohibition of marrying two sisters at the same time would not come until God handed down the Law to Moses several hundred years later. So, Laban schemed to deceive the deceiver and unload two daughters at once. Generational dysfunction reared its ugly head once again.

What we see in this story, and others that follow throughout the Bible, is that God is in charge of all things. We see that when someone faithfully serves God, even when things go south, God's purpose will still prevail.

In the previous chapter of Genesis, we are privy to the scene of Jacob dreaming of a ladder extending to the heavens and his resolution upon waking:

⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear ²¹ so that I return safely to my father’s household, then the Lord will be my God.” Gen 28:20-21

Jacob, despite his human failings, dedicated himself to serve God and so proved worthy to become the father of the tribes of Israel. Leah, the unloved wife, became the mother of many of those tribes, including Judah, the ancestor of Jesus. God was at work in the lives of the alien (Jacob) and the unloved (Leah), and it is those who are on the margins that continue to be close to the heart of God. Archbishop Desmond Tutu in speaking about the history of Israel said this:

“This God did not just talk—He acted. He showed himself to be a doing God. Perhaps we might add another point about God—He takes sides. He is not a neutral God. He took the side of the slaves, the oppressed, the victims. He is still the same today, He sides with the poor, the hungry, the oppressed and the victims of injustice.”

In our story today, we see humans behaving badly toward each other. Jacob stole his brother’s blessing. Laban wrongfully used Jacob in order

to marry off both the unloved and beloved daughters. And I wish I could say that things ran a lot more smoothly after the double wedding, but the Bible tells us otherwise. But there is also something else the Bible tells us: God's will prevails. Despite the tangled webs of deceit and trickery that has run through the human family, from the time of the Patriarchs to today, God's will prevails.

God has been able to bring order out of chaos since the time of Creation. Despite the morally questionable triangle of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, God's will prevailed when Isaac was born as the son of promise. Despite rampant favoritism in the family of Isaac and Rebekah, and the deception of Laban in giving the unloved daughter to Jacob, Jacob would still go on to become the father of the tribes of Israel. Joseph, the favored son of Jacob, sold into slavery by his jealous brothers would rise to become the savior of nations during a time of famine. As time went on we would see the Hebrew baby, Moses, raised in Pharaoh's court, grow up to defend his people through murder and yet be called to be the leader of those tribes taking them out of slavery to the Promised Land. The shepherd king, David, a man after God's own heart we are told, was an adulterer and a murderer, was a poor father leading to intrigue in his courts, yet he is remembered as the greatest of the kings of Israel. God's will prevails.

Through all of time God's will prevails because he is God and his heart is tuned to the alien, the unloved, the outcasts, and those on the margins of society. He uses fallible human beings to execute His will in ways we struggle to understand. Perhaps in Jacob's love for Rachel we can catch a glimpse of how much God loves us, despite how messy we can be.

Jacob deemed Rachel worthy of whatever sacrifice he needed to make to be with her. Can we see in Jacob, God's love for us, willing to make the ultimate sacrifice in his son, Jesus?

Knowing how much God loves and works with broken humanity (which includes each of us), can we look at our brothers and sisters, in their brokenness, and love them as God loves us? Can we see how God might use those society sees as "less than" to fulfill His purpose? When we are able to do so, God's will shall prevail. May it be so.

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