

**Genesis 35: 8, 16-20, and 27-29; “The Value of Life & Death” Sermon # 95 in series**  
**– “Beginnings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019**  
**in the Morning Worship Service.**

I want you to understand, as we begin to consider what this passage might hold for us, that when God redeems a person, when He begins to do the good work of transforming their life to make it into the image of Christ, He then undertakes to make every experience in their life to have value to them. He causes all things to work together for good to those whom He has called. As a Christian, when you experience that which is hard for you to bear, it sometimes becomes something which works for your good. God teaches you through it, and it becomes something which is precious, also to Him, when you learn to cling to Him, and to His promises.

So, we need to remember this important truth; that when you are proving God’s faithfulness to yourself, then because you are looking to Him in faith, God will become more precious to you every day. If God the Father and your Lord Jesus Christ are not becoming more precious to you every day, then you need to ask yourself – Why not? Could it be that I am tolerating unbelief in my heart? O, may it not continue! May it not be the case with you. For the apostle Paul says in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3: 21 – “Therefore let no one boast in men.” “For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come – All are yours.”

Now, I want you to notice that Death is included in that list of all things which are yours. And so the question that I want to ask at this hour is this – How does the death of your loved ones, or even your own death when it comes providentially in God’s time, come to have value to you as a Christian? The lessons that you will learn this morning, will be of great help to you, if you will listen carefully. I would answer the question in this way. Your life and your death will become of value to you when you will learn the following 3 lessons. There is 1<sup>st</sup> – The lesson of service. There is 2<sup>nd</sup> – The lesson of your desires. And then 3<sup>rd</sup> there is the lesson of God’s timing in your being gathered to your people. Let’s take a look at them one by one and take in all the truth that God has for us here.

**1<sup>st</sup> – There is the lesson of Service.** (verse 8)

It was right after Jacob had built the altar to the Lord, there at Bethel, that it says in verse 8 – “Now Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the terebinth tree.” This Deborah must have been a very special person to Jacob and to all of his household. She is not mentioned by name, before, in the Bible. But I believe that she is the one referred to in Genesis 24: 59. It was the time when Rebekah, Jacob’s mother, agreed to “go with this man”, the steward and servant of Abraham; when Rebekah agreed to become Isaac’s wife. It says in that place – “So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham’s servant and his men.” She had been Rebekah’s servant and helper during all the wanderings and places that she and Isaac had lived in. She had seen the Lord greatly bless her master and her mistress.

This lady served Rebekah faithfully during the whole time of her raising Esau and Jacob. Then it appears that when Jacob went to Haran and married Laban’s daughters, that, at some point she may have come back from Hebron to Haran and served Jacob’s large family during that 20 year stay as well. She was a nurse par-excellence. She probably helped Leah and Rachel with nursing and raising many of their children during those difficult early years. She understood why Jacob dwelt in tents, and perhaps was with him in some of his wanderings.

She no doubt saw some of the joys and sorrows related to his family. She was able to comfort him and encourage him with her words and her service on behalf of his family, because she had come to have a faith of her own in the true and living God. She was, indeed, the helper of many. She evidently had seen Jacob’s faith and come to believe in Jacob’s God, because she was one of those who had “put away” all of her idols. The idols were buried under a terebinth

tree at Shechem. Deborah was buried under the terebinth tree at Bethel. The Lord has put this verse in the Bible for one very important reason. It has to do with her value to God and her value to other people around her. This is why she is mentioned. It says in verse 8 that the name of the place was called, "Allon Bachuth". Translated this means, "The terebinth of weeping".

There was great sorrow over this woman's death. It was the end of an era for Jacob. The death of people of our parent's age is a sad thing in many respects. They were the ones who taught us much of what we know about life. They are the ones who read us our story books and took us places, and did things for us and with us. We cannot, and we should not, forget them. The good people in our lives are gifts of the Almighty God to us. Only God could have raised them up to do what they did for us.

Deborah was not only a servant helper, but she was somewhat of a mother-figure in Jacob's life. His own mother, Rebekah, was not with him for much of his life due to the separation because of Esau. Also, the distance was very great, some 500 miles. Deborah was the one connection that Jacob did have with his mother, and so he probably thought of his mother whenever he spoke with Deborah. The two were intimately connected in his mind. It is worth observing that there is no record of Rebekah's death in the Bible. I

think that it possibly took place not too long before Deborah's. But only Deborah's death is mentioned. I think that this is because she was actually more of a mother to Jacob than his own mother was. That was the reality of the situation. I think that the Lord raised up Deborah to do these things because Rebekah could not be there. Now, we can learn something very valuable from this. It is this: That in God's sight, there is great value in serving others. It is something that will be remembered forever. Being a faithful servant is a very precious thing in God's sight; just as it comes to be in the sight of those closest to them.

The principle of truth for us to consider is found in Matthew 23: 8-12 if you will turn there with me. "But you, do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren." "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven." "And do not be called teachers for One is your teacher, the Christ." "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant." "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." This is the principle which is so precious to the heart of God and men.

It takes humility to be a servant. It takes submission to be a good and faithful servant of Christ. It takes Christ's love to serve well, when you are not being forced to it. All of these qualities, I believe, Deborah had. I believe that Jacob and all of his household learned the preciousness of these qualities by looking at her life, and remembering her as she was. This is what made her funeral a place of weeping. The people remembered, and they valued the preciousness of her service to them.

You see this kind of reaction to a spiritual servant's death in the New Testament in Acts chapter 9, verse 36. It says there, "At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas." "This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did." "But it happened in those days that she became sick and died." "When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room." "And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them."

"Then Peter arose and went with them." "When he had come, they brought him to the upper room." "And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them." "But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed." "And turning to the body he said, 'Tabitha, arise.'" "And she opened her eyes and when she saw Peter she sat up." "Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive."

You see here, how valuable this woman's service was. We could wish that God would raise from the dead, all such servants, immediately. But God has things for us to learn about service.

And sometimes we learn them better when the teacher has passed on to glory. Death becomes of value when we understand the value of a servant's life. All service in the name of Christ has an eternal reward. A life well lived establishes that reward in God's sight. Revelation 14: 13 says – "Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write; Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them." The works of service for Christ's sake, follow every believer. They will have a time to rest from their labors in death.

Ask yourself this morning: Do I have works of service to others in my family, and in my church family, that will follow me? Have I labored to serve others, or do I labor simply to serve myself? I would assert to you that it was because of Deborah's loving service, and her works of caring, that she has this verse given to her in the Bible. She had a place in the hearts of all who knew her. If you will lovingly serve and think of the needs of others, you will find a similar place in the hearts of people around you. And your life, and even your death, will have great value.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – Your life and your Death can be of value to you if you will learn the lesson of your desires.** (Verses 16-20)

"Then they journeyed from Bethel." "And when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel labored in childbirth, and she had hard labor." "Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the mid-wife said to her, 'Do not fear: you will have this son also.'" "And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin." "So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)." Let us pause here and think back in time a few years in the account of Genesis, to Genesis Chapter 30.

At this point, if you will recall, Rachel saw Leah was bearing children to Jacob and that she was not. And the text says that "she envied her sister, and said to Jacob, 'Give me children or I die.'" "And Jacob's anger was aroused against Rachel, and he said, 'Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?'" Perhaps you remember the rest of the story. Rachel gave her maid Bilhah to Jacob as wife so that she could compete with her sister for Jacob's affections. What strong desires that Rachel had, to fulfill her God-given role as a mother to Jacob's children. But her envy of Leah made her desires all the stronger. In fact, it made them too strong.

Let me explain this to you. When there is sin mixed in with your desires, it will lead you to go too far in your words and deeds. She had said, "Give me children, or else I die." Well sometimes we forget that God listens to our every word. And we forget that God will hold us accountable for every careless word that we speak in the day of judgment. Rachel had put Jacob in the place of God, a thing which no one should ever do. When you put a person in the place of God, and then demand of them something which only God has the power to give you, you will be bitterly disappointed in the end.

I do believe that Rachel did learn her lesson. She did come to a right attitude in this regard. It says in verse 22 of Chapter 30, "Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb." She had learned to pray, and she had learned to go straight to God with these strong desires. But still sometimes, a Christian person may not understand what the outcome will be in relation to their strong desires. When you pray, you should pray not only for what you want in a situation, but also to be able to receive it in the way that God would intend for you to have it.

That will temper the strength of your desire and it will help you to keep the commandments of God. You shall not covet. You shall have no other gods before me. O may each of us understand, that our words reveal what is in our heart. They may come to haunt us later on. Truly they may cost us our life. And as we see from the names of the children that Rachel bore to Jacob, this may be good, and then it may not be so good. Her first son's name was Joseph which means – He will add to me another son. It was true, she would have one more son. But

this labor was different. It is called hard labor here in verse 16. We must understand in relation to our desires, that the outworking of things, to get to the desired goal, will not always come about in the way that we conceive it. This is because for you, dear Christian, God is teaching you about yourself. He is teaching you His ways.

And, will you receive it? The mid-wife tried to encourage Rachel with a favorable outcome. She said to her, "Do not fear; you will have this son also". This was true. But the outcome was not in the mid-wife's hands. She could not guarantee the outcome to be favorable. Rachel seemed to sense this. Only God could bring this child to birth and save her life as well. God is sovereign in these things, and He was ordering all things for Rachel's good at this point in her life, as a believer in Him. He had determined that she would attain her goal, but He had also determined that she would not live physically to see the blessed outcome of all of her labors.

You who believe in the Lord; will you not see that you cannot predict the outcome of your hard labors in what you desire most in life, whether it is having children or attaining to some other goal or thing that you desire. It is not in your hands. It is in God's hands. A Christian must be prepared to die at any time, whether they are young or old. I exhort you all this morning, whether you are young or old, that you must turn to Christ for salvation and eternal life. And dear Christian, do not assume that you will have many a day left in your life to think about all that you will accomplish and bring forth. If you are striving, what are you striving for?

Your greatest goal ought to be to know and to please God. You cannot do this without Jesus Christ and His grace. A Christian, who has been shown grace, should be preparing in such a way for death, that their greatest desire is to have Christ approve of what they have been striving to accomplish in this life. But the Christian should also be preparing to meet His Maker, His Savior, and Lord at any time when their Lord should choose to call them home. Indeed, this is what the true believer longs to do if they have come to maturity as a Christian.

Listen to what the Apostle Paul in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5: 1 and following – "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." "For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked." "For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life." "Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee." "So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord." "For we walk by faith, not by sight." "We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord."

So, we have here in the death of Rachel, one of the most beautiful descriptions in all the Scripture, of what it means to die, for the believer. It says in verse 18 – "And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin." The soul of a person, when they die, departs from their body. It is, as it is said in Ecclesiastes 12: 7 – "the spirit returning to God who gave it". It was at this very time of Rachel's dying that she called the son who was being born to her by the name Ben-Oni, which in the Hebrew means, "son of my sorrow". Jacob, who loved her so very much, took the name and gave it a better construction. He called him Benjamin, which means, "son of my right hand".

I would suggest to you that this shows us this morning the value of life and the value of death. The value of Rachel's life was in her coming to see things the way that God sees them. It is the same way that He would have us to see them. Rachel probably thought that all of her desires had come only to sorrow. She would not be able to see the fruit of her labors or to have the highest place in Jacob's affections any longer. She was having this child, but now she sees clearly that her desires in the past were not all that they should have been. As she looked at her life, she probably saw her own sinfulness, and she now felt in dying like someone who has been

put to bed in the dark. But clearly Jacob, in changing the name that she gave this child, was seeing things clearly, and how he appreciated his dying wife all the more for this child.

How he whispered these words in love in the ear of his beloved, wishing that she could stay, but knowing that she would go. But he knew that God would welcome Rachel into the eternal heavenly dwelling places, which would be far better although she did not know it in dying. Benjamin would be “the son of his right hand”. He would put the best construction on it that he could. He would put the construction on it that God Himself put on it. Oh, how beautiful thing it is to end your life well.

Listen to the Apostle Paul in Philippians 1: 19. “For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.” “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” I believe that even in this sorrowful event of Rachel’s death that Christ was being magnified. There is value in this death. Rachel is the picture of one who is going Christ’s way.

Life is coming to its climax, even though she is dying. The “son of her sorrow” will become “the son of his right hand” to his father. Even so, the Son of God, the Son of God’s right hand, would suffer in His labors and die for the sins of all who would believe in Him for eternal life. This is the value of your life and your death also; to look to Jesus Christ and find life, and find that that life which you have received, will never end. Your earthly plans may be ruined, but if you trust in the Lord Jesus, your heavenly life has only just begun. Even though as you look at your whole life and think that all of your desires to become and to accomplish something with your life have failed, and what you bring forth because of mistakes that you have made, is sorrow and grief, yet if you are trusting in Jesus, it shall all have the right construction put upon it by the Father. Your sins and mistakes will all be forgiven.

Listen to John 16: 20 – “Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.” “A woman when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.” “Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice and your joy no one will take from you.” Jesus is speaking of his labors in our redemption, and his disciples are sorrowing over them. It would indeed be a sorrowful experience for all of the 11 disciples when He went to the cross and died. But a child would be born, which is His Church.

And there will be a reward for your labors, as well, if they are in Christ. And others, not yourself, will put the right construction on it. It is not your glory to seek your own glory. It says in verse 19 – “So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).” Remember, this was the place where our Savior was born. Rachel was buried on way to where the Christ would be born; the very best place for an Old Testament saint to be buried. Jacob set a pillar on her grave, to show her how much he valued her in life, and for what he learned to value in her death. God Himself puts a good construction on her death, in this providential ordering of things, to have her die at this particular time, and this particular place. This is what faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is all about.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> – There is the lesson of God’s timing in your being gathered to your people.**

(verses 27-29)

“Then Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had dwelt.” “Now the days of Isaac were one hundred eighty years.” “So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, being old and full of days.” “And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.” Isaac, you see, had lived a good long time past what he thought that he would. He lived 50 years past the time when Jacob had deceived him into

giving him the blessing of the first born. He was almost blind then. He lived to be “old and full of days”. God’s timing is perfect in relation to your being gathered to your people in death. I hope that you have learned the lesson of the value of life, and the value of death today. Some of us may not outlive our youth or our middle age. Some of you may live to be very old, and yet all the while you are yearning to go to be with the Lord, but it is not your time yet. Let us learn the lesson of what it will mean to be gathered to our people.

Who are your people? Your people are either the people of God, those relatives and friends that are saved and redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ to know and serve Him in this life and the next. Or they are they are those relatives and friends who are living for this world and their desires are all related to what they will have here, and will accomplish here, in this world. But this world is passing away and the lust of it. But he who does the will of God abides forever. There is a great value to life when it is lived for Christ. And there is a great value to death.

When you first believe in Christ you come to understand that to die to sin with Christ is to come to understand what it means to live for God. It will mean that you been given such great grace that you will not live to yourself, but you will live to Him who loved you and gave Himself for You. Jacob labored for Rachel for 7 years and they seemed like a few days to him. The Lord Jesus labored for you to work out a perfect obedience to God on your behalf, and then He died for your sins on the cross if you will believe in Him. And with His life He purchased for every believer, and all of God’s elect, all of the days of an eternity of joy and peace and blessing which will never end. May you see the value of Christ’s life. And may you see the value of His death and His resurrection from the dead, even today.