

Genesis 29: 13-30; "What should your wages be?", Sermon # 85 in the series - "Beginnings", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on October 15th, 2006, in the Morning Worship Service.

We need desperately to believe today, in regard to our own life, that the same God Who saved Jacob on his journey to Haran in a dream of the night, and led him to meet Rachel right away when he first came to Haran, is the same God Who is now providentially ordering everything related to his new life in Haran, even his strange and unusual relationship with his uncle Laban. The reason that I say this is that sometimes Christians have the impression that God is the God Who only providentially orders the good things that happen to us in our lives, and not the difficult things. God, they think, cannot be the God who brings people into our lives who will be a part of His plan for us, to test our faith and our willingness to do the right thing when they have taken advantage of us, or even worse, sinned against us. The passage that we have in front of us shows us that it is so. God is not the author of sin, and he certainly does, because of His Son Jesus Christ, cause all things to work together for good for those who love him, to those who are called according to His purpose. But we are called "according to his purpose," and not our own. That is why there are so many things in life that do not go according to the way that we would want them to. It is because there is so much for us to learn. And sometimes, the only way that we can grow in faith and learn to repent of our past sins thoroughly, is for God to lead us to be around people in our jobs, or even in our family or extended family, who will not be all that we want them to be in the most important situations of our lives. This is a great test of our faith, an aggravating influence to our own remaining corruption and sin, but it is the opportunity to learn what we need to learn in order to grow in our faith and in order to receive the rewards for our good responses that only God can bring.

God's providence is at work in Jacob's relationship with Laban to accomplish His holy and wise purpose in relation to the things that Jacob had done in the past, as well as his present and future life in Haran. God, in placing Jacob in Laban's employ, will teach him, even as He will teach us as well, that He will pay us wages that will reward us according to our work and according to His mercy and faithfulness if we are trusting Him. How does God do this? How does God teach Jacob about Himself and His ways through Jacob's interaction with Laban? I would say that this passage shows us that God will teach Jacob how a man is paid according to his work in the sight of God. This seems to be the theme of the relationship between Jacob and Laban; what should Jacob's wages be? God will teach him what his wages should be in 4 areas of his life. He will teach him what will be the wages of his ability to choose. He will teach him the wages of love. He will teach him the wages of sin. And He will teach him the wages of perseverance. God has much to teach him and He has much to teach us as well. So let us begin.

1st- God will teach Jacob the wages of his choice. (Verses 13-17)

Laban's initial response to Jacob is a very good one. He has heard the report of Jacob, how he had left the household of his parents and had come to Haran on foot. He didn't have much in the way of possessions or resources with him, but he seemed to be an eager and thankful man; one who could possibly be of great use, Laban probably thought to himself. He had heard from Rachel how Jacob rolled the stone away from

the well's mouth, and he was impressed by Jacob's strength to do this. So he "ran out to meet Jacob and embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house," the text says. He brought Jacob into the house and probably listened to the story of his having to leave because of his father's blessing coming to him instead of Esau. He probably thought to himself, "Well, this man isn't going to be going back to Canaan anytime soon." "Perhaps I can persuade him to work for me." He says to him as Jacob finishes relating the stories of the past, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." He is saying, "I will take you in for my sister's sake." So Jacob, it says, stayed with him a month. After this first month, Laban is fully convinced of Jacob's worth and value to himself, to help him in the shepherding work. And his daughters did need a husband. Perhaps he would consider marriage to Leah. So he says to Jacob, "Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing?" "Tell me what should your wages be?" Name the price that it will take to keep you here. We should note here how greatly interested Laban is in having Jacob work for him. It is a question asked from selfish motives on his part. He is, as we shall see in future sermons, interested in making money off of Jacob's labor, more interested in having a indentured servant than in having a son. I think that he was aware of Jacob's interest in Rachel from the beginning of Jacob's time there. And Laban will take advantage of this as well.

Now we will see God give Jacob the wages of his choice in this question that Laban sets before him. God does not approve of Laban's cunning desire to take advantage of Jacob's labor but he would have Jacob remember another incident long before; that of the sale of the birthright by Esau to himself. The wages of Jacob's choice would reflect the reality of what went on in that conversation between Jacob and Esau, when Esau came in from the field, tired and famished, and Jacob would not give him the food that he was looking for unless he sold his birthright to him. Jacob used Esau's desire to get what he wanted most in life. Now Laban is going to use Jacob's desire to get what he wants most in life; to be rich. Jacob looked at Leah. He knew that she was the older daughter and yet he was not attracted to her. Her eyes were tender and delicate but that was the most beautiful aspect of her person as far as he could see. He was, on the other hand, greatly attracted to Rachel, who it says in the text, "was beautiful of form and appearance. His answer to Laban's question is to say to him, "I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter." This was a good choice which Jacob made. It flowed from the greatest desires of his heart. It was truly a noble and generous offer which Jacob made in the sincerity of his heart. He is showing Laban just how greatly he valued Rachel and how much he thought being married to her was worth. God knew this and Laban knew it too. It was, I am told, the custom of that day for men to give money or gifts to obtain the woman whom they wanted to marry. Jacob did not have either money or gifts but he would give his hard labor for Rachel. This was what Laban was hoping for, even better than he had hoped for. But he craftily conceals his joy by saying casually, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man." "Stay with me." God would establish this marital contract, but Jacob did not realize what it would really cost him to obtain Rachel. Jacob had taken advantage of Esau's hunger, that day so long ago, so that he could obtain the birthright, and yet Esau did not know what it would cost him. It was his soul in his case. Are you not thankful this morning that God showed such mercy to Jacob to lead him to understand the wages of the choices that he made? His earlier choice to take advantage of Esau was selfish

and sinful. He would learn to see this through the way that Laban treated him. His choice at this point shows grace at work in him, to value his wife-to-be so highly.

Now 2ndly- God will teach Jacob the wages of love.(Verse 20)

"So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed like only a few days to him because of the love that he had for her." Jacob shows us the strength and power of love. When a person is young and strong and in love the obstacles to doing things and going through difficulties to obtain the hand of the one they love, are greatly lessened. In Song of Solomon 8, verse 7, it says, "Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it." Jacob has already shown Rachel the strength of his first love by his rolling the stone away from the mouth of the well. This is all the more remarkable when you consider that Jacob was not that young. He was 78-80 years old at that time. Now he displays his love in the endurance of working 7 years labor for her. This is a very Christ-like love that he displays for Rachel. It is a labor of love, laying out his strength in this way, giving of himself for the one that he loved. The time seemed to pass very quickly because of his love for Rachel. In the greater sense, of which Jacob is a type, we see that the Lord Jesus loved the church, His bride, and gave Himself for her. Jesus had a work to do for His Father in order to purchase His Bride. He laid out his strength in perfect obedience to God's holy law and then died for her on the cross. God's commands were not burdensome to Him. They were his delight, and God Himself was His chief delight. He says in John 4: 34-36, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work." Do you not say, "There are still four months and then comes the harvest?" Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" "And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together." "For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.'" Jesus is saying that his food was to do God's will. That was His strength and satisfaction. It was that goal that sustained His very life. And He finished the work that His Father had sent Him to do, the work of redemption, so that He could purchase His Bride, a people for God's own possession. He sowed His life a Seed in the ground so that He could reap for God's Elect, everlasting life. He received the wages for the labors that He performed in obedience and sacrifice. He performed the work sowed His life and we reaped eternal life. All of our salvation is based upon the work that the Lord Jesus has done to redeem us. If we are to work the works of God, we must listen to the words of Christ in John 6: 29, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent. We merit nothing in the sight of God as a result of our works. All the merit is in Christ, and all the glory belongs to Him for our salvation, for His was the ultimate labor of love. Will you not, this morning, come to the Lord Jesus Christ, laying down your dead works and rest yourself in His loving arms? Will you have this man to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold until death will bring you together in a greater sense? This is what I beseech you to consider.

3rdly- God will teach Jacob the wages of sin. (Verses 21-27)

"Then Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in to her.'" "And Laban gathered together all the men of the place and made a feast." "Now it came to pass in the evening that he took Leah his daughter and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her." "So it came to pass in the morning that behold, it was Leah." "And he said to Laban, 'What is this you have done to me?' "Was it not for Rachel that I served you?" This is certainly one of the most awful tricks that was played on any man. What bitter disappointment and anguish must have filled Jacob's heart

and mind when he realized that he had been deliberately deceived by Laban and by Leah as well. Laban seems to be the perfect picture of the devil and sin in what he did to Jacob. The devil has been a deceiver from the Beginning and does not stand in the truth. Sin is that which deceives us into thinking that we are receiving the real thing, the real blessings of ultimate satisfaction, but after we sin, we wake up in the next morning and find that we have been deceived. So will it be for those who think that they can sow to the flesh and sow to sin in this life. They shall awake on the day of the resurrection of the dead and find to their bitter disappointment that they have been deceived. All their hard work will have been in vain.

We need to see from this situation also that God is not mocked. What we sow, we shall also reap. Jacob had deceived his father not too long before, in regard to the blessing which Isaac intended should go to Esau. He went along with the scheme of his mother to trick Isaac, to place the skins of goats upon his hands and neck so that his father would feel him and think that it was Esau. They succeeded in this scheme, but God was watching, and God rewards a man according to his work. He will reward deceit with being deceived. Listen to Psalm 18: 20-27. David is speaking here, and he is relating his experience of the very opposite of what happened to Jacob. He says, "The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me." "For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God." "For all His judgments were before me, and I did not put away His statutes from me." "I was also blameless before Him, and I kept myself from my iniquity." "Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in His sight." "With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful; with a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless; with the pure You will show Yourself pure; and with the devious You will show Yourself shrewd." "You will save the humble people, but will bring down haughty looks."

In Job 34: 10 when Elihu was speaking with Job of how he had misconceived God's role in the calamity of affliction that he was going through, he says to Job, "Therefore listen to me, you men of understanding: far be it from God to do wickedness, and from the Almighty to commit iniquity." "For He repays a man according to his work, and makes man to find a reward according to his way." You see, that is the very truth that you and I need to receive this morning from God's word. He repays a man according to his work. You and I must ask ourselves, in relation to our living the Christian life, "What is my work like." Do I use my own cleverness or trickery to get what I want from other people and think that God will not reward me according to the way that I think and do and treat them? It is not only poetic justice but Divine justice that it be so. Listen to A. W. Pink's very insightful comments on this. "The most striking example of what men term "poetic justice" is the case of Jacob himself. He deceived his father and was, in turn, deceived by his father-in-law." "Jacob came the younger for the elder to deceive Isaac, and has the elder daughter of Laban given to him instead of the younger for a wife." You see if it is your practice to trick others, God will providentially order it that at some time in the future that you will be tricked yourself. We need to think over very carefully the way that we have treated others in the past, and repent of any trickiness that we have used to get what we want, lest God raise up a Laban in our life to teach us a lesson. I am speaking now to Christians who use their own cunning cleverness to get what they think they want or must have from others. God will not let it pass. He will

providentially order the remedy for our sins. He will reward us according to our works. He will not send the one trusting in Jesus to hell, but he will discipline him diligently so that he will forsake his sin.

But let us glory in God, that in Jesus Christ that we are not rewarded according to what our iniquities deserve, if we come to God confessing our sins and asking for grace to do what is right in His sight. We are rewarded according to our work in God's discipline of us, but even this is a great mercy. I like the little note card that my wife has put on our refrigerator which has a quote written on it from Bishop Patrick, the commentator. In commenting on Psalm 103: 10, which says, "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities," he says, "Blessed be His name, there is mercy even in our punishments: our sufferings are never so great as our sins." I think that this is what I am trying to say to you in regard to Jacob. He was rewarded according to what he had done. He was not rewarded according to what he deserved. He deserved far worse. The person who will not repent of their sins and will not receive the Lord's discipline will receive everything that his sins deserve one day at the judgment. He will be eternally rewarded with the punishment which every sin he committed deserved. In Jesus Christ, the believer finds a refuge from that wrath. He will never be eternally punished. He will be corrected when he goes astray. There is a vast difference between the two. Will you not see what the wages of sin are? They are worthy of either discipline in the case of the Christian, or eternal punishment in hell, for those who will not repent and believe the gospel. Oh, I plead with you, that you will receive Christ even now. Even now, turn to Him.

And then 4thly- God will teach Jacob the wages that He give for his perseverance. (Verses 27-30)

In verse 27 Laban urges Jacob to fulfill her week; that is the week of the marriage celebration and feasting, and then he would give him Rachel also to wife. What a deceiver and a trickster this Laban is. Did Jacob really have to go through with this marriage with Leah which was entered into under false pretenses from Leah's side? But Laban still maintains his control and says that he should. He practically forces Jacob into the sin of polygamy by doing so. But it was never Jacob's thought that it should be so. Jacob will take this sad advice and whether he was right to do so or not is hard to judge. Polygamy was acceptable in sight of men in the Old Testament times for reasons which are not clear to me. One man and woman in marriage was God's intention from the beginning. But it must be noted that the promised Seed, the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ was not descended through Rachel but rather through Leah. The Lord's ways in His providence are indeed mysterious. But Jacob is to be commended in this, that even though tricked into this awful situation of having to marry two women and they being sisters as well, yet he persevered in this estate to care for both of his wives and fulfill the promise of having many sons who would form the 12 tribes of Israel. God is still working all things together for good for him. He is a good example for us in this; that when we are under God's discipline for past sins that we have committed, that we should persevere in faith and hope and love to God and our immediate family members, asking and praying that God would teach us how we may overcome all of our sinful weaknesses. We should be mindful of the fact that it is God that places people in our lives and in our families and He expects us to work out our salvation in relation to these people in a way that shows that we will learn the wages of our good and bad choices, the

wages of love, and the wages of perseverance which will build the character of Jesus Christ into the very fabric of our being.