

Series: Genesis: "Back to The Beginnings Again"

Sermon: "As the World Turns Episode 29: Romance at the Dessert Well"

Text: Genesis 29:1-14a

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- The year after I was born a TV show—a “soap opera” as they were called—was born. It’s name was, “*As the World Turns.*”
- There is speculation about the reason for the name of the show but it probably emphasized, “*this is just how the world works—what happens good and bad in the normal passing of life each day.*”
- On that show, much of life was tawdry, bad even evil. People seem to be just as interested in watching the sin, failure and pain of TV characters as sharing in stories of the goodness and joys of life.
- As I come to parts of the story in *Genesis* of the lives of God’s designated human lineage for the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth—the story of the lives of Abraham—Isaac—Jacob and also Joseph—I feel a distinct parallel with that old soap opera and its exposure of the fictional messes the characters made in their lives.
- Only, in *Genesis*, this story is *not* fiction. Real live people made these messes. People, who—remarkably—God chose to participate in advancing his perfect, eternal redemptive plan. A big deal!
- My feeling of a *mismatch*—a misfit of messy, sinful people for the glorious divine purpose probably couldn’t be any greater.
- One theological application—one lesson I can emphasize and remind us of up front—is that ***the Creator God of Genesis is enormously more merciful and more gracious towards humans than any of us should ever begin to hope for or expect.***
- The God who created billions of galaxies—trillions of stars—the earth the sun and the moon—this God humbles himself to love and care for human creatures who make their lives into jumbled, broken, sinful messes time and time again. AND, he desires to let them enjoy the privilege of being part of his glorious plans.

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- Today, in order to talk about the part of this family's story we have reached, I should remind you of some important details we of what they are like and especially the devious things they have been up to.
- Please scan through these highpoints (actually probably better called "low points" of Genesis 27 and 28 with me.
- Start at **Genesis 27:1**. Isaac—dad here—is a very old man near death. He seems bedridden and almost completely blind.
- I have sat by the side of some folks that have reached this stage of life. It is not easy. To *trick* a dad at this helpless point in life might be one of the meanest things I could think of doing to another person.
- I'm not talking about triking in the sense of convincing my dad we have indeed spoken with the police shift commander so it we know it is OK for him to send the rest of the police crew under his command home now. This trick is for dad's sake so he can finally go to sleep for at least a bit each night.
- I'm talking about selfishly taking advantage of a tired, blind, somewhat confused, skin and bones old man for one's own devious sake.
- Isaac, the younger son, along with, and sadly urged on by, mama Rebekah, the scheming wife, participates in an elaborate scam on the old man to steal the powerful blessing he can pass on to a son.
- Look! You must understand how horribly mean this is. It is what we now would call, "*elder abuse!*" People could go to jail if they were caught doing this.
- Most of us have heard this story of the scam preparing dad's favorite venison stew and even wearing fake hairy arms to trick blind, old dad. Some of us have heard it often enough that we may not pause to think of just how mean—how dastardly—how sinful this was on the part of a wife and son.

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- Things may eventually turn out how God wanted them but carefully doing God's will for God's glory is not the selfish motive of these two perpetrators.
- Rebekah is quite aware of this and aware of what she deserves for doing it. In **27:13** she urges her son just to do as she says even recognizing the "curse" for the evil might fall on her.
- When dad, Isaac, asks a direct question, Jacob, the 2<sup>nd</sup> born, tells blind dad that he is indeed Esau, his 1<sup>st</sup> born. **LIAR!**
- "How did you make this wonderful stew I love so much so quickly Esau? "The LORD, your God, gave me success." **LIAR!**
- Religiously connected *liars* sometimes "baptize" their selfish acts by claiming God has motivated or been involved. It makes the lies weightier with authority because they are now ostensibly spiritual or even divine workings.
- "There are those hairy arms I know so well my son." "You are my son, right Esau??" "I am, he replied." **LIAR!**
- When the meal was over, Isaac wanted to say thank you. He kissed his son, as was the custom, and due to the borrowed clothing and animal skin costume, Isaac smelled the familiar smells of Esau rather than the more *domesticated* body odors of #2 son Jacob.
- The payoff to the devious scheme is next. Father Isaac—Son of father Abraham—patriarchs of the promises to God's chosen representative people and the Messiah's lineage—receives the powerful generational blessing passing on the promises spoken and backed up by God.
- Their trickery has worked. The younger son has stolen the blessing from the first-born. Uh! OH! What about God's plan. What about the *missio dei*—"the mission of God" the promise of redemption

through a people eventually becoming narrowed to a singular, specific person?

- Is the plan thwarted by the sinful treachery of God's people?
- It seems it could be?? If for no other reason, when Esau finds out he has been cheated again he plans to kill the one now owning the blessing of the promised lineage. Jacob runs for his life.
- In **27:41**, Moses describes it like this: "*Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. (you think??!!) He said to himself, 'the days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.'*"
- Before running, Mama Rebekah had justifies the exit of her favorite son to his father by emphasizing how Esau and others of the family had married women not of the chosen people—Hittite women—Canaanite women—women of the world rather than offspring of Shem—"The Name" (remember him?).
- Could these so-called "women of the world" have been women any more devious and sinful than she was?
- Mama emphasizes the same to her beloved boy, Jacob. "*Marry a woman from the chosen line not a woman from the rest of the world.*" Does she do this because this is the lineage of humans who chose to "call upon the name of the LORD?" If that was her motive Moses doesn't say so, so I bet it wasn't
- As I reminded you last time I spoke, all this sends Jacob on the run from a murderous brother. Along the way, he spends the night, has a dream and realizes even as he is hiding to escape the consequences of his own sin.
- However, somehow, some way, for some reason God is still there even if Jacob is not very aware of his presence.

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- **28:16** records: "When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the LORD is in this place (he calls it Bethel—House of God he is so certain), and I was not aware of it.'"
- A 2<sup>nd</sup> "**broad lesson**" from sweeping through these chapters again: If you are among God's **designated plan participants**, and, you **absolutely are** if you are in Jesus Christ by simply believing in him for eternal life, God is there even when you mess up and are facing the consequences of that sin.
- Recognizing this lesson of God's presence in his sinful mess, without any sense of repenting from his and his mother's devious sin, Jacob makes a deal with the LORD. "If you will take care of me as I work hard to navigate and to fix my life the way I want it, if you will take care of me, I will call you, "Yaweh," my God and I will even pay a tribute to you of 10% of everything we make in this scheme."
- I guess the Creator and Promise making Lord God of Abraham and Isaac says, "Gee thanks Jacob!"
- This is the setting for chapter *genesis 29*. Let me read the first part of the chapter: Episode 29 in the continuing true saga of "As the World Turns"... **READ GENESIS 29: 1-14a**
- *Now there is a romantic tale!* The sweat of the hot dessert sun rolling down. You can hear the sheep. You can smell the camels. You can see the beautiful girls.
- Wait! No, you can't see any beautiful girls. Any girls that are there are dressed in dirty, smelly shepherds garb—rough, loose work clothes with headgear and face coverings.
- "Were ya'll from? Haran. I know some folks who live in Haran. Do you happen to know a guy there named Laban? Ya, we know him. In fact that flock you see way oy there headed this way, the shepherd—"

*excuse me that shepherd-DESS—is one of Laban’s girls. I think she’s his **younger** one.”*

- In what seems like an attempt to clear out the space around the well where they were gathering—to get a bit more privacy for potential romance—ever thinking—ever planning—ever scheming Jacob helps open the well and water the sheep earlier than normal so they can leave and be on their way.
- In this romantic setting of "As the World Turns," Rachel pulls up in her sexy shepherdess outfit with all her bleating, stinking thirsty sheep.
- In a grand romantic gesture, Jacob waters the flock of Rachel, Laban, her father’s sheep.
- Then, Jacob, his heart so overcome by the romance of the moment that he is openly weeping, courageously, and being quite forward and assuming, lifts the veil of Rachel and kisses her. (or perhaps, like our vice-president and her man, he kisses her right through her mask.
- Surprised by his romantic gestures, Rachel hears those all-important words in a relationship every girl longs to hear: **You’re my cousin!**
- Rachel is so excited by this development she leaves the sheep and runs to tell her father, Laban. *“Daddy! Daddy! A stranger was at the well. He helped me water our sheep. Then he kissed me...and Daddy! He told me he is our **cousin!**”*
- Laban is so impressed and excited that he now hurries back to the well where he hugs, and kisses new found nephew Jacob. Jacob tells Laban the story—probably not all of it—likely not the part about where he and his mom tricked blind, dying Isaac.
- Jacob knows what to tell and what part not say aloud. He is an expert at shaping words and circumstances to get what he wants.

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- Little does Jacob know he may have encountered his match at making life work by deception in his Uncle Laban. However, that story is for another week.
- This week all that remains is to ask: What is the point of this story? [(Dennis) I'm not sure AI would keep it pure and get it right from the Author's perspective. I (or someone doing what I do) may still be necessary this week and maybe even next week.]
- I suspect the point of this "As the World Turns" story was not to tell us a romantic story of courtship in the ANE. If that were the point, I would say either Moses failed or we are so far removed from that culture of sheep, camels and desserts that we can't see the romance.
- NO, I hinted at the point of this part of the story in my review when I emphasized, just as Moses did in chapters 27 and 28, the matter of who married whom and marrying someone "proper."
- Now, the point here is made explicit by the words of *Laban* in verse 14... **"You are my own flesh and blood."** You are my actual relative. You are in our family lineage. That is the point here.
- We should remind ourselves why it mattered who got married to whom in *Genesis*. For us, since we don't generally marry our cousins or any close relatives any more this seems a bit strange.
- The cultural prohibitions in that setting were quite different and could properly marry a closer relative. In fact, that was very often the case if for nothing else than logistics.
- We could ask a biologist who specializes in genetics what the physical reason is to avoid close marriages today but we'd have to keep in mind that so much was very different back then. Even the gene pool was different then. It was less polluted by anomalies that could have been a problem with closer relatives marrying and multiplying their effects.

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- So set aside the cultural and genetic matters and ask again, why it was GOOD thing to find this cousin to marry.
- Some preach—not very much anymore but they did—that this was a racial thing. Races were not supposed to mix in marriage—especially black and white races.
- Oh, the trouble we create when we don’t study the whole context of the Word of God and let it permeate our thinking! If preachers against such marriages would have looked back a bit and with eyes to see, they could have seen that race is not even a biblical category for separating peoples. It becomes one as sin causes people to hate others not like them.
- Satan uses a human divider we can hardly define clearly the one we call “race” to divide us and make us hate one another because hate does not glorify God by imaging him. All the social justice and equity matters built of the foundation of racial differences today are built on the sinking sand of a sinful human concept from the start.
- It’s not race here that matters. It’s not purity of having the same skin color or manmade distinction like that that makes a difference in who Jacob marries.
- Then what is it? As we moved through *Genesis* we saw God choosing specific people and then peoples for specific roles in his plan. This is actually what biblical ***election*** is about. It is not about God choosing some individuals to go to heaven and some to hell.
- For example, when they came off the ark, after the flood, God chose Noah’s son Shem and his family lineage to be the family through whom he would especially work his plan to redeem—a plan that allowed human participation.



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- Then, for example, God chose Abram and his family as that lineage. The family received lasting promises to be passed down as they participated in that redemptive plan.
- Now, it seems like Rebekah and Jacob have worked a plan to trick Isaac into choosing Jacob when the 1<sup>st</sup> born, Esau, would have more naturally been chosen to carry the on the chosen lineage.
- *Jokes on you!* It was God's plan all along that the lineage would go through Jacob the 2<sup>nd</sup> born rather than Esau the 1<sup>st</sup>.
- But why does it matter that the chosen lineage chose a wife from the chosen lineage? Because this lineage is meant to be the family of faith in God. While other families of the world—for example the Canaanites—are God-rejecters as a family—the Shem—Abraham---- Jacob and so on family is the family of the earth chosen specifically to show faith.
- To marry in the family was to marry into the lineage of faith and to keep the lineage pure this way.
- But Rebekah and Jacob, even though they were of this lineage were not very nice people. They tricked the old man Isaac.
- God and his redemptive plan are so amazing—so certain—so pure that even when carried forward by an inconsistent family of faith God is able to make his plan happen.
- Again, we could, I believe get down to the genetic level and even say that God planned for the unique human genetic makeup of Jesus of Nazareth to be THE Messiah in the flesh that was planned exactly all along for him.
- Did Satan know this? Yes he did! One way possibly to thwart the perfect *genetic* plan of God for Jesus the Messiah was to mess up the genetics by the wrong people marrying.

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- It doesn't take much to realize why much of *Genesis* is about marrying the right persons. If Satan can mess this up he thinks he can foil the plan for the Messiah to be born of Mary.
- Then it doesn't take much more to recognize that genetic mixing involves sex. Now we know why so much of the rest of *Genesis* is tainted by sexual temptation and deviance from God's sexual design. Satan uses human sex and human sexuality to try to destroy God's plan in *Genesis*, and he still uses it to try to destroy the plan for us to being glory to God even today.
- Sex and sexuality are indeed very important human matters but not for the reasons the world without God thinks they are. Satan uses sex to mess with God's way all through human history.
- I'll repeat an observation about what we learn as a principle from this "romantic" tale. God is there working in the lives of his chosen people even when his chosen people don't act like his chosen people.
- And, *jokes on us!* God is able to use our lives even when they are a mess and we can't seem to fix them by our best plans and schemes.
- Of course, there is a whole other lesson about how much joy we will experience in life living in alignment with God's plans rather than ignoring them and making a mess with sin. God's plan will be accomplished in either case but our experience of eternal life now will be greatly different based on our choices.
- This means that even when other believers seem to me to live in ways that might thwart God's plan, their failures will not cause it to fail. I have responsibility to my brothers and sisters caught in sin but I am not responsible to get God's plan back on track. It is arrogant to decide that depends on me even if it my own believing kids who have gone off the rails of God's way!

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- There is peace in knowing God's plan of redemption doesn't depend on me getting it perfectly right or on me fixing it when it seems to have gone wrong. PEACE I say! Peace!
- And, for me, there is mercy and grace when I get it wrong.
- Romans 6 asks: "What? Shall I sin more and more so that God's grace and mercy around my sin can abound more and more?" "*Magnoita!*" May it not be! Of course not.
- But when I do sin John says: ***My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*** (1 John 2:1-2)
- Have you sinned? Probably? Are you to put your focus on that sin and how you have now probably messed up God's perfect plan so that you need to figure out how you can fix it?
- ***Jokes on you!***
- Let the light of truth about your sin shine in. Walk in that light each day as you can. Quit thinking you are more powerful than Satan and have messed up God's redemptive plan so you must now be as powerful as God to fix it yourself. *You didn't and you can't.*
- Find peace in Jesus with his ***mercy and grace*** and move forward glorifying God by trusting and knowing Him.
- Jesus the Christ is perfectly able to advocate for you. Just one important reason that this is true, is that Satan couldn't jumble Jesus' ***genetic makeup*** even when he tried so hard to do so.
- ***Jokes on*** Rebekah, Jacob, Rachel, Laban and so many others in the chosen lineage. God even knows how to bring people together and get them married. God's plan will stand and will come to fruition.