

Series: "Back to The Beginnings Again"

Sermon: "Love, Marriage, Baby Carriages and Faith"

Text: Genesis 29:14b-Genesis 30:1-24

RGGJR/FBCCS/4-2-23 UNEDITED

- *First, comes love...then comes marriage...then comes "awfully-weasily" Jacob with a baby carriage—actually, a whole bunch of baby carriages!*
- When we talk about the OT book of *Genesis* being a book about "the beginnings," most of us are quickly interested in the beginnings of the Creation, the earth and human beings. That is the age in which we live—an age of science focused on cause and effect equations.
- However, that part of the "*beginnings*" was not why Moses wrote as he wrote—choosing what he chose to emphasize moved by the Holy Spirit of God to write down as God's Word *inscripturated*.
- The "beginnings" Moses had in mind were the "beginnings" of the OT people of God—the chosen covenant people of the LORD, i.e., YAWEH. *Where did you Israelites come from? How did you get here?*
- This is why he spends as much time—or maybe more time dealing with Jacob's family life—as he spends telling us how all the Creation we can see out there got here like it is.
- I would have liked to include the first portion of *Genesis* chapter 29, we considered last week and the last portion of chapter 30 that I will not get to this week—all in one sermon. They are all together one long story explaining, with the exception of an important added detail later—*just how the people of Israel got here*—their beginnings—"their creation."
- Most importantly, we can see in the details the answer to the question: "*What did God have to do with it?*"
- I've seen a new book advertised. I'm not sure I will order it.
- The new book is called Love stories of the Bible: Biblical Lessons on Romance. It might offer a different view on what the emphasis is in this long story. You can let me know when you read it.

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- As I said last week, as an un-romantic man, I don't think this "*As the World Turns*"—soap opera section of *Genesis* is mainly about "What Love (or romance) has to do with it" but rather "what God has to do with it."
- Can we see Him working his eternal plan of absolutely gracious redemption amidst the messes people came make in their lives because of their worldly values and their sinful choices?
- Can Israelites who read it see that God put them together as a chosen nation for a purpose? Can they see what their forbearers brought to the project as sinful humans and what God brought? In other words, *who actually made Israel the Israel of God?*
- If you need to "*feel the romance*," you'll be able to get it from the Christian sister's new book on romance in the Bible. *BTW*: she is a sister I admire for her testimony in a dark place in our world.
- Even without these connecting these other portions of Scripture, the text for today is still too long for the time our modern "body clocks" allot for sermons on Sunday mornings—at least as I preach sermons.
- So...I will forgo my normal approach and instead mostly read the text making comments along the way and emphasizing some conclusions.
- So...let's get started.
- Moses doesn't say it as directly as he through Abraham's servant who found Isaac's perfect wife when he proclaimed, **"Praise be to the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the LORD has led me on my journey to the house of my master's relatives."**
- Jacob has expressed a more vague idea that God was somehow involved in his journey when he awoke from his dream at, renamed "Beth-el," but his faith is too little to believe that God could be

behind this in any explicit way. He still believes he must make life happen—even the parts of life that might be connected to promises.

- But, we have now read both "*project find-a good-wife*" stories and we can easily see the *parallel* that Moses wants us to see.
- In this case, Jacob and his uncle Laban and all the women are making real human choices and acting on them without much explicit thought about God working—at least as Moses tells the story.
- God is there working! He has much, much more to do with this matter of *love marriage and baby carriages* (and thus the making of the people of Israel) than they seem to understand—or at least they seem to understand so far in the story.
- Let's start reading where we left the first section of the whole, bigger story last week—the ***second half of verse 14 in Genesis 29***, as my NIV version divides things.

Genesis 29:14b–30:24 (NIV84)

^{14b...} ***After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, ¹⁵ Laban said to him, "Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be."***

¹⁶ ***Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful. ¹⁸ Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel."***

- Well, I guess *there's* some *romance*. Unlike all of us who are married—that is we who all selected our mates based only on their commitment to God and righteousness not based on their looks and our attraction for other reasons—Jacob falls in love with Rachel's "*form and beauty*." "*Weak eyes*" is the best Moses can say of Leah. This likely means she had a condition of *extropia*, *estropia* or *strabismus*. We used to call one of these "*cross-eyed*."

- Asking dad for a girl's hand in marriage was a bit different back then. Jacob will pay for his beautiful Rachel with 7 years (probably often a number of completion or perfection that was chosen in bargains) of working for dad—Laban
- Any of you "buy" your wife? Please don't raise your hands!

¹⁹ Laban said, "It's better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me." ²⁰ So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

²¹ Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her."

- Seven years went by quickly—OK, YES, all right! Jacob was in love.
- That was a pretty straight forward request by Jacob. It was cultural but it still gives hints of the kind of man Jacob was—what moved him.

²² So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. ²³ But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and Jacob lay with her. ²⁴ And Laban gave his servant girl Zilpah to his daughter as her maidservant.

²⁵ When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?"

²⁶ Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. ²⁷ Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work."

- The wedding feast takes place. Maybe it was dark and late at night when the party was winding down and the bride and groom are ready to leave. There were probably no line up of guests and waving of sparklers. Maybe there had been some wine at the celebration?? Maybe the passion was overwhelming.

- *Tricky* uncle Laban *tricks tricky trickster* Jacob with the wrong bride. Jacob unknowingly "marries" the less-beautiful sister Leah. *Importantly*, she comes to him with her personal servant **Zilpah**.
- The sun comes up and Jacob has been tricked into "marrying" the wrong woman.
- The explanation for the trick was no accident. It was a reminder of his own ways of making life work. *Younger* daughters are not to usurp the rights of *older* daughters, including marrying first.
- The disagreement was easier to fix in those days. Laban will just sell Rachel to Jacob as well. This time the perfect seven is a week of days treating Leah as his wife.
- I suppose Laban concluded that living together with Jacob waiting seven more years with this animosity between them over this trick would have been hell. Seven days is enough and he has *unloaded* the more difficult daughter in the deal to a man from the family.

²⁸ And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. ²⁹ Laban gave his servant girl Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maidservant. ³⁰ Jacob lay with Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

- Jacob marries Rachel, who importantly brings with her, a personal servant, **Bilah**. Laban still got his seven years of work.
- The foundations for God's OT family are in place in a family with four women. Two sister-brides unequally loved and knowing it and two servant women who had little choice in the matter.
- John, if Focus on your Family had been around back then, I wonder what that interview would have been like.
- Even by the cultural standards, this was no recipe for a great human situation. It was no fertile ground created by good human choices that would *automatically* produce a Godly result.

- Israel was born out of a human mess with a messy human leader. How did that happen? Let's read quickly starting in verse 31.

³¹ When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. ³² Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the LORD has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."

- Listen to the comments throughout this. The LORD blesses the **unloved** person—the **rejected** person and uses her in his plan to produce the family of Israel. Leah recognizes God *opens wombs* and has blessed her. Her human hope, and she names her son Reuben as she does because his name is a sounds-like reminder of God, her misery and her blessing. Humanly speaking, a baby boy should bring her Jacob's love she longs for but it doesn't.

³³ She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the LORD heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon.

³⁴ Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." So he was named Levi.

³⁵ She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the LORD." So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children.

- Three more boy babies later, two more were named in a way that every time they were called there was a reminder of her sad relationship with Jacob. The fourth was a relenting—"OK fine! I get it. This time, I will simply recognize that the LORD is in charge and doing all of this. **Hear that, family Israel? The LORD does it!**

30 When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she **became jealous** of her sister (first time that ever happened!). So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!"

² Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?"

- Maybe Jacob is learning who makes the promises happen. Maybe he is just looking to dump the blame on God.

³ Then she said, "Here is *Bilhah*, my maidservant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and that through her I too can *build a family*."

⁴ So she gave him her servant *Bilhah as a wife*. Jacob slept with her, ⁵ and she became pregnant and bore him a son. ⁶ Then Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son." *Because of this she named him Dan*.

- In a Hagar-like move of the drive for human doing, fixing and controlling the servant girls get involved and become child-bearing wives.
- This pragmatically produced child and his name, "Dan" says Rachel proves God loves me and I am right!

⁷ Rachel's servant *Bilhah conceived again* and bore Jacob a second son. ⁸ Then Rachel said, "I have had a great struggle with my sister, *and I have won*." So she named him *Naphtali*.

- Na-na-na-na-na! –"Naphtali! Naphtali! I have won, says Rachel!
- Game on, Sis, says Leah! I'll raise you one servant girl!

⁹ When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her maidservant *Zilpah* and gave her to Jacob as a wife. ¹⁰ Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. ¹¹ Then Leah said, "What good fortune!" So she named him *Gad*. This time it is "good luck???"

¹² Leah's servant *Zilpah bore Jacob a second son*. ¹³ Then Leah said, "How happy I am! The women will call me happy." So she named him *Asher*. Doesn't matter how this happening. I am happy (*Asher*) because I'm winning

¹⁴ During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some *mandrake plants*, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes."

¹⁵ But she said to her, "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?"

"Very well," Rachel said, "he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes."

- Evidently, "mandrakes" were thought to be some form of aphrodisiac that would give an advantage in the "who gets to sleep with Jacob and make babies" competition.

¹⁶ So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she said. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he slept with her that night.

¹⁷ God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. ¹⁸ Then Leah said, "God has rewarded me for giving my maidservant to my husband." So she named him Issachar.

- But it was God not the mandrakes that worked to give Leah another son. Leah concluded it was reward from God for her insightful human planning. That is nearly always how pragmatist believers think of any success they have by their measure. God blessed ME and my plans!

¹⁹ Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. ²⁰ Then Leah said, "God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun. Six sons must be enough to get me approved and loved. Zebulun—Zebulon—Zebulon!

²¹ Some time later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah. A girl! Does she matter in the family's story? She will matter!

²² Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb. ²³ She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." ²⁴ She named him Joseph, and said, "May the LORD add to me another son." Rachel's turn again. She attributes her new face-saving birth to God. I guess God is most concerned that Rachel *not be embarrassed*. Right??

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- Eleven sons for Jacob so far. It is all so confusing that it is hard to keep track as you read. The eleventh name, "Joseph" seems to prophesy another son to come. *Benjamin*, number 12 will come to Rachel. His name, will mean "*son of sorrow*," we will see later, Lord willing, he is named appropriately by his mother Rachel.
- Later we will also see son Levi's family is not one of the 12 tribes but is rather dedicated to the "worship-work" of the LORD.
- Then Joseph also will receive a double portion, since Jacob gives him the family blessing, forming two tribes through his sons Ephraim and Manasseh. That will make the family heads of the 12 tribes. And just to add to the messiness, their mother is the Joseph, *Asenath*, daughter of an Egyptian son-god priest.
- OK Here it is Israel—People of God! In all its earthly, human glory. Here is where you came from! Here is the story of your family's tribes.
- Aren't you proud of the example it is of your chosen ancestors acting on only Godly motivations and proud of all the trusting God and waiting on him versus human attempts at doing—fixing—and controlling to win—to get love—to make life what you want it to be???
- Israel, did your family earn a *special* place in God's plan? Hardly! It is by God's choice and God's grace that you have this part in his redemptive plan. Please try to remember that truth as a light to the world. So...
- ***Lesson #1 to Israel*** starting with Grandpa Abraham: As God's people God's promises and God's plan will be produced by God. If you would like to be a blessed part of it, you can be that only by actually trusting God—truly living by faith—not by your own doing-fixing and controlling for your own little plan for your own little success.

- **Lesson #2 to Israel:** God will accomplish **HIS** plan even when humanelly it may all look like an impossible mess. Israel, trust God even when the worldly mess obscures your view of how and when God is working.
- **Any lessons for us?** I suppose these lessons to Israel from the story of who they are and who actually made them who they are would extrapolate as good lessons for us as well.
- **1st:** Trust God for his plan not your own doing—fixing and controlling.
- **2nd:** Trust God for his NT plan even when the mess of the world—political, social, economic, cultural and all is a human mess that seems to obscure how and when God is working. Trust God!
- But, we know so much more of God's **trustworthy** work than Jacob and Laban and Leah and Rachel and Zilpah and Bilhah did. We know more than Israel even later as a kingdom of God's OT people knew.
- *In for a dime—in for a dollar* on reading long texts of names—please look at Matthew 1 for just a few moments...

Matthew 1:1–18

1 *A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:*

**2 *Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Isaac the father of Jacob,
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,***

**3 *Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,
Perez the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,***

**4 *Ram the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon,***

**5 *Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,***

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⁶ and Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

⁷ Solomon the father of Rehoboam,

Rehoboam the father of Abijah,

Abijah the father of Asa,

⁸ Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,

Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,

Jehoram the father of Uzziah,

⁹ Uzziah the father of Jotham,

Jotham the father of Ahaz,

Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,

¹⁰ Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,

Manasseh the father of Amon,

Amon the father of Josiah,

¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

¹² After the exile to Babylon:

Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,

Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

¹³ Zerubbabel the father of Abiud,

Abiud the father of Eliakim,

Eliakim the father of Azor,

¹⁴ Azor the father of Zadok,

Zadok the father of Akim,

Akim the father of Eliud,

¹⁵ Eliud the father of Eleazar,

Eleazar the father of Matthan,

Matthan the father of Jacob,

¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

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17 Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.

18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.

- Jesus of Nazareth was born not by the will of man—not by the any well-intended human doing-fixing and control of Joseph and Mary.
- Jesus was born by God keeping his promise through all the intervening centuries of human messes even messes created by his own people not trusting Him.
- ***Today is Palm Sunday***...you wondered how I would force that fact in didn't you??? In the end I discovered that I didn't have to force it!
- The *triumphal* entry of lowly Jesus of Nazareth into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey as Gods Messiah and King of the Jews is teaching us the same lessons again

Matthew 21:1–10 (NIV84)

21 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

⁵ "Say to the Daughter of Zion,

'See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
***on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'* "**

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on

the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Hosanna in the highest!"

¹⁰ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

- They said: "Who is this guy?????!!!!!" It was hard to see through all the human mess of their day and of so many generations past.
- "This is the exact guy who through **fourteen** generations of messy sinful people from Abraham to David, and then **fourteen** generations of at least as messy and sinful people from David to the exile to Babylon, and then through a destruction of everything they knew as sacred and everything they saw that meant God was with them and an **additional fourteen generations** of messy sinful people from the exile to the Christ.—this is the exact guy God knew would be the answer he promised way,way,way back in earthly human time—(millennia back in time!) the One seed promised in that curse found in the early part of the book of Genesis."
- This is the exact guy who, **from all eternity**, God had known and made possible through **keeping all of his promises perfectly**
- This was the exact Son of God, child of Mary, that would crush the Serpent's head and accomplish God's plan to redeem sinful humans back to their Created role of imaging God's glory—**THE EXACT GUY in every way**—(even in our, scientific, physical, genetic terms).
- **Lesson to us?** If God could keep his promise and bring Jesus Christ the Son of God to do what he did as the incarnate Messiah of God at exactly the right place and exactly the right time to do exactly what was needed to redeem all of us—**Lesson to us this morning?** Maybe we can trust him for the promises that still await fulfillment even if we can't always see how and where he is working. Just *maybe?!?!?*
- **This is the real foundation for the true HOPE of God's people!**