

# Blessing in the Rat Race

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 04 October 2020

Preacher: Bo Wong

[ 0 : 00 ] Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east. As he looked, he saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep lying beside it, for out of that well the flocks were watered.

The stone on the well's mouth was large, and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place over the mouth of the well.

Jacob said to them, My brothers, where did you come from? They said, We are from Haran. He said to them, Do you know Laban, the son of Nahor? They said, We know him.

He said to them, Is it well with him? They said, It is well, and see, Rachel, his daughter, is coming with the sheep. He said, Behold, it is still high day. It is not time for the livestock to be gathered together.

Water the sheep and go, pasture them. But they said, We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and the stone is rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we water the sheep.

[ 1 : 00 ] While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. Now as soon as Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban, his mother's brother.

Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son. And she ran and told her father. As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house.

Jacob told Laban all these things. And Laban said to him, Surely you are my bone and my flesh. And he stayed with him a month. Then Laban said to Jacob, Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing?

Tell me, what shall your wages be? Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance.

Jacob loved Rachel, and he said, I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel. Laban said, It is better that I give her to you than I should give her away to any other man.

[ 2 : 15 ] Stay with me. So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. Then Jacob said to Laban, Give me my wife that I may go into her, for my time is completed.

So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went into her. Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.

And in the morning, behold, it was Leah. And Jacob said to Laban, What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me? Laban said, It is not so done in our country to give the younger before the firstborn.

Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years. Jacob did so and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife.

Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant. So Jacob went into Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years.

[ 3 : 20 ] When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, Because the

Lord has looked upon my affliction, for now my husband will love me.

She conceived again and bore a son, and said, Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also, and she called his name Simeon. Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons. Therefore his name was called Levi. And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, This time I will praise the Lord. Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing.

Thanks, Jane. Good afternoon, everyone. Nice to see you again. Today's the topic of the sermon is Blessing in the Red Rays.

Initially I was preparing for three sermons for my trip back to Malaysia. This is an extra one. The third one is for next week. And this sermon covers three chapters, which is quite long.

[ 4 : 42 ] So I'm not going to be able to cover, or maybe I only cover about 10% of what those three chapters has in it. But as I prepared for the sermon, I learned many things, and I hope that I can help you to see something in it, and also enjoy reading that part of the Bible, and get a lot more out of it as you read through the three chapters.

Why is it called the Red Rays? That's because it's just like us. Jacob just suddenly got himself into this situation, which he never dreamt or hoped or thought of when he came to the uncle's place. And he started needing to learn how to work, how to compete with others at work, deal with the uncle's treachery, deal with other work makes, and then having a family, and having so many wives and children.

All this will occupy his time, and hopefully through this sermon, we'll see how the Lord was blessing him. Even though that, he may not knew that at that time, but as the year went on, he gradually learned and appreciated what the Lord has done for him.

And that will show us we come next week to chapter 32 and 33. Let us pray first before we start. Father, we thank you for your goodness in helping us through all that happened to us in our daily lives, to see the truth, and to see the truth about us and about you.

[ 6 : 30 ] And thank you for your word that we can learn from, and the word that will transform us as well. Lord, we ask that you might do so as we dwell into your word at this time.

Thank you, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So, last time, when we talked about God promising to be with Jacob, that is, while he had the dream at night, and that God promised that he would be with him and brought him back to this land.

And when we heard that God was blessing someone or to be, will be with someone, we would straight away usually think that, oh, Jacob would become successful in whatever way he do.

We will see that Jacob did become a rich man 20 years after God promised to be with him. First 14 years, he worked for the two wives. He didn't actually get anything.

But the last six years, he became very rich. However, we will also see that his wealth that he accumulated, eventually, it was for him to pay back a debt.

[ 7 : 45 ] And that we'll see again next week. So, even when he became rich, it wasn't ready for him. And we know that being wealthy and healthy is not often the outcome of having God in our lives.

Majority of faithful servants of God live in poverty under persecution. Psalm 25, verse 8, says that, good and upright is the Lord, therefore, he instructs sinners in the way.

Because God is good and upright, so if God promised to be with us, he would not just sit there and let us do whatever we like. He will automatically, and this part is the nature, to make us like him, good and upright.

and to do that, he will, through his work, I mean, we read and we learn, and through our interaction with people and our living in this world, it perpetuates through difficulty, difficult times.

And in today's story, we will see how God did that in Jacob's life. we will see that his interaction with Laban, Rachel, and Leah and Rachel in particular.

[ 9 : 04 ] There are a lot more, but I could only cover these three. So, last time we came to the part when Jacob was sent to his uncle's place to find a wife, though the real reason was to find refuge from his brother, Esau, who was planning to kill him.

And then God appeared to him and promised him that he would go with Jacob. And then, so Jacob kept walking for many weeks. I'm sure on the way he'd been asking people, are you from Haran? Do you know Laban? It would take many weeks. I suspect it would take about two months before I arrived in this well when there are shepherds who actually knew who Laban was.

And it happened that Rachel was coming to the well, too. And you can imagine how relieved Jacob was to finally arrive after being on the lonely journey for so long.

He was so excited that his son managed to roll the stone from the well's mouth to water his uncle's ship. I suppose they were all waiting for people to come so that they could all do it together.

[10:19] But somehow, the long journey seemed to have made Jacob strong enough to do that by himself. And maybe he was also one thing to show off a bit to Rachel.

So he did that. He kissed Rachel and cried aloud and then Laban heard about him coming. He ran to meet him and took him in. And we read that Laban was quite excited to know that Jacob was there.

And when we first read it, you may think, oh, Laban must be quite a good uncle. He wants to look after Jacob. But as we read through, read on, we find that it's not the case.

Laban was just trying to make use of Jacob for his own gain. But why was he so excited? If we know about Jacob's mom, Rebecca, who is Laban's sister, so when Abraham's servant came to get a wife for Isaac, that is Jacob's father, brother, Abraham's servant brought a lot of gifts, a lot of gold and precious things.

I think Laban was expecting the same thing, oh, now the second generation has come, what is he bringing to me? But unfortunately, Jacob didn't bring anything.

[11:47] Jacob was by himself and he didn't have anything with him. But Jacob was attracted to Rachel. I think it was not only because Rachel was pretty, but most sadly also because Rachel was the first person, Jacob could be a hero too.

Jacob showed himself to be a man. If you know Jacob's background, he wasn't loved by his father and now he's running away from his brother. He's an insecure man.

He finds himself insignificant and now he could show that he was a man to Rachel. That's why it's part of it in terms of not only Rachel was attractive to him, but Rachel was sort of dependent on him in Jacob's mind.

However, as time goes on, after a month, it became clear that Laban was not going to let Jacob marry his daughter without payment and so they make a deal and verse 20 says, so Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. In Rachel, Jacob had the first taste of sacrificial love. He never had this sort of love before. He suddenly was so occupied, his mind was so occupied by Rachel.

[13:18] He seemed to have gone crazy. He could only think about Rachel. He was never one who would be taken advantage of, but then for Rachel he was willing to work without wages.

So he worked for seven years and it seemed to be a short time to him. So you can imagine how he was expecting to get Rachel. So his love for Rachel helped him to enjoy the hardship and abuses experience at work.

He would otherwise not have learned how to be a good shepherd through this. He learned how to spend his night in the wilderness, look after the sheep and be a strong man I suppose over this time.

If you remember, Jacob's mother, Rebecca, did love Jacob sacrificially, love for the parents. Jacob did not appreciate it then as most children would not appreciate how their parents loved them. Jacob was happy to let his mother take the curse for him if his deception was found out by Isaac and that showed that he didn't actually appreciate that love.

[14:35] But now that he is actually loving someone in a similar way, he had the chance to understand how his mother had loved him.

And for us, if we have such a love, we could understand how God has loved us as well. The end of seven years came.

Laban did nothing until Jacob reminded him that he had fulfilled his side of the deal. Then Laban held a wedding feast for Jacob and Rachel, but cheated Jacob by replacing Rachel with Leah under the darkness of the night.

Laban profited a lot from Jacob's service. And he could not get anyone to pay a good price for Leah, so he deceived Jacob.

He let Jacob have Rachel as well, with the condition that he served for another seven years. So in Laban, Jacob had a taste of what it meant to be deceived.

[15:35] We cannot appreciate the harm we do to others until we are the victims. Jacob would not have understood how his father Isaac and his brother Esau felt until he himself was a victim of

deception.

Being on the receiving end of deception also helps us to empathize with those who have been deceived. love. And we know that because of Jacob's dependence on Nabhan and his love for Rachel, he had little choice but to submit to Nabhan's scheme at this stage.

So he had Leah and Rachel. With Rachel, he got no problem, he loved Rachel. But in Leah, Jacob needed to learn how to love someone who was not lovely, at least someone not lovely in his eye. Jacob had no interest in Leah. But divorcing Leah was not out of the question in his time. And God gave Leah some help. Leah had four sons in a row while Rachel could not conceive.

At that time, having children, in particular sons, is very important to develop into a strong family to do farming, all those things.

[16:54] So having four children would definitely help Leah's position in the family. And at least because of the children, Jacob started to care about Leah and learn how to love her.

However, Leah was not contented with having children. She wanted more. She wanted like what Jacob gave to Rachel.

So Leah and Rachel started using children to strengthen their position in the family. In that time, a woman's security and significance were dependent on their father before their marriage.

After their marriage, it depended on the husband. And so having the husband's love was very important. children. And so they both tried to have more children and they gave Jacob their mates to have more children as well.

So both Leah and Rachel wanted to be the most secure and significant person in the family. Neither of them feared God or trusted God. They became stuck in constant scheming for prominence in the family.

[18:08] In a way, they condemned themselves to live unhappily ever after if they don't change in the way. As you know, my father had two wives living under the same roof.

My mother was a younger wife. When I was young, I used to sleep in my mother's room because there was no other place for me to sleep. So my younger brother and myself were the two younger, and so we sleep with our mother.

And my father was always in my mother's room overnight. I didn't think much of it until I was older. Then I started to think, why is it that he never spent time with my senior mother?

I mean, I was young, I didn't think that it was something unusual, but as I get older, I thought, why is my father always in my mom's room?

And then as I look back now, I could understand why my senior mother was so demanding in nature. So she was the mistress of the household to assign jobs to each of us.

[19:17] I would always try to hide from her because every time she saw me doing nothing, she would get me a job to do. So there's no freedom in a sense. After school, going, getting home, there's always job, regardless, even if you have homework or whatever, there's also job to do.

I was talking to my eldest sister who actually looked after me when I was young because my mom was too busy working and doing all the jobs.

So my eldest sister said he hated coming home just because every time she came home, she got no time for herself.

You can't plan anything. Basically, we couldn't plan anything. If you plan to do something, forget it. If you don't do it, you get a scolding. So the home was like a factory.

My senior mother was very well known in our hometown to produce the best Chinese delicacies.

And all those things take a lot of manpower to produce. And my senior mother was well known for it.

[20:23] And that is her significance. And that's why she needs that. And that's why she traded her relationship with her children for her significance. Even her own children seemed like her eventually.

It was not close to her. My mom worked from early morning until late at night. But my mom never complained. I think he had my father's attention and that was enough for her.

And she just suffered. But because she suffered together with us, so she is very close to all the children, including my senior mom's children, even now.

So I fell for Leah in this sense. Because Leah didn't have the significance and security he needed to fight for it. He didn't know where to get it.

If he had his security and significance in God, then in the first place, he would not have collaborated with Laban in deceiving Jacob. Jacob. And secondly, if he did marry Jacob, he would not need to

make herself so miserable in scheming and fighting over Jacob with Rachel.

[ 21 : 42 ] So Leah was hoping that by marrying Jacob, her life would be happier. but in fact, she was disappointed.

Things that we get by deception don't usually bring happiness. So as Jacob tried to relate to Leah, he was reminded about how his father Isaac related to him.

Leah in Jacob's eyes was like Jacob in Isaac's eyes. As Jacob wished Isaac would love him more, Leah was wishing Jacob would love her more. At this point, we may ask, why didn't God stop Laban from deceiving Jacob?

The same question can be asked, why didn't God stop Jacob from deceiving Isaac? Or why didn't God stop the serpent from deceiving Eve? Throughout the Bible, we see that God intervenes in some matters and not in many other matters.

If you are a parent, you may know that you should not intervene in everything in your child's or children's life. some parents want to protect their children and would not allow them to make mistakes or get hurt.

[ 22 : 56 ] My mom, who is 95 years old now, she still scolds my 70-year-old brother when he did something that she is not pleased with.

My oldest brother, her oldest son, and my oldest sister, oldest daughter, both of them are not married because they were just too busy. to socialize when they were young.

Now my oldest brother and my mom live together and they care for each other, but they don't talk.

Whenever I go back home, the interaction is argument over something or blaming or something.

That's because my mom had never treated my oldest brother as an adult and still exerting control over her. In a way, it's a bit sad that they lose that enjoyment of talking as friends and as adults, not only as mother to son.

Even all these years, if the parents just want to control the children and prevent them from getting hurt, they will lose a lot of enjoyment together in the relationship.

[ 24 : 13 ] So this is about God's heart. God has got a father's heart in terms of how he deals with us. We should also consider what is in our hearts when we do foolish things. Why was Eve deceived?

Because she wanted to be like God, who can determine what is good and what is evil. She wanted to be more significant than being Adam's wife and God's daughter. She could not deny her desire to be more significant.

Why was Isaac deceived by Jacob? Because Isaac was blinded by his own love of Esau. He was determined to bless Esau. He heard Jacob's voice.

It should have been sufficient for Isaac to realize that it was Jacob. But when our minds are occupied with the desire to accomplish something, we usually ignore warning signs.

Why was Jacob deceived by Laban? Because he was blinded by his love of Rachel. Before Jacob left home, he was full of himself.

[ 25 : 14 ] During his trip to Haran, he encountered God. In Haran, then he encountered Rachel. Jacob was beginning to change from worshipping himself to worshipping God.

Now it seems that Rachel became his idol. I believe that there would be many telltale signs. Laban was manipulating him over the seven years.

He could see how Laban treated other people. And there would be signs that something was not right in the wedding night. But Jacob was too focused on Rachel that he lost his objectivity.

While it was not wrong for Jacob to love Rachel, but when such a love does not submit to God's guidance, it does not usually end well. if his focus was on God who promised to be with him, Laban would not be able to use Rachel to manipulate Jacob.

The amazing thing is that God will always achieve his purpose regardless of our foolish choices.

And we see that as the story develops. In these three sermons, I have mentioned many times about security and significance as a motivation for our behaviors.

[ 26 : 27 ] to be secure is to have protection and provision. And to be significant is to have respect and recognition.

And that's what we want in our whole life. But in Jacob, so that's why Jacob deceived his father to get the blessing. That's why he wanted. But in Rachel, we found a third motivation force for Jacob's behavior.

It was not for security or significance that Jacob worked 14 years for Rachel because he did not receive any wages or position for his work.

And getting Rachel would not make him wealthier or more powerful. What was motivating Jacob then? That was love that we talk about. Love can mean different things.

In here, I'm talking about the feeling that your life is incomplete without the presence of that object or the person of your love. When Adam first saw Eve, he said, this at last is born of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

[ 27 : 35 ] Adam meant that if you take Eve away from him, it was like taking away his bone and flesh. When Laban first met Jacob, he also said the same thing, surely you are my bone and my flesh.

love. But then Laban has changed the definition of love. He was deceiving himself and Jacob when he said that, as if he said that he loved Jacob.

He was in fact telling Jacob that you are mine, therefore serve me. But Adam was telling Eve that you are mine, therefore I will serve you.

This is a love that I'm talking about that Jacob was starting to experience that he could love someone just purely because the person, not because the person can give him anything in the sense of security and significance.

However, there is still a bit of self-centeredness in this style of love as we love people. There's always the pleasure or something that we get from the person, which Jacob couldn't get from Leah.

[ 28 : 53 ] But that is at least the start of that love. So in Rachel, Jacob first experienced self-denying love. Love made him do everything just to be with Rachel.

In Leah, Jacob had a challenge of loving someone who was not lovely. And in Laban, Jacob saw the degradation of love. So when a man loved God, he would love other people and things appropriately.

When a man does not love God, he will not be able to love other people and things appropriately.

What was Laban's object of love? It was quite obvious, it's money.

Why did Laban love money? Because money can be exchanged for security, significance, and pleasure. Laban could only see life in terms of profit and loss. Laban could only relate to people in terms of benefit or burden.

He would only do what he thought would profit him. He would befriend people who would benefit him. Once Jacob saw Laban's real face, he did not want to become another Laban.

[ 30 : 01 ] Jacob started to realize that while he suffered under Laban, he was also becoming a person who was different from Laban. did Jacob learn his lessons?

We shall see that he did as we read the subsequent chapters of Genesis, which will be the topic of next week's sermon. When God promised that he would be with Jacob, he would ensure that Jacob would be changed.

This change did not come about as if God just put a spell on Jacob. This change came about as God led Jacob to see Jacob's own heart in the light of the holy God.

and also in the midst of the red race as Jacob makes decisions and choices in his relationship, in his work, in his family.

All this are still happening in our life right now. In Matthew chapter 16 verses 24 to 26, Jesus told his disciples, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

[ 31 : 14 ] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeit his soul?

or what shall a man give in return for his soul? First of all, we consider why would anyone want to come after Jesus?

I can give you four reasons. Number one, Jesus said he came as a good shepherd who gave his life for his sheep. Jesus denied himself of comfort and status.

He died for our sins on the cross. Adam told Eve, you are my bone and my flesh. I will love you.

Laban told Jacob, you are my bone and my flesh. You should serve me.

Jesus told his sheep, here is my body and blood broken and spilled out for you. Jesus did not give a few years of his life to redeem Jesus said he came to seek sinners, those who are not lovely, to change them into those who are lovely.

[ 32 : 22 ] Isaac found it difficult to love Jacob, Jacob found it difficult to love Leah. We find it difficult to love many people. Jesus did not only die for us when we were yet sinners, he will also change us

into saints.

Reason number three, Jesus rose again and will never die. In Jesus we will find our souls who will never die again. This gives us meaning and hope for our existence.

Reason number four, Jesus is Lord. At the name of Jesus every knee should bow. Why would we follow anybody else? Would Laban come after Jesus?

He would not. He would consider the message of the cross something foolish and weak. He would only come after the way of this world. He would get what he wants.

He would scheme, he would compete, he would cheat, he would do anything to satisfy the desires of his heart. Because the desire of his heart was not satisfiable with whatever he could gain in this world, he would scheme some more, compete some more, cheat some more, until the freedom he thought he had in doing things become a bondage.

[ 33 : 40 ] He becomes a prisoner of his own desire. He will keep seeking for satisfaction for eternity but will never find it. It is like a drug addict who cannot stop using drugs even when he finds that drug is no longer pressurable.

Laban can only boast in his achievements, he can never boast in the cross. In the process of gaining his wealth, Laban abused everyone else, including his own family, now that he was very wealthy, he became a lonely old man.

Like Esau, Laban sold his birthright for a single meal. He had exchanged eternal satisfaction with transient pleasure. Would Jacob follow Jesus?

Not initially. However, God took him away from the comfort of his home and go through a lonely journey and left him under Laban for 20 years. Jacob observed Laban's life.

He saw Laban's wealth, comfort, and power. He also saw Laban's no-needness, restlessness, and joylessness. He saw how Laban treated his children and servants.

[ 34 : 50 ] Everything is about profit. He saw how Laban could not keep promise and kept changing his wages to get more profit out of him. Jacob also saw that God had increased his own wealth under impossible circumstances.

So he got wealth and then he got four wives and many children. But even then it did not give him joy that he was looking for.

Someone once said, if you think you are perfect, go and get married. you can imagine Jacob's marriage, how chaotic it would be, how much stress in that marriage.

Imagine him working the whole day, tired, coming home, different wives, wonder his attention, children, wonder his attention. It's a messy, very messy life.

life, and then Jacob would lose his temper. So Jacob, this marriage would quickly help Jacob to see how flawed and weak he was.

[ 35 : 58 ] He was no better than his father Isaac. He could not love his family equally. Even the wife he loved the most, Rachel, almost betrayed him when she stole Laban's idol during the escape from Laban's control.

When Jacob saw his own foolishness and sinfulness, he could begin to deny himself. What did Jacob see in his heart?

You see, he saw at least four things. One, Jacob began to understand what evil was in his interaction with Laban. And he saw the same evil in his heart.

Number two is he began to realize that there was a type of love that does not care about benefits. And that was the love that he wanted from his father. He did get it from the mom, but that wasn't sufficient because he wanted from his father.

And that was the love that Leah was looking from him. Number three, Jacob began to long for justice when he was mistreated.

[ 37 : 06 ] But at the same time, he knew that he had also mistreated others. So the justice doesn't only apply to other people, it apply to himself too. Number four, he began to wish for forgiveness for all the wrong he had done because justice he couldn't bear, he couldn't hope for forgiveness.

Where does one find the display of evil, love, justice, and forgiveness? In the cross. When man nailed Jesus on the cross, it was the ultimate display of evil.

And when Jesus died on the cross for our sins, it was the ultimate display of love, justice, and forgiveness. Justice because God's wrath has been satisfied.

Unless we see our own foolishness and sinfulness, we will not deny ourselves. We also cannot deny ourselves unless or until we see someone who is righteous, pure, and wise for us to turn to.

Many of us live in the red race. We hardly have time to think about our life. We want to be significant and secure and to have love. We all lose our life for something or someone.  
[ 38 : 26 ] It can be your boyfriend, your girlfriend, children, careers, hobbies, or addictions. Only when you lose your life for Jesus shall you find your soul.

I hope that today you can have time to think how God has been blessing you in your failures and frustrations. I hope that you can deny yourself and turn your eyes to the Lord Jesus who loved you and gave his life for you.

In denying ourselves and coming to the Lord Jesus Christ, we will find our souls. Next week, we shall see what happened when Jacob found his soul. Let us pray.

Amen. Father, may you speak to our hearts.

Help us to see care of what is in our hearts and at the same time, help us to see care of the Lord Jesus Christ that we might turn to him.

[ 39 : 29 ] Thank you, Father, for we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.