

God's Sovereignty and Human Sin

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Date: 04 August 2019

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[0 : 00] Genesis 29 is a story of boy meets girl. And Andrew Price, our senior pastor, Andrew asked me to preach this passage because the girl here is called Rachel.

And my wife is called Rachel. So Jacob falls in love and marries a Rachel. Vijay falls in love and marries a Rachel too. She's the embarrassed lady in the crying room right now.

But I hope that's where the similarities stop. Because underneath the story of boy meets girl is a second story of boy gets taste of his own medicine.

Two stories on top of each other. And chapter 29 is really important because so far in this series, the main idea, a dominant note, is that God chooses real scoundrels despite their sin.

Our boy Jacob, the biggest scoundrel so far. And for Christians, we're also chosen by God. We're blessed through Jesus. But does that mean we're okay to keep acting as we are?

[1 : 07] After all, doesn't this series teach that God loves rotten, raw materials? And in one sense, that's correct. We are chosen despite our sin. It is by grace.

But if we think that God wants us just as we are, we're in danger of wrongly applying this passage. And so in chapter 29, underneath boy meets girl is the real story of boy gets taste of his own medicine.

To stop chosen ones like Jacob, chosen ones like us, from presuming we can carry on as scoundrels just as we are. So the handout shows you where we're going.

We're at point one. We're going to do up to verse 30, which is a lot. But I won't cover every verse. I'll just pick out the big main points of the story. It's a really fantastic passage. So please pay attention. We're at point one. You'll remember in this story that Jacob is on the run after cheating his brother Esau. He's also searching for a wife from his mother's family, which is like trying to find a needle in a 700-mile haystack.

[2 : 14] But in our passage, Jacob has success after success after success. So in verse 4, he gets to the right place, Haran. In verse 5, the local shepherds, they know his mother's family.

He says to them, do you know Laban? That's his uncle. Nahor's grandson. Yes, we know him. So brilliant. The correct spot. In verse 6 is a girl from the right family.

Verse 9, she is Laban's daughter. That is Rebecca's niece. Verse 10, she is ravishing Rachel, the hottie from Haran and Tasmania.

She is the shepherdess' stunner. In verse 7 and 8, the shepherds are wasting good pasture time because there isn't enough of them to roll the stone away from the well.

Verse 8, it's a massive stone. And in verse 9, with Rachel looking on, Jacob does what any bloke in this room would do when he's trying to impress a girl. He flexes his muscles.

[3 : 14] And in verse 10, he rolls the stone away. In verse 11, he turns on the charm. He kisses the girl. And then he weeps out aloud. Now, I'm not sure that's a really good first date strategy.

Ladies, how would you feel if after your fella kisses you, he starts weeping out aloud? Probably not a great idea. But anyway, it must have worked. Because in verse 12, Jacob explains how pleased Rachel's father will be to meet him.

That's pretty cocky, isn't it? And so Rachel goes to fetch her father. Verse 13, as soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he hurried to meet him.

He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home. And there Jacob told him all these things. Then Laban said to him, you are my own flesh and blood. The engagement is on.

It is married at first sight. Last week, God said he will watch over Jacob wherever he goes, even if he's 700 miles away in Haran.

[4 : 17] This week, success after success after success. This is God keeping his promises. In fact, chapter 29 is so similar to how Jacob's parents met, we can say God always keeps his promises.

So I put a table on your hand out there. Comparing chapter 24, when Jacob's parents met, to chapter 29. In both stories of boy meets girl, there is a long journey to Abraham's family. There is a beauty. There are flocks. There is a well. And Laban is involved. When comparing these love stories, it's clear God has done it again. But our author puts a contrast in the table as well. You see, in chapter 24, there's lots of prayer. It's full of dependence on God and praises to him for success. You see, Isaac wanted God to get the glory. But in chapter 29, Jacob never mentions God once. It's amazing, isn't it, that God keeps his promises to ungrateful scoundrels like Jacob. [5 : 33] But we mustn't get carried away. Because our sin still matters. And God normally keeps their cause and effect in his world.

So the reason Laban... Sorry, in chapter 24, Abraham's emissary took gold rings and presents and treasures for Laban, for Rebecca's hand in marriage.

You see, the reason Laban runs out to meet Jacob in chapter 29 is because last time the mad cousins from the east came looking for a bride, Laban was set up for life.

The cousins from the east are mad, but they are rich. Jacob, however, he wasn't sent out in the same way. He can't offer gold and flocks as a dowry for Rachel because of his sin.

Remember, he lied and cheated his brother Esau. He had to flee his family with nothing. You see, God normally keeps cause and effect of our sin in his world.

[6 : 38] Our sin really matters. So yes, God sovereignly chooses Jacob. He makes sure that Rachel comes and arrives at the well at just the right time. He gives this mummy's boy the strength of 10 shepherds as he rolls the stone away.

God will go on to bless Jacob with many descendants, which is what happens in chapter 30 and beyond. But in our passage, instead of Jacob miraculously finding a gold mine and some random flocks on the way to Haran, he arrives with nothing to offer Laban.

Because his sin still matters. It still has terrible consequences in his life. So here, when it comes to a marriage arrangement, he arrives already in debt to Laban.

You see, God's sovereignty cannot be separated from the normal cause and effect of our sin. You see, Christians, we need to know that if we hurt people on Monday, we will have damaged relationships on Tuesday.

If we're lazy at work on Wednesday, we'll probably lose our job on Thursday. If we make terrible, sinful life choices in the 90s, we'll probably still feel their effects some 20, nearly 30 years later.

[7 : 58] Chosen and forgiven? Yes. Blessed on our way to heaven? For sure. But even amongst chosen ones like us, God normally keeps cause and effect of our sin in his world.

It really matters. And that may be a shock. Because hasn't our series so far said that God chooses people despite their sin? Couldn't we say that God wants a sinner like us?

Can't we act like scoundrels at home or at work? But that isn't quite true. You see, God chooses us, but he doesn't want us.

He wants Jesus. He chooses sinners so he can change us to be the people he wants us to be.

People like Jesus. On Wednesday night in our Winter Doctrine series, Andrew Moody, he said this. He said, thinking that God wants us as we are, mostly holy, is like thinking that we would like our drinking water, mostly free of sewage, or our coffee, mostly free of cyanide.

[9 : 06] God doesn't want us mostly as we are, sort of mostly holy. His plan is to change us, to make us like Christ. See, this is a chapter about a man looking for a bride, but really it's about God looking for a bride for his son.

Us together, the church, the chosen ones of God, we are the bride of Jesus. Yes, chosen, but God needs to change us to be more suitable for Jesus, ultimately holy, ultimately without blemish.

The way he's going to change us is by disciplining us, which in chapter 29 is giving us a dose of our own medicine. So, point one, God always keeps his promises.

Point two, he disciplines us to be more like Jesus. From our second reading, which Eric gave us, which, can I have a screen please, Ryan? So, that's Hebrews 12, verse 10.

And that enables us to understand what's going on in Genesis 29. God disciplines us for our good. Why? In order that we may share in his holiness.

[10 : 17] Hebrews says that discipline hurts at the time. It's very realistic. But, this passage says it's for our good. So, scoundrels like us can become more holy, more like Jesus.

And so far, Jacob is the chosen one. We've said that many times. He has the blessing and the birthright, which means Jacob is the ruler. He will rule over his brother Esau. He will rule a family dynasty, which much of the rest of the chapters of Genesis are about.

But, before Jacob can do any ruling, he needs to be changed. He needs to be disciplined first. That's what chapter 29 is doing.

Because, ever since we met Jacob, he's anything but holy. He lies and he cheats and he's a heel-grabbing deceiver. In chapter 29, he's an arrogant charmer.

He comes back to his mother's homeland. He never thanks God for safety or success. In verse 7 and 8, he starts ordering around the local country bumpkins. And then he flexes his muscles to show off to Rachel.

[11 : 23] And he spends the next seven years playing the role of the dashing, self-assured charmer, ruler. Getting his own life sorted for himself.

I'll marry the beauty queen. I'll inherit half of Laban's treasures. And then I'll go home and kick sand in Esau's face and live with my mum. But, all the while, Laban has been laughing at him.

Verse 15. Have a look down at verse 15, everyone. 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. Now, that sounds like a really nice gesture, doesn't it?

Let me pay you for your work. But in their world, work is a slavery word. And in verse 16, the narrator gives us a clue about what Laban's planning.

Verse 16. Now, Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah. And the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes. But Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful.

[12 : 27] You see, Laban is met by the right man who has no dowry to offer. And he has an unattractive daughter that no one wants.

And so his plan is set in motion. We're told that Leah had weak eyes, which is really hard to translate. It can't be bad eyesight because my eyes are getting worse and I'm still a catch.

But anyway. I was thinking, should I do it or no? Anyway. Maybe it's that Leah was so ugly she hurt the eyes of other people when they looked at her.

No, no, no. I'm not sure. Anyway, the point is she is no Princess Leah. That's the point. But it isn't just her eyes. It's not just her eyes. See the contrast in verse 17? Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful.

Without being too pious about this, Rachel was a hottie. She had a great face and a beautiful body. I said a great face and a beautiful body. There she is now.

[13 : 32] And in verse 18, in verse 18, Jacob is so besotted by Rachel, he can't suspect what Laban, or he doesn't suspect what Laban is doing.

He says, I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter, Rachel. We're told in verse 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.

Oh, isn't that nice? You can imagine them seven years flirting with one another, laughing, playing, talking of their future marriage. On the phone, you hang up. No, you hang up.

No, you hang up. Get a room, you two. And in verse 22, we come to the wedding day, finally. And it's verse 22 says, Laban gave a feast.

But the word for feast comes from the word to drink. So in other words, it's a drunken party. Verse 23 tells us it was evening time, which means it is getting darker.

[14 : 33] And Laban's trap is now set because Jacob is probably drunk and brides in their culture wore veils over their faces.

And so verse 23, Laban took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob. And Jacob made love to her. Boom.

The next day, Jacob rolls over to greet his trophy wife. Verse 25, when morning came, there was Leah, which is actually better translated like this.

In the morning, look, she, Leah. Verse 25, why, what is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I?

Why have you deceived me? You see, for five chapters now, Jacob has been the deceiver. But today, he has met his match.

[15 : 32] And it's not Rachel, it's not Leah. It is Laban, the arch deceiver, who is giving Jacob a taste of his own medicine. Jacob is still in love with Rachel, however, but he's now stuck with Leah.

And so in verse 29, like any good mafia man, Laban makes him an offer he can't refuse. Another seven years work or slavery for the one that he loves.

You see, this self-confidence, lying, cheating, heel-grabbing deceiver is trapped. God has done this. Let me show you the elegance of God's sovereignty and discipline as he gives Jacob a taste of his own medicine.

This is the second table on your handout. So when Jacob took Esau's blessings, the younger was switched for the older. But here Laban switches older for younger. Rebecca disguises rival siblings to steal the prize.

Laban disguises rival siblings to cheat the same way. Jacob tricked his family with bad eyesight, some stew and a goat skin. Laban tricks Jacob almost identically with darkness, alcohol and a veil. [16:44] Sell me your birthright, Jacob once told his brother Esau. But now Jacob is the one sold into another seven years of slavery.

You can imagine poor old ugly Leah or Rachel locked away in a barn somewhere on her own wedding day. Laban is a nasty piece of work.

But Laban is only a reflection of Jacob himself. Jacob is the chosen one despite his sin. But God doesn't want him as he is.

And so he sovereignly brings him to Laban to be disciplined by a dose of his own medicine. Can you imagine Jacob for the remaining seven days of that wedding feast having to put up with drunken Laban and his mates?

All laughing, telling the same joke about how he was deceived. You see, lying and deceiving used to be such handy tools for Jacob in getting him what he wanted.

[17:46] But in Laban, he finally recognizes them for the sins that they are. See, underneath boy meets girl is a dark comedy. We're supposed to laugh and cheer as Jacob gets it in the neck, gets a dose of his own medicine.

God has done this. This passage has lots of mentions of servants. So two maids, two daughters, and now Jacob. God has done this to his chosen ruler.

Because before he rules, he needs to be disciplined. To learn holiness as a servant. Until he one day becomes like Jesus. The servant ruler.

And as the saga of Jacob continues over the next few weeks, please keep watching out for his slow transformation. Until he's the person God wants him to be.

He's not finished yet. I think the author deliberately leaves it hanging in the air. For us here, as we apply this, think about your favorite sins. See, as good Christians, we're supposed to be praying that God would change us and discipline us.

[18:57] But if you're like me, you don't want that change to happen just yet. See, I love my sins too much. They're too handy for me. They help me get what I want.

I'm too afraid that without them, I'll be just another boring, dull Christian. I don't want God to discipline my anger just yet. Because it's great to blow off steam on other people.

I don't want God to discipline my sexual immorality just yet. It's fun and exciting still. Or to discipline my materialism because it gives me such a sense of security in the world.

Or to discipline my ego just yet. It feels good to force my way to the center of things and not have to listen to other people. And I don't want God to discipline my lying and deceit just yet.

Because like Jacob, it's still handy in getting me what I want. Do we recognize our sins for what they are? Do we see sins as so serious that even after being forgiven, we can still feel their effect many years later?

[20:04] Hebrews 12 says that like a father, God disciplines us for our good. In order that we may share in his holiness.

Wouldn't you think it would be good to be less sinful? To be free from sin completely. Wouldn't that be a great thing? Haven't you had enough of their bad effect in your life?

Wouldn't our lives and relationships be so much more good if we resembled the Lord Jesus after some loving discipline from our Heavenly Father?

It is true that discipline feels painful at the time. We're all aware of that. But Hebrews says time and again that God only does it to his real children.

That is to the real chosen ones. They're the only ones that get to experience a loving hand from our Heavenly Father. So for tomorrow as we finish, why not do a review of the year so far?

[21 : 10] Do this tomorrow. And review the areas of your character that God has been at work in. Changing, rebuking, chastening. That's the language of Hebrews 12.

Disciplining. And as you think back on your journey, you may, in your thinking, come across a real scoundrel in your days. Someone you just can't stand.

Maybe, maybe God is giving you a taste of your own medicine. That is showing you your sins in someone else. The way he did through Laban to Jacob.

It is good that God loves us enough to discipline us. Let's take time to recognize his discipline and to pray over it, to thank him for it.

So we're going to do that now as we pray. Father God, we are so nervous of your discipline because we love our sin and we love our lives just as they are.

[22 : 09] But we love that you chose us and we confess as one body that we don't always want you to change us. Please help us to see our sins for what they are.

Please help us to see your discipline as a good thing. Please would we want to be more holy like the Lord Jesus. And we ask this in his name.

Amen.