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WHEN YOU ARE BETRAYED – LESSONS FROM JACOB (Genesis 29:13-30)

Recently, I heard someone say, “My life hasn’t turned out the way I thought it would.” I’m not exactly sure what that meant, since few of us strategically map out our futures in explicit detail, but I imagine it had something to do with situations that are difficult. When we face unanticipated struggle, pain and loss, it can certainly bring despair, especially since we try to avoid anything unpleasant in our lives. Maybe you have said the same thing at some point. But to be human is to suffer. We won’t all face the same challenges, but we will all have to deal with negative circumstances sooner or later. How we handle that difficulty, or better, what we learn from hurtful times, will say much about our futures. We aren’t in control of many circumstances, so how will we move forward when obstacles block our path?

In one of Jacob’s most shocking chapters, we observe a man who definitely could say that life was not turning out the way he ever thought it would. In fact, the betrayal he faced in the passage we come to in this study would affect the rest of his life, as well as all of redemptive history. Remember that God had promised him that all the world would be blessed through his descendants. How could he have known that the beginning of that family would be the result of unbelievable treachery and betrayal?

JACOB MEETS LABAN

Genesis 29:13, 14 - 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.

Recall that Jacob had fled home for his life after deceiving his brother, Esau, out of his father’s blessing. Along the way, Jacob’s life was changed by an encounter with God at a place called Bethel. He now arrives at Haran, where his mother, Rebekah, had grown up. Laban was Jacob’s uncle and as this story begins, he has just heard that his nephew wants to see him.

The start of their relationship is encouraging and warm, but Jacob is unaware of the pain that is ahead. None of us knows what going to happen to us in the future, which is why knowing, following and obeying God is so crucial. He can be trusted to strengthen, comfort and help us in times of need.

In truth, God already knows what is in the future and is in control of our affairs.

*Isaiah 46:9, 10 - Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, **declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.’***

JACOB WORKS FOR RACHEL

*Genesis 29:15-20 - 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 that I should give her to any other man; 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.***

Jacob had to be feeling great about life at this point. He had removed himself from Esau’s wrath and murderous intentions. He had an assuring and inspiring message directly from God during his journey. He had arrived at Laban’s home and been warmly received. He had stayed a month and found productivity helping Laban out. And now, by continuing to work for his uncle, he could marry the girl of his dreams. If Jacob could have laid out his future and planned for success and happiness, it would have looked exactly like this.

First, we should acknowledge God and be grateful when times are easy and enjoyable. At the same time, prosperity and ease should not dull us to the reality that life is full of heartache and our lives can be turned upside down in a second. We don't have to go through life with paranoia, looking around every corner for the next bit of bad news, but we should also not be so caught off-guard even when devastating news does come.

JACOB IS BETRAYED

*Genesis 29:21-30 - Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to 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 in to her. 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. So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years.*

Why does betrayal hurt us so much? Why are we so shocked, saddened and angered when we are double-crossed? The deepest pain of betrayal comes from those we love, those we have invested in and trusted in a formerly-healthy relationship.

Betrayal breaks a promise. It can be as trivial as a vendor changing a price or as crushing as marital infidelity. When promises are made, we expect the one promising to follow through. We place trust in them and when the promise is pulled away, the relationship breaks down and we are left suffering and angry. That was Jacob's response to Laban's betrayal.

But Jacob was no stranger to deception as we have seen¹. His very name meant "deceiver". He had taken advantage of his older brother, Esau, when he traded for his birthright. He lied to his own father, Isaac, when he deceived him into blessing him. And now, on the receiving end of deception, Jacob can't believe Laban would treat him with such cruelty, even though Laban had justified his actions in his own mind.

There are several biblical principles to consider here. The first is that our choices will lead to future consequences.

*Galatians 6:7 - Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for **whatever one sows, that will he also reap.***

The consequences for Jacob would be far-reaching. Imagine these two sisters, now vying for the attention of their shared husband. Child-bearing now became a competition between Leah, (along with her maid, Zilpah) and Rachel (with her maid, Bilhah). So before all was done, Jacob would have 12 sons and one daughter by four different women, all because of Laban's betrayal. The damaged relationships would not only affect Jacob and his wives, but the next generation as most of the sons would turn on their brother, Joseph.

Another major point to learn from this tragic story is that God, even in times of duplicity and unfaithfulness, can take the sin of faulty humans and still bring about his purposes. He had made a promise to Jacob back at Bethel. The difference between God's promise to Jacob and Laban's promise is that God cannot lie. His word and promise are always true and can be counted on no matter what we may feel.

*Hebrews 10:23 - Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for **he who promised is faithful.***

In the capitol, you will be betrayed at some point. Responding in kind is not the answer. Being a person who stays true is always right, regardless of how you have been treated. Entrust yourself to God and let him take care of your heart and the heart of your betrayer. Some of the best guidance on how to deal with betrayal is found in these verses in Romans. You have my prayers as you seek to live out these important words in your relationships.

*Romans 12:18, 19 - If possible, so far as it depends on you, **live peaceably with all.** Beloved, **never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."***

¹ See *Deception – Lessons from Jacob* from Feb.9, 2015 at <http://www.capitolcom.org/maryland/studies>.

BIBLE STUDY

LEGISLATORS AND STAFF (During Session)
TUESDAYS, 8:00 a.m.
ROOM 153, HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING