

#TryChurch - The God Who Restores

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[0 : 0 0] reading is from Genesis chapter 29, which is on page 31 of the Bibles in the church seats. So Genesis chapter 29, page 31.

Starting at verse 1. Then Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples. There he saw a well in the open country where three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well.

The stone over the mouth of the well was large. When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well's mouth and water the sheep. Then they would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well.

Jacob asked the shepherds, my brothers, where are you from? We're from Haran, they replied. He said to them, do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?

Yes, we know him, they answered. Then Jacob asked them, is he well? Yes, he is, they said. And here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep. Look, he said, the sun is still high.

[1 : 2 2] It is not time for the flocks to be gathered. Water the sheep and take them back to pasture. We can't, they replied, until all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well.

Then we will water the sheep. While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherd. When Jacob saw Rachel, daughter of his uncle Laban, and Laban's sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle's sheep.

Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud. He had told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah. So she ran and told her father.

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. After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, Laban said to him, just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing?

[2 : 3 3] Tell me what your wages should be. Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the elder was Leah and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful.

Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter, Rachel. Laban said, it's better that I give her to you than some other man.

Stay here with me. So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. Then Jacob said to Laban, give me my wife.

My time is completed and I want to make love to her. So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob and Jacob made love to her.

And Laban gave his servant Zilpah to his daughter as her attendant. When morning came, there was Leah. So Jacob said to Laban, what is this you have done to me?

[3 : 40] I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me? Laban replied, it is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the elder one.

Finish this daughter's bride a week. Then we will give you the younger one also in return for another seven years of work. And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah and when Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife.

Laban gave his servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her attendant. Jacob made love to Rachel also. And his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah.

And he worked for Laban another seven years. Amen. I'm going to risk standing down here, but I've realized Jack's about nine feet tall and I'm about five.

And so there's probably about a six foot difference. I'm not sure. My name is James. I'm on the staff team here. Let me pray for us as we start. So Father, we pray that you'd speak to us through this passage.

[4 : 44] We pray that we'd come to trust you more deeply and more nearly, even through the messed upness of this life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, in the evening at St. Silas, we are in the middle of a series in Genesis. And we're looking at one of the big figures in the Bible, Jacob.

And we remember how Jacob is perhaps one half of the greatest sibling rivalry in history. I'm trying to think of other sibling rivalries. I can't just yet, but maybe you can tell me afterwards.

And we remember his rivalry with his twin brother Esau. We remember how Jacob is born. And he's born grasping Esau's heel. And then we remember how Jacob deceived his father so that he could steal Esau's birthright and blessing.

And that he might inherit the very great promises and privileges that God had given Esau and that were the rights of the firstborn. And because of this deception, the sibling rivalry, Jacob finds himself in a very sticky situation in the previous chapters of Genesis.

[6 : 01] In that he has to flee his brother. And so his parents, because they love Jacob, they send him away. Both Isaac, Jacob's father, and Rebekah, Jacob's mother.

They send him away to Rebekah's brother, Uncle Laban. I'm not quite sure how to say that. Laban, Laban, I should know. But maybe you can correct me afterwards as well.

So they send Jacob back to the land where Jacob's people, Rebekah's family, had come from. Under the pretense of finding a suitable wife for Jacob there from his own relatives.

And if you can remember back to the dim past of 2019, we remember how in our last session in Genesis, how God had appeared to Jacob in a dream. And that God gave Jacob the very great and sure promises that he had given Jacob's grandfather, Abraham.

So I wonder if you might just turn back. You can literally turn back to 28. You don't have to scan very far. Just look at verses 14 and 15. And we read those promises.

[7 : 12] Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, God says to Jacob. And you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south, everywhere.

All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and I will watch over you wherever you go.

And I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised for you and to you. And so Jacob is given some very great promises by God.

He's promised a land, he's promised a people, a great nation that will fill that land. And he's promised some very great blessings that the whole world will be blessed with him.

And in addition, God says that he will go with Jacob wherever Jacob goes. And because of these great promises, Jacob says that he will trust God.

[8 : 13] He will show faithfulness towards God, perhaps for the very first time in the Genesis and accounts. And as we read through tonight's reading and as we remember what we've looked at in Genesis, maybe some of that might have rung true for you.

Some of the bits of the story might ring home amazingly close. Maybe you've come off Christmas and it has been a Christmas that is filled with sibling rivalry.

Maybe you come here tonight as someone who is new to the Christian faith or you are inquiring regarding the Christian faith.

Maybe you have doubts. You're wondering about how can God really be God in this crazy messed up world that we're living in. Maybe you're simply curious about Christianity.

And it might be a surprise that as we come to Genesis, we find that Genesis doesn't paint an idealistic picture of what the world is like.

[9 : 15] But it really paints a picture of the world in all its warts and all. In all its doubts and struggles and messed upness. And the point of that and why Genesis does that is because Genesis is pointing us to our need for a Savior.

That we need to be rescued. We cannot do it ourselves. We can't be right with God on our own efforts. And that if we need a Savior, then we'll need to know that we need to live by faith, trusting in God, and not by sight.

And so we remember how the Israelites, they were going to that heavenly land, that promised land that they were promised. And we remember how Jacob was leaving the land and he is told that he'll come back to the land.

And then we remember how we are on a journey towards a heavenly land. And in all those situations, we might have great temptation to abandon living by faith and going on to live by sight.

And so the question that we might have in our mind from this reading tonight is, can God can be trusted when everything looks so messed up?

[10 : 35] And the answer that Moses gives and the point of this passage is that yes, God can be trusted to keep his promises.

God is still in charge, even despite all the messed upness and despite human deception. Deception and lies are really a part of life, aren't they?

And despite them, God can be trusted. And so in chapter 29, we really see the start of the fulfillment of God's very great promises that he gives Jacob in chapter 28.

And so in 29, we're given three assurances that God will keep his promises despite opposition, despite deception, that he'll look after Jacob, that he'll look after the Israelites, and that he'll look after us.

Three reasons why we might trust God despite all the messed upness of the world. Three evidences for God. The first one there is God's assurance of his providence.

[11 : 45] And then the second one is God's assurance of his love for Jacob and for us. And then thirdly, God's assurance that he gives them and us of his seed despite deception.

So providence, love and seed despite deception. And so God's assurance of his providence. And providence really is just a fancy word that says how God is in control of the times and places of our lives.

Maybe you've wondered, what does it mean when some stuff happens accidentally? It's those chance happenings in life. And providence really says that those chance happenings aren't chance, but they're really God acting.

It's the just so happens in life. And chapter 29 starts off on a real down point for Jacob. We remember that Jacob is in the wilderness.

He's poor. He's alone. We pick up the journey in chapter, in verse 1, that Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples.

[12 : 56] And when he gets there, the beginning of verse 2, we read, There he saw it just so happened that he comes across a well. Behold, a well, literally.

And at this point in Genesis, if we've been reading Genesis carefully, we get a sense of deja vu here. Because we've come across a well before.

And that is in chapter 24, when we remember how Abraham sends his servant to Haran, the place where Jacob is now, to find a bride for his son, Isaac, who is Rebecca, Jacob's parents.

And so we get the sense of deja vu. We're back at a well. We're back looking for a bride for one of Abraham's offspring. And we remember how Rebecca there is Isaac's relation.

And so when we come across this well, we kind of had wedding music in our mind. We can hear the church bells ringing as it is if we were a first hearer of the time.

[14 : 04] And so Jacob approaches the well, verse 4, and what do we read? He asked the shepherds, Jacob asked the shepherds, My brothers, where are you from? Jacob is completely confused and lost as to where he is.

And they go, well, we're from Haran, they replied. And it just so happens that Jacob has arrived in exactly the place where he needed to be, the town where his uncle Laban lived.

But not only that, it just so happens that they know Jacob's uncle. Look down at verse 5 there. Jacob said to them, he said to them, Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?

Yes, we know him. And they answered. And what's more, it just so happens that at that very point, Laban's daughter Rachel arrives.

And here he comes, his daughter Rachel. Here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep. And so Jacob, having come to Haran to find a bride, in God's providence, in the just so happiness, comes to the right place, finds the right person, Rachel.

[15 : 24] But it appears to be the wrong time. Look at verse 7 there. What does he say? It is not time. But Jacob isn't deterred there. He's a man of action at this point in Genesis.

And he's driven by his sight. He can see Rachel. And so verse 10. He single-handedly, superhuman strength, he rolls the stone away.

And overcome by emotion, and having found the object of his journey, arrived in the place, finding his relative, Rachel, he kisses her in a greeting.

And he weeps aloud. And then Jacob reveals to Rachel that he is her cousin. And she tells her father there.

And notice, throughout the section, Moses goes on to highlight, Moses who writes this account, God's providence in Jacob meeting Rachel.

[16 : 22] But he also highlights that Rachel is Jacob's relationship, relation. And what he's saying there is, Rachel's a good girl to marry.

Rachel's Jacob's cousin. That might be slightly awkward for us today. But in those days, that was an indicator that she was a good girl to marry. And I want us to notice here, something else here, that we might have not missed over, that we might have missed.

You see, unlike Abraham's servant, who prays to God for guidance and for success in chapter 24, and then thanks God for leading him.

Jacob here neither consults God, nor does he thank God afterwards. You see, although Jacob at this point believes and trusts in God, he acts as if he has no relationship or obligation to God.

See, at this moment, he's living entirely motivated by sight. And remember that Jacob has been rescued out of slavery and sin and destitution, but he still lives as a godless sinner.

[17 : 32] And the lesson for us here is as people who have experienced the full extent of God's love for us, who through Jesus have a relationship with God on a deep level.

And we remember how Jesus calls us friends and not servants. And so we recognize that the Christian can come to God as a friend and pray to him and ask him on all occasions, ask him for advice in every situation and care.

And all of that Jacob forgets here. He forgets that hymn. And what a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs are to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.

But the second assurance that Jacob gets here, that God will care for him, that God will look after him, the second evidence that we see for God here is God's assurance of his love.

And what happens, what follows is a whirlwind romance. So picking up the action there, in verse 14, Jacob stays with Laban for a month and he works for Laban.

[18 : 47] No doubt Laban notices that Jacob is a good and able worker. And he's perhaps looking to formalize the relationship there.

And so in verse 15, we see that Laban said to him, just because you're a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing?

Tell me what your wages should be. And just before we hear the answer, Moses, the narrator, he interrupts the story because he wants to tell us some extra details.

He wants to tell us a little more about Leah and Rachel. And the first thing that we learn is, well, Leah's the older sister and Rachel's the younger. And then secondly, we learn that perhaps Leah is less attractive.

She's got weak eyes. I don't think that means that she wears glasses or anything. Who knows what that means exactly. But whatever it is, she's not quite a Rachel.

[19 : 47] How does Moses describe Rachel? She had a lovely figure and was beautiful. And Jacob, at this point, he's driven by what he sees.

He falls in love with Rachel and he sets his terms of employment. He says, I'll work for seven years in return for your younger daughter, Rachel.

And on the face of it, on the first hand, it seems as though Jacob, for the very first time in Genesis, is stepping up to the plate. He seems as though he's developing and growing.

He's no longer grasping after things, but he's looking to settle down. He's looking for love. And that seems like a positive step. And it looks as though he's not hanging about the house.

We remember how he's found hanging around the tents. But he wants to go out and work, and that seems positive. But on the other hand, Jacob seems quite foolish in how he behaves.

[20 : 48] You see, unlike Abraham's servants, who, if we remember the story, the Abraham's servant measures up Rebecca's good qualities. You notice how Rebecca first gave him a drink, and then not only did Rebecca give Abraham's servants a drink, but also went on to feed all the camels, give all the camels drinks.

Jacob makes no attempt at doing that here. He's entirely motivated by Rachel's external beauty. And not only that, it seems as though Jacob here sells himself into slavery in order to get Rachel.

You see, in the second half, from verse 15 to the end of 30, the word that is repeated in the section is work, service, slavery. And if you're a first hearer coming out of slavery in Egypt and you heard the repetition of that word work, slavery, that would bring back very bad memories here.

So you'd be wondering, what is Jacob about here? But notice, despite all this foolishness, the point of this section is that God loves Jacob, and he shows Jacob goodness.

goodness. And we've seen that, how he's guided Jacob to Rachel, but not only that, he blesses Jacob with romantic love. Look at verse 18.

[22 : 21] Jacob was in love with Rachel. And then, read verse 20. You'd struggle to find a Mills and Boone novel that would put it better than this.

How does verse 20 go? It's one of the most beautiful verses in the Bible, perhaps. So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days because of his love for her.

And it seems completely idyllic, completely wonderful. And Jacob's enormously blessed by God, completely out of God's goodness and mercy and kindness.

Jacob's done nothing to deserve this. He simply receives all these blessings out of God's goodness and mercy. And the application for us here is to see that God's goodness is not just for Jacob then, but for us here tonight.

Whatever situation we are in, no matter how messed up our lives are, God is still the good God who cares for us. He still loves us.

[23 : 29] So the New Testament puts it. We remember that verse, Romans 8, 28. We know that God works for the good of those who love him. God loves those who love him and have been called according to his purpose.

And for some of us, we might look at our lives and we might be quite resentful towards God. Our lives might look nothing like the bliss of verse 20.

They might look nothing like a Richard Curtis rom-com movie. In fact, they might look exactly the opposite. they might look a bit more like a Guy Ritchie movie.

Just chaos everywhere. But God is no less good and generous to us. And all of that is totally undeserved.

And that's the great promise of the gospel. You see, if we trust God and love him, then no matter what happens in our life, we'll see the goodness and kindness of God behind it in God's providence.

[24 : 34] But if we don't trust God, if we doubt God's goodness, then we'll always think that we know better than the infinite good God of the universe and we'll always be dissatisfied.

So God assures Jacob that he will fulfill his promises through his providence. God assures Jacob that he loves him, that he cares for him, he blesses him abundantly, even though Jacob deserves nothing.

And then the third assurance or evidence that we find for God here that God gives us tonight and gave Jacob then was that God sends a seed despite the deception that we see in this passage.

So after the years of working for Laban, Jacob finally is about to receive Rachel, his wife. And to mark the occasion, Laban holds a feast.

And we're picking up the action here in verse 22. So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. It's a party. It's a fantastic party.

[25 : 40] I don't know what kind of party it might have been. Probably brilliant. Parties are good. But the reason for the feast here is not to celebrate Rachel's wedding, but it's so that Laban can deceive his nephew Jacob.

It's a terrible deception. But that's what life is like. We get deceived by those who should know better. And so we read in verse 23, when the evening came, we don't know how the party's gone, but Laban takes his daughter Leah and he brought her to Jacob and Jacob made love to her.

And Jacob who at this point is ruled by sight, by what he sees, and we remember how Jacob's deceived others. Here Jacob's eyes fail him and here Jacob is deceived.

And so we read in verse 25, when the morning came, literally behold, there was Leah, orcs, and Jacob is naturally outraged.

Why have you deceived me? It's the exact same word that Esau used for Jacob earlier in Genesis.

[26 : 57] Laban's response in verse 26 is a bit like dust off the shoulder. See, the truth is he's looking to extort Jacob for another seven years of work.

He's looking to use his nephew. And so being governed by his sight, he deceives Jacob and gets him to work. And so what do we see here?

We see verse 20, Jacob going from that mountaintop in verse 20, into the pit of despair in verse 25. And then verse 30 we read, and it's a real bittersweet verse, isn't it?

Jacob made love to Rachel also, and his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah. And he worked for Laban for another seven years.

And it's a heartbreaking line, isn't it? that Jacob loves one wife more than the other. He loves Rachel more than he loves Leah.

[27 : 59] And it's brutal. And poor Leah here is trapped in a loveless marriage to someone who never even wanted to marry her in the first place. Now, as we sit here in 21st century Glasgow, we might read this, our temptation might be to pick the book up at this point and throw it on the floor and say that's completely outrageous.

And your instinct there would be right to read this is outrageous. Later on, Moses goes on to condemn a man marrying two sisters in Leviticus 18, verse 18.

But by describing it here, Moses is not condoning Jacob or Laban's behavior. Moses isn't whitewashing history.

He isn't the woke police who is trying to make everything politically correct. Anyone know the word woke? Maybe it's my new word for the year, 2020. He's trying to whitewash history.

In fact, Moses leaves the story in and it just simply points to the truthfulness of this tale, that he'll tell such a bad story about such a great figure, Jacob.

[29 : 17] And it points to the messed upness of the world, that we need a savior to rescue us, despite the messes that we find ourselves in.

And so, as we get to the end of verse city, the situation seems completely hopeless. Laban's deception has ruined the lives of everyone involved in the story.

But if we're honest, there's a bit of Laban in all of us, aren't there? We might not do deceptions on that level, but I'm sure most of us have deceived others in some small way, and maybe told a white lie.

And maybe we've got ourselves in a mess through this, and we've ruined something for someone else, maybe in a small way. And maybe that deception has caused some big chaos in other people's lives.

And we wonder if there's any hope for us, for marriage, for life, for happiness. At those times, we might wonder what will become of God's promises to us.

- [30 : 27] And so, Jacob might wonder, has Laban railroaded God's promises for him? And we might wonder, has our deception, our little white lies, our untruths, railroaded God's promises for us?

And then we remember God's promise to Jacob and to the Israelites, that I am with you always, even in the messed up bits of life.

And the point of this passage, and the point of that we've tried to hammer home, is that God is bigger than our deceptions. And so despite Laban's deception here, what does God do?

He uses it for good. And through that deception, we begin to see God's promises being fulfilled. God's promises go through those deceptions like a freight train through soft butter.

What I mean, I wonder if you might just turn and scan down verses 31 to 35. Just scan it, scan it down, and what do we see?

- [31 : 36] Time and again, Leah giving birth, Leah giving birth, Leah being blessed with children. And so the promises are starting to be fulfilled.

Jacob's descendants are starting to fill the earth like the dust. And then if you scan right to the bottom, you get to verse 35, and then at the end of verse 35, you read, so she named him Judah.

Judah. And Judah there means praise. And we remember, if you know your Bible history, that Judah is Moses' great-grandfather who wrote this account.

And we remember that Judah is King David's great-great-great-great-great-grandfather. And we remember that Judah is Jesus' great-great-great-great-grandfather.

So Moses, David, Jesus, all the big figures come from Leah, someone whom Jacob was tricked into the marrying, the one whom Jacob did not love.

- [32 : 43] And the point that the Israelites were meant to take away from the story, and the point that we are meant to take away from the story tonight is yes, that God can be trusted to keep his promises despite human deception, despite all the messed upness of life, despite all the wrong things that might go wrong.

God's skill in charge. He still orders the events and times that just so happens in life. He's still good to us.

He still loves us, even though we don't deserve it. And he still keeps his promises no matter what, even when we do our best to wreck this.

And perhaps this is most clearly seen at the cross where we took Jesus, God's own son, God's savior, and we said to him, we said to him, no, I am in charge, not you.

And we nailed Jesus to a cross. And in that moment, even in that moment of utter rejection, when we rejected God, God allowed it in his infinite goodness and love, in his providence, despite our deception, despite the deception of his accusers then who told lies to have him crucified, God allowed it that he might bless all people throughout the world through Jesus.

- [34 : 16] That if we simply trust in Jesus' death for our sins, that we'll receive his perfect life, that we'll receive his right standing before God as our heavenly judge.

Something that we could never get if we tried to earn it. Something that we could never get by our own. By that single seed, by Leah's great, great, great, great, great, great grandson, Jesus.

God blesses all peoples on the earth. And although Jacob never knew Jesus, he trusted Jesus by faith because he trusted God's promises.

He took God at his word. And after Jesus died, God raised him up to life again. And then right at the end of Matthew's gospel, Jesus appears to his disciples and he commands them to tell this good news to everyone everywhere.

He says, make disciples of all people. And then he gives them a promise that is true for us tonight. And it's the same promise that God gave Jacob then.

[35 : 24] Surely I'm with you always, even to the very end of the age. Let's close in prayer. So, Father, we thank you for your very great and sure promises.

We thank you that you're in control in the big bits in life, in the small bits in life. We thank you for your love and goodness for us.

We thank you that there's nothing that we can do, no great train smash that can railroad those promises for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Cool.