

Providential Pursuit

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[0:00] I'm so glad that you all are here with us this morning at Covenant Baptist Church for worship.

! And I invite you, if you have a copy of the scriptures with you, to open up to the book of Genesis in chapter 29. We're going to be covering Genesis chapter 29 this morning, which is in fact, in the middle of the life of Jacob the patriarch.

Jacob the son of Isaac, who in turn is the son of Abraham. We began this particular study of the lives of these patriarchs, these fathers, with Abraham, Jacob's grandfather.

And we've spent quite a bit of time walking through his life, seeing what God did to direct the course of his life, seeing the things that God did to redirect Abraham at times. We saw God briefly at work in the life of Isaac, though the amount of information that we were given about Isaac is significantly less than what we received about Abraham, and significantly less than even that we are given about Jacob here now in the book of Genesis.

But we are walking through, we are looking at the life of Jacob, and in many ways, Jacob is easier, I think, for us to relate to. Easier for me to relate to, at least, because Jacob makes a lot of mistakes, and I make a lot of mistakes.

[1:23] So he's relatable. I don't want you to ever think that the scriptures, that the word of God is disconnected from our lives, whether that be our thinking or our feeling, the things that flow from our heart.

The scriptures directly address those things. We only need to ask God to give us eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to respond rightly to his word. And so here we are, arriving in Genesis chapter 29, in the middle of the life of Jacob.

Now as a reminder, Jacob, at this point in his life, is on the run. Jacob has deceived and tricked his way within his family.

He has stolen his brother's birthright. He has stolen his brother's right to the inheritance. He has stolen his brother's blessing from his father. And yet because of those things, he is now on the run in fear for his life, because he is afraid that his brother Esau will kill him.

And Esau is in fact, and has said that he is determined to take the life of his very own twin brother. And so Jacob was sent away by his mother and father. Sent away not to a place unknown to the family.

[2:33] sent away, in fact, to the very land from which Abraham initiated his journey toward the promised land. Abraham, Jacob's grandfather, had been living in Haran for some time.

We don't know how long. He was actually from a place called Ur, which is in modern day sort of Babylon and Iran, and in that area in Samaria. But Abraham had moved north to a place called Haran.

And Abraham had lived there for some time with his family when God called him and said, Go into a land that I will show you. And so Abraham began to travel, and he came to the land of Canaan, or the land of Palestine, or Israel.

Depending on where you're reading, or what time period you live in, it has a lot of different names. But that's where Abraham settled, and that's where he spent his days, moving from one place to another. And Abraham's son Isaac was raised in the land of Canaan.

But Isaac's wife was from Haran. So this is a familiar place. Not only is it the location of Abraham's some time spent with his family living there, but it's also the place where Isaac's wife, Jacob's mother, grew up.

[3:41] She was, in fact, a relative of Abraham. Abraham sent one of his servants back into Haran to find a wife for his son Isaac. And he did. And so Jacob has now been sent back to this place, to a land where family lives, a land where his mother's family lives, where his grandfather's family lives.

He's been sent there both because they fear for his life and because, like his father before him, he needs a wife. And what better place to find a wife than to go back to the place where your family is from?

So that's where Jacob is. He's fleeing for his life. He is on a journey toward this place called Haran. And that's where we find him. Last week we saw him in the midst of that journey.

God encountered him in a dream and spoke to him and gave the promises that he'd given to Abraham and to Isaac. He passed those on to Jacob. And as we'll see in a moment, Jacob did not respond in the best possible way that he could have.

But nevertheless, now we pick up with Jacob continuing that journey. And we're going to be reading quite a bit this morning. We're going to begin in verse 1 and read all the way down through verse 30. Not quite the end of the chapter, but almost to the end of the chapter.

[4:51] So I want to invite you to stand to your feet. And if as we're reading, you grow tired because it's a long reading, you may sit if you want. But let's at least begin on our feet. Genesis 29 verse 1.

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 do 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. And he said, Behold, it is still high day. It is not time for the livestock to be gathered together.

[5:53] Water the sheep and go pasture them. But they said, We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well. Well, then we water the sheep.

While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, where 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. 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.

[7 : 08] 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 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. Then Jacob said to Laban, Give me my wife, that I may go into her from my time as 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.

[8 : 13] 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.

Father, we thank you that you, that your spirit inspired Moses to write down this story in such detail for us so that we might see your hand at work in the life of Jacob and then from that we might learn how you work in the lives of your people.

Teach us, we ask now, we pray in Christ's name. Amen. You guys take a seat. You know, most people actually enjoy a really well told love story.

Now I know a lot of us men would rather not go to movies that are just love stories. We prefer to avoid those. In fact, I don't know, a couple of years ago I finally said to Allie, I said, no more Nicholas Sparks movies.

I don't know if you're familiar with him. And the books that he writes, I keep making them into movies and I don't know why because the books aren't even all that well done. But nevertheless, I finally said, no more of these movies.

[9 : 24] Not because they were love stories though per se, but because that's all they were and they weren't told all that well in my opinion and I didn't enjoy them all that much and I didn't think the acting was very good in these movies and so I just missed them entirely.

I don't want to see, I can't watch any more of these movies. I mean, I need at least some sort of explosion or some sort of excitement. I need the man to really struggle and fight against somebody in his pursuit of the girl.

I don't mind a love story, but it needs to be more exciting than his movies and books tend to be, for me at least. But I think still, nevertheless, most people are captivated by a genuine love story.

By a story of a man pursuing a woman. By a story of a woman loving a man and the ways in which life can throw complications in the way. Because we often see in those things, we see reflections of our own struggles and our own difficulties.

Because let's be honest, relationships are not always easy. We enter into them though because of the strength and power and the draw of love. And I think because of our inclination to like a good love story and to even be drawn into it, men and women alike, to be drawn into those stories, I think because of that inclination, we often read the story of Jacob and of Rachel as merely a love story between two people.

[10:49] And you can understand why someone would read through particularly this chapter and come to the conclusion, oh, well this chapter is about Jacob and how much he loved Rachel. Because we are actually told that on more than one occasion.

Look in verse 18. Jacob loved Rachel. He loved her so much so that he was willing to work for seven years to have her hand in marriage. And then verse 20.

Those seven years, they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. And then as you move toward the end of the passage that we read, we are told in verse 30, so Jacob went into Rachel also and he loved Rachel more than Leah.

He certainly loves her. And so one element of this story certainly is the love that Jacob has for Rachel and his pursuit, his willingness to pursue her and do whatever is necessary, whatever is laid before him to jump over those hurdles and do whatever he needs to do so that she might be his wife.

But I would argue that that's not the main point of this chapter. And not only that, but that love story is not the primary love story that Moses is trying to draw our attention to as we read through this chapter.

[12:08] That story is merely the backdrop for a much greater, much more powerful love story that is contained within this chapter and the chapters that surround it.

Because in reality, this chapter is not about Jacob's pursuit of Rachel. This is about God providentially pursuing Jacob. That may seem like a strange connection of terms to you for God to providentially pursue someone.

Because when we think of God's providence, we rightly think of God's directing and ordering and controlling the course of events in our lives. Because the Scriptures teach us that God does that.

The Bible teaches us and shows us repeatedly that God is sovereign over all things. There's not an aspect of your life. There's not an event that happens in your life. There's nothing that you do or the people around you that they do that falls outside of the sovereign control or the providence of God.

And so it might seem strange to you for me to speak of God providentially. That is God who is sovereign over all things yet nevertheless pursuing Jacob.

[13:17] But I believe that's what we're seeing in this passage. God is in fact pursuing Jacob but not in the ways in which we think of a man typically would pursue his great love.

Jacob pursues Rachel and we see that Jacob is disappointed. We see that events take a turn that surprise Jacob. We see that there is some tension that builds up into the story when he finds that he's been married to Leah and not Rachel and there's a brief moment in the story if you don't know the story and most of us probably do but there's that brief moment in the story where you think what's going to happen now?

Is this going to work? Is it over? Does that mean that he's never going to marry Rachel this great love of his? And so there's that moment. And so when we think of pursuit particularly in the context of a love story we think that there is uncertainty involved.

There is risk involved on behalf of the pursuer. But when we say that God providentially pursues Jacob we are removing the element of risk because God never fails in his determinations.

God never pursues any end that he is not certain to achieve and all the means that he has to put in place to reach that end are determined in fact by God himself.

[14:36] So for us to say that this is a story about God providentially pursuing Jacob is to say that all of the events that take place within the life of Jacob.

Even Jacob's stealing of the birthright. Jacob's fooling and tricking of his father so that he might take the blessing. All of Jacob's sinful deeds.

Jacob's having to run and Esau's wanting to kill him. All of those things and even the things that are going to unfold in this chapter in chapter 30 and chapter 31 as we see Jacob enter into a period of life that we would call the hard years of Jacob's life.

The difficult years. Even those difficult years and Jacob's own sinful decisions. Even those are a part of God's plan. God's providential way of pursuing Jacob and accomplishing his purposes and his ends in the life of Jacob.

Now I say that that's the point of the chapter. That this chapter is about God providentially pursuing Jacob and even using, planning, purposing the sinful events and the distracting or difficult events of Jacob's life in order to arrive at the point to where he has Jacob and Jacob is in covenantal relationship with him.

[15:59] I say that that's the point of this chapter. But it's my job as a preacher to show you that that's actually the point of the chapter. So let's dive back into this love story in Genesis chapter 29 and I want to try to help you to see that that is in fact the story of Genesis 29.

That this is in fact about God's providential pursuit of Jacob even through and by means of Jacob's own sins and the sins of others we'll see as we walk through this chapter and the following chapters.

Now one of the ways in which you can see that this is a chapter that is clearly about God's providence is when you recognize that much of this chapter is written in such a way that if you have been reading through the book of Genesis so if you have been here for our study of the lives of the patriarchs and I know that many of you have not you've come in in the middle or at different times some of you this is even your first Sunday here to hear parts of this sermon but if you had been here you would probably spot and recognize that there are some strange similarities similarities in fact a remarkable degree of similarity between the things that are happening particularly in the first half of this chapter in the life of Jacob and something that happened in the life of someone else a few chapters earlier in Genesis chapter 24 and you can turn there I invite you to turn there so that you can actually see some of these things in Genesis chapter 24 we are told the story of when Abraham that's Jacob's grandfather when Abraham sent his most trusted servant to find a wife for his son Isaac that would be

Jacob's father so even that set up draws makes a connection with chapter 29 because the very end of Genesis chapter 28 tells us very clearly that yes Jacob is running from his brother for fear of his life but the reason that he goes to Haran is because his mother and father have said go there to find a wife so just like the servant of Abraham who was sent to Haran to find a wife for Isaac now Jacob himself is going traveling to Haran from the same general vicinity the land of promise in order that he might find a wife so even the setup of the story is very similar in chapter 24 though jump in at chapter 10 and we're going to see that there are not only great similarities but there are dissimilarities that begin to stand out so verse 10 in chapter 24 then the servant that's Abraham's servant took 10 of his master's camels and departed taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master and he arose and went to Mesopotamia the city of Nahor and he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening the time when women go out to water now pause just there so there are remarkable similarities they're headed to the same general area from the same general region so they're taking the same trip they're going for the same basic purpose though the servant is finding a wife for Isaac

Jacob is finding a wife for himself and both of them happen upon a well of water as they arrive at least near their final destination they arrive at a well we're told that Jacob arrived at a well now it's probably not the same exact well it could be the same well but the way in which the well is described indicates to me that it's probably a different well the well that the servant arrives at here is near the city of Nahor the well that Jacob arrives at we're told is simply in the fields now granted near the city and in the fields could be the same thing but given the different descriptions I'm inclined to think that they're not the same well but in addition to that we're told that this particular well in chapter 24 where the servant arrives is the well where women would come in the evening in order to draw water whereas the well that Jacob arrives at in chapter 29 is the well that the shepherds would bring their sheep to so that the sheep themselves could drink water so there's a bit of a dissimilarity though a small one probably a much more glaring dissimilarity though between the two accounts is the fact that the servant of Abraham and remember this is a servant of Abraham not a son of Abraham you have a servant of Abraham who comes with great wealth with many camels carrying all these this great wealth that he has to bring and present so that he might pay a bride price for Isaac's future wife but Jacob comes alone and he comes really with nothing we are not told of anything that he has he is fleeing for his life when he goes in search of a bride it doesn't take much with him so that one of the dissimilarities that we are seeing immediately and that I think

[20:50] Moses intends for us to see is that Jacob has made decisions and has done things in his life that he is now in a worse position than his grandfather's servant his grandfather's servant had wealth to spend had most likely companions because you can't take that many camels by yourself Jacob comes alone and on foot and he is without companion without wealth without means the servant of Abraham comes with something to offer Jacob comes in desperate need when he arrives so there are clear dissimilarities and these dissimilarities are primarily owing to the decisions that Jacob has made in his life that's why he is there that's why he's walking on foot I say he's walking on foot because one thing I didn't point out to you a moment ago in Genesis 29 is that quite literally verse 1 is translated then Jacob lifted up his feet and came to the land of the people he is literally quite literally walking there on his way rather than taking these camels and these companions along with him so he's in a worse situation than the servant but here's where I think things stand out the most in terms of dissimilarity when they arrive at the well both of them have this providentially arranged meeting with the future bride do they not?

the servant comes and wouldn't you know it here comes Rebecca to draw water in the evening Jacob comes and wouldn't you know it here comes Rachel to water the sheep because she's a shepherdess so those things are similar but there's a glaring dissimilarity in that as the servant sits by the well he lifts up his voice in prayer to the Lord himself notice in Genesis chapter 24 what the servant has to say he says in verse 12 O Lord God of my master Abraham please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham behold I am standing by the spring of water and the daughters of men of the city are coming out to draw water let the young woman to whom I shall say please let down your jar that I may drink and who shall say drink and I will water your camels let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac by this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master the servant comes and he sits down at the well and his first thought is to pray to the Lord to ask for his help to say to him let me see your hand at work the woman who does this let her be the woman so the servant is trusting that God is providentially guiding things that God is in control of things and the servant believes fully that God can make it clear to him who the bride to be is that's not Jacob

Jacob comes there to the well and he begins to ask questions he begins to inquire hey hey are you guys from Haran because that's where he's going are you from Haran when he finds out they are do you know Laban Jacob is doing what Jacob has always done and that is Jacob is trying to obtain the thing that he has been promised the thing that he believes rightly belongs to him he's trying to obtain that by his own abilities by even at times his own cunning and we will see here even by his own strength you see Jacob as he comes in chapter 29 not only does he begin to ask them questions very quickly after he sees Rachel coming and he must have been impressed by her and he must have wanted to impress her he suddenly begins to give orders look at verse look at verse 4 he asks the questions where are you from we're from Haran do you know Laban there's the question again yeah we know him is it well with him they say yes well and look here comes his daughter now immediately look what he says behold it's still high day this is Jacob speaking behold it's still high day it's not time for the livestock to be gathered together water the sheep and go past to them who's this guy right who's this guy walking up to the well by foot he's alone he's got nothing to offer who is he that suddenly he's ordering these shepherds whom he does not know he's ordering them around what are you doing guys it's the middle of the day it's not time to sit there and lay around in the field with your sheep and your cattle that's not what we do right now

I know how to be a shepherd you need to get up you need to water your feet and your sheep and then take them out back out into the fields so they can graze I mean he's telling them what to do who is he you know I think he's doing all that in an attempt probably to impress Rachel he knows who she is he needs to get a foot in the door but he's not successful in his bossing around of these strangers they rebrough him pretty quickly they simply tell him verse 8 we can't do that we can't water them until all the flocks are gathered together and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well then we water the sheep in other words you don't know what you're doing foreigner don't try to tell us how to do things there's a giant stone covering up the well are you blind we can't water the sheep until the rest of the shepherds come with their flocks and then all of us together will be able to remove the big old stone we've already been told that it's a large stone we can remove this big stone together then we water our sheep that's how we do things around here thanks for the advice man just be quiet

Jacob though is not deterred he needs to get the attention of Rachel he can't just be some poor guy traveling on foot from the land of Canaan he needs to be more than that and so Jacob immediately springs to his feet and we are told that as he sees her he goes and he grabs the stone and somehow he manages to move the stone away from the well's mouth verse 10 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 have you ever seen a grown man try to impress a woman it's pretty sad most of the time what's even more sad to me though is watching a teenage boy try to impress a teenage girl couple of days a week I get to go to my kids school and teach for a few hours at their school and I only teach one class at what's called the upper campus so that would be like 7th grade and up and that's where it gets really humorous and I only teach one class there but it's fun at times to watch things as they move through the hallway and see how almost every boy there they're concerned as they walk through the hallway you can tell they don't care what

[27:57] I think about them I'm walking through as an adult and a teacher they don't care what I think but they care about what the girls think and it's a funny thing to see a teenager try to act in such a way that he's aloof and he's not trying to impress anyone but we all know that he's trying to impress the girls around him it's funny when a kid does it it's funny when a grown man does it and here Jacob he's almost comical in his actions I mean this is a stone that these other shepherds they're smart they've been doing this their whole lives listen we're not going to do this until everybody gets here and then we'll take care of the stone we'll move it out of the way but Jacob sees her coming and he just manhandles he's just going to get it out of the way not only that but he waters all of her sheep I mean here he is desperate to get her attention this is the very person that he needs to impress and then layered in on top of that is apparently there was this almost love at first sight factor in the midst of all of these things he's trying to impress her but again this is this is

Jacob being Jacob this is Jacob trying to do things and accomplish things in his own strength the servant sits down and prays and he doesn't do anything he asks God to do things Jacob we are never told of Jacob pausing to pray or seek the Lord or ask for the Lord's guidance the only time that we've seen Jacob actually interact with the Lord is when God came and appeared to him in a dream but God came God initiated God spoke to him he doesn't ever initiate any sort of conversation with the Lord that's that's not Jacob at this point in his life in fact Jacob is the exact opposite of that God came to Jacob and God spoke great promises to Jacob I will give you this land I will multiply your descendants and through one of your descendants through your offspring all the families of the earth will be blessed and I will be with you there's no greater promise than that

God would be with a person and God says I will be with you no matter where you go I will be with you and Jacob's response is well if you do all that stuff then you can be my God which I said to you last week was a clear signal that at this point in Jacob's life God is not yet his God the Lord Yahweh or Jehovah the Lord the God of his father Abraham is not yet his God and that's clearly still the case as we move through chapter!

29 the contrast servant prays servant seeks the Lord and asks the Lord Jacob never prays Jacob starts doing the work himself Jacob starts trying to do all that he can do to actually accomplish God's purposes God has told him you will have children that means he's going to find a wife but Jacob has to accomplish this on his own he is in many ways the polar opposite of the servant!

Sent on the same journey arriving at a similar location events similarly providentially arranged by God Jacob doesn't seek the Lord despite this though despite Jacob's determination to go his own way God God God is still providentially at work God is still orchestrating events so that his promises to sinful Jacob might be fulfilled everything else that happens as we lay out this chapter everything else that happens shows God's hand network not only through Jacob's duplicity and Jacob's sinfulness but now even through the duplicity and the sinfulness of those around Jacob things actually initially seem as if they may go well

[32:09] God has providentially arranged this meeting between Jacob and Rachel and Jacob we're told comes to love her Jacob is invited into her father's home who happens to also be his uncle don't let the cousin thing distract you now it's weird I get it it's been weird the whole time through Genesis it's going to stay weird to just push it aside the law of Moses has not yet come to tell them don't do that but she it is his uncle's household he is welcomed in he comes and you think initially it seems!

Jacob's doing well because Laban do you need I should be paying you for this so apparently for a full month Laban was kind enough to let Jacob stay in his home but Jacob was also willing to work for Laban so the initial set up of things as God has arranged them seems to be going well but you know that that's probably not going to remain that's probably not going to be the case because of Jacob and who he is he is a deceiver and a trickster but also because of who Laban is we've already been shown in an earlier chapter when Laban came on the scene that Laban is greedy and he himself is willing to deceive if necessary his eyes are fixed on wealth and he will deceive in order to get it now jump in at verse 15 the second half of chapter wages be so now Jacob is the servant right that's made all the more strange in that before

Jacob was ever born when God gave promises pertaining to him and Esau God had said the older will serve the younger Jacob was destined to be served but here he finds himself the servant another irony and Laban said to Jacob because you're my kinsman should you therefore serve me for nothing tell me what shall your wages be now Laban had two daughters we already know about one of them right what do you know about Rachel she's already impressive I mean she's a shepherdess and she's coming out there she's keeping up with the men we already know that much about her she's impressive we're going to learn a little bit about Leah that's not impressive verse 17 well continuing verse 16 Laban had two daughters the name of the older was Leah the name of the younger was Rachel Leah's eyes were weak we don't know what that means to be honest with what what does it mean to have weak eyes we don't know precisely what it means but in some way it must mean the opposite of what we're told about Rachel because there's a contrast but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance so whatever weak eyes are it's not attractive

I don't know what it means but it's not attractive she's the opposite at least physically of Rachel Leah's eyes were weak Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance Jacob loved her and he says I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel that's a long time I don't know if you guys noticed it but when it's been a the assumption was that would be a very short trip the assumption was that he would go find his family get a wife and then hopefully by the time he returned with that wife Esau would have cooled off and they could figure things out it's not meant to be a place of permanent residence for Jacob but now here he is already saying I'll give you seven years I will serve you faithfully for seven years for Rachel and Laban's attitude is not gratitude his attitude is more along the lines of you'll do right it's better that I give her to you than that

I should give her to any other man stay with me that was that's not entirely dissimilar to my conversation with Allie's dad right but it wasn't quite that bad but I give her to you so!

[36:08] verse 20 so Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love that he had for her now as the story progresses we immediately see Laban's duplicity at play Laban's willingness to deceive because he served his seven years he does it willingly and gladly it seems a short time to him but in verse 21 he has to come to Laban and say give me my wife in other words you would think with a deal like that at the end of the seven years a big deal would have been made for okay it's time it's time for the wedding feast it's time for all these things to happen and yet Jacob has to go to him and say give me my wife now it's interesting that Jacob already speaks of her as presently his wife probably during these seven years it was something of a betrothal period between them something very similar to we see with Jesus mother Mary and her husband Joseph where they are married in every other way except they don't have an intimate relationship with one another betrothal was treated in the ancient world as marriage minus the intimate relationship it's not the same as engagement it's similar but it's not the same but

Jacob! already considers her his wife he simply needs to initiate the intimate part of their marriage there needs to be a wedding feast and a wedding ceremony so that they can consummate their marriage and they can fully move into marriage to one another and Laban appears to be agreeable to everything but this is where Laban shows his cards to us at least because Laban has apparently had a plan all along to deceive Jacob here is Leah she has weak eyes and whatever that means though she's still single she's still single she has a younger sister who's being pursued by a man and yet here she is in a world in which women were usually married off very young she's still single and so Laban has this plan he fools Jacob into thinking that he has married the love of his life Rachel but in fact it is Leah that he is married now we can speculate as to how he was able to accomplish that we don't really know it could have been that she wore such a thick veil that he never saw her face it could have been that it was because it was the evening and of course it's not like you have a light switch to flip on things when it gets dark it gets dark in the ancient world we could probably speculate!

and come up with all sorts of ways they pull this off they fool Jacob he marries Leah without even knowing it and he doesn't realize it until the next day and by then it's really too late by then they're married in every sense of the term and Jacob who has been the trickster and the deceiver is now the deceived he's now the one who has been tricked and what's more I think one of the greatest ironies of this chapter is that when Jacob comes to Laban to protest and say what have you done to me Laban's response if you've been tracking with the story of Jacob is it is tragic but it is also in a sense comical verse 25 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 have you deceived me that's funny in itself why have you deceived me Laban said it was not so done in our country to give the younger before the first born I hope you can hear the irony in that because Jacob's entire life has been as the younger twin brother to take what rightfully belongs at least by law and custom to his older brother everything he has done has been to deceive to take from the older so that he the younger might possess it and now Laban turns it around all of the details of that Laban turns it around and he goes oh you didn't know it's not our custom to marry the younger before the older so I kind of had to do that you know that's the way things had to happen everything that Jacob has done is now falling upon his own head but Laban is not finished Laban is smart he's crafty!

Verse 27! Complete the week nice way to talk about your daughter right? And we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years so now we move from seven years to fourteen years service that Laban has been able to ring out of Jacob and all he had to do was allow him to marry his daughters his daughters were going to marry someone at some point in time this is a world in which daughters don't not marry They marry!

[41 : 05] It's going to happen! But Jacob is able to use that which is certain to happen in order to bring great benefit for himself and he gains a very we will see in later chapters a very skilled and shrewd servant to serve him for fourteen years Jacob does it Verse 28 Jacob did so and completed her week and 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 and so then Jacob went into Rachel also So Laban's ruse and Laban's plan works perfectly But in the midst of all of these things God's hand is at work God told Jacob I will be with you And though Jacob cannot see it Though Jacob is blind to it God has been with him God told Jacob that you will have a multitude of descendants more than can be counted more than can be numbered

How is that going to happen? Well the end of this chapter and the next chapter detail exactly how that happens How does that happen? Because Leah bears him many children four sons in fact Eventually Rachel has children and these two little phrases that are put in parentheses here about the handmaids the servants being given to the daughters Now again this is weird and from our perspective wicked and sinful These women also bear children for Jacob You ever hear of the twelve tribes of Israel?

The twelve children of Abraham the twelve children of Jacob born by these four women that come to be a part of Jacob's household and family because of his own sinfulness because of his own duplicity and because of the sinfulness and duplicity of his uncle Laban And God is not standing back watching saying I mean I guess I can make something out of this mess God had already promised numerous descendants and God is at work even through the sin of Jacob and the sin of Laban God is at work to fulfill all of his promises to Jacob God is pursuing Jacob but he's doing it providentially This is after all the very Jacob that when the prophets look back toward Jacob and they speak from at least Jacob's perspective from the future and they're looking back upon the life of Jacob how they describe Jacob is they look back and they say

Jacob he loved speaking of God God loved Jacob God set his love upon Jacob Paul tells us that God did that before Jacob or Esau had been born before they had done anything good or bad Jacob falls in love with Rachel because she's beautiful and because she's capable God loves Jacob for nothing in Jacob nothing at all nothing to commend him to Jacob nothing to make to make Jacob worthy of God's love God simply set his electing love upon Jacob before Jacob is ever born and that makes me feel good because there's nothing in me to commend me to God there's nothing that I have done in my own strength and power there is nothing about me intrinsic to me my qualities or my character apart from the work of Christ within me there is nothing about me natural old Chris by himself that is worthy of God's love or that would commend me to God in any way and yet he called me to himself and made me his own there's nothing commendable about you whether in the eyes of other people you lived a pretty good life or whether you've been a scoundrel!

for most of your life either way from God's perspective who is perfect and holy there's nothing to commend you to him and that does not shut us off from God's love when he sets his love upon a man or a woman he does it not because of anything in the man or the woman he does it because he pleases him to do it and to bring honor and glory to his own name as he even through our foolishness works all things for our good for his great and everlasting glory God providentially pursues those whom he has set his electing love upon and nothing will ever stop him from accomplishing his purposes you know if we're going to really understand I think this concept there are a couple of places in the New Testament that we can turn to that I think give us a great picture and a great illustration of God's providential pursuit of the people that he himself has marked out as his own from eternity past both of those pictures ironically are related at least thematically to the passage that we're looking at to the life of Jacob because both of them are stories about a shepherd and sheep one of them is Jesus speaking of himself as the shepherd and his people as the sheep one of them is a parable that Jesus tells but even in that parable the shepherd represents Jesus and the sheep represent his people

[46:38] I want you to look at these and I want you to think of these in terms of God's pursuit of his people but providentially now in the one of the examples if you'll turn to the gospel of John in John chapter 10 here we see how Jesus the great shepherd pursues his sheep but he does it providentially what I mean is he's going to catch them he's going to get them they're his he's marked them out as his own much as God had marked Jacob out as his own before Jacob was even born John chapter 10 Jesus begins to speak and use this analogy of sheep and shepherd and those sorts of things he says truly truly I say to you he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way that man is a thief and a robber in other words there are those who would like to appear to be a part of the sheepfold who are not they try to come in some other way they're a thief and a robber but he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep to him the gatekeeper opens now this is remarkable listen to what

Jesus says the sheep hear his that is the shepherd the sheep hear his voice and he calls his own sheep by name and he leads them out when he has brought out all his own he goes before them and the sheep follow him for they know his voice this is a shepherd in control of the sheep this is a shepherd who can direct the sheep this is a shepherd to whom the sheep always without fail respond he is sovereign now we are tempted to think well this must be talking about Jesus and believers in a sense yes but in a sense no because as we move further down through the passage what we see is that word sheep here in John 10 is not synonymous with believer it is not it is synonymous with those whom Christ calls his own and those are not always necessarily the same categories yes those who are his own will eventually believe in him but there was a time before your conversion when you weren't a believer and even though you didn't know it at that time you were his own marked out from eternity past

Jacob I love he had already set his love on you in eternity past let me show you this in the text verse 16 Jesus is speaking of course to his disciples who are all Jews and he says to them after identifying himself as the shepherd he makes sure they know now I'm the good shepherd he tells them that and then he says in verse 16 I have other sheep that are not of this fold what I think he means by that speaking to his Jewish disciples is guess what guys I came and I chose you I chose you out of the world in fact he tells him in John 15 you did not choose me but I chose you he's saying to them look I gathered you to me but I have some other sheep they're not a part of this fold they're out there they're scattered and I have to bring them in also this too should remind you of God's promise to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob that through their offspring all the families of the earth would be blessed this is

Jesus saying I'm doing that all the families of the earth are about to get blessed through me the offspring but in this word picture I'm the shepherd and I got sheep out there and I've got to gather them together but now here's what's amazing I must bring them also they will listen to my voice it is settled it is determined they will listen to my voice my voice will call out to my sheep and they will hear me and they will come and I will take them out as I am taking you out and I will feed them and care for them this is the picture that Jesus gives in John chapter 10 of his providence calling his sheep to himself but there's another time in another gospel in the gospel of Matthew when Jesus tells a parable about sheep that I believe presents sort of the other side of this so on the one hand he is providentially in control that is he's sovereign all of his sheep he's going to call to himself but this is not some this is not some impassionate way in which he just sort of snaps his fingers or makes things happen and without without any sense of real affection and love he just gets what done what he wants to do that's that's that's not how the shepherd calls his sheep in fact when the shepherd calls his sheep he actually is he pursues them parable of the lost sheep is in

Matthew chapter 18 now to understand that parable you have to understand a little bit about the context and in the context Jesus' disciples have come and asked him a question who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven they're always obsessed with this right the disciples they basically want to know hey which one of us do you like the most that's what they want to know and so he takes a child puts a child in the midst of them and he says that you need to become like this child if you want to enter into the kingdom of heaven whoever humbles himself like this child that one's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven it's Jesus lesson to them and then as you move down to verse 10 as we approach the parable he says something else about this child that he has put in the midst as he's talking to them he says see to it that you do not despise any of these little ones but I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my father who is in heaven now that that little phrase little ones is significant because he uses it earlier in the chapter when he says in verse 5

[52 : 55] I'm sorry in verse 6 whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin so the little ones are those who believe in him right that's his point he's not telling them you just need to be like a child what he's saying to them is you need to have the kind of faith in me that a little child has in me he's not leaving faith out as necessary in order to enter the kingdom of God it's necessary this little child represents the humble believer that's who he represents now Jesus says don't despise them then the parable comes in so that we can understand how this little little one who believes him came to be in his care what do you think he says if a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray does he not leave the ninety nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray and if he finds it truly I say to you he rejoices over it more than over the ninety nine that never went astray so and here we are connecting the parable again to the little ones so it is not the will of my father who is in heaven that any one of these little ones should perish in other words my father is not going to let them perish they're like my sheep and one of them is out there going astray

I go get them I go I walk along the rocky hills I go out into the fields I call the sheep they hear my voice I get them I lift them I put them on my shoulders I carry them back into the fold I pursue my people that's what he's saying and that's what God is teaching us in the life of Jacob God is pursuing him he set his love on him he loves Jacob and nothing nothing can deter God not Jacob's sin not Laban's sin not what appeared to us to be unfortunate turns of events nothing can deter God because all is determined by God that he might gather his sheep that those whom he loves he might bring into his arms because there will come a time in the future when this very one who said to

God you fulfill your promises to me then you will be my God when this one is remembered not because of what he did not because of his great accomplishments!

This one is remembered this way not when he is spoken of but when God is spoken of God comes to Moses and says to Moses I'm the God of your father Abraham I'm the God of Isaac I am the God of Jacob Jacob did nothing did nothing to deserve that label yet Jacob will be known throughout the rest of human history he will be known by the phrase!

God Jacob the writer of Hebrews says God was not ashamed to be called his father father Jacob and Isaac and Abraham God was not ashamed why?

[56 : 05] they were something to be ashamed of especially Jacob because God pursued him and God even used Jacob's sinful decisions to turn Jacob toward himself and he even used the sad and painful events of Jacob's life being deceived by his uncle being hated by his brother he even used those events that he might have Jacob as his own and Jacob might have God as his own God and Jesus says that's what I'm doing it's why I came here it's why I came to the earth so that I might pursue my sheep and make them my own and if you think that Jesus commitment to do that is a half hearted commitment or is not a costly commitment remember the words that read together from Romans 5 earlier while we were still weak we were

Jacob we were we were deceivers we weren't anything while we were weak at the right time Christ died for the ungodly I'm so thankful that Christ does not die for those who cleaned themselves up I'm thankful that Christ did not die for those who make themselves worthy of being his followers but he dies for the ungodly while we're still weak while we're still ungodly verse 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us Jesus pursues his sheep all the way to the cross and he lays his life down for them and he sheds his blood for them why because he has set his love on them God is demonstrating his love for those whom he pursues on the cross as Jesus takes upon himself the penalty that you and I deserve what is the conclusion that Paul is able to come to we shall be from the wrath of

God Jesus took the punishment that Jacob deserved for being a deceiver Jesus took the punishment that Jacob deserved for living years of his life in unbelief though given great promise Jesus shed his blood for Jacob and for all of his sheep Jesus says I am the good shepherd the good shepherd lays his life down for the sheep and it may be that you are among those who knew even now as you hear and contemplate the great love of God in Christ on the cross that you sense you feel you hear in your spirit the voice of the shepherd is calling you and the only response of the sheep is!

I believe I will follow you turn away from my sin I will follow after you I do not assume that everybody who comes and gathers together on a Sunday morning here that everybody here has trusted in Christ has turned from their sin in fact I assume the opposite I assume there are a whole lot of us who look like sheep we've been climbing in we've been climbing in over the fence trying to look like the sheep when in fact the only way to know if you are a sheep is if you trust in Jesus and his blood covers all of your sin this is the only way I implore you and I beg you do not go home feeling good because you satisfied everyone's curiosity and made people around you think you are a sheep when you know in your heart you know you're not do not do that do not go home in that way trust in this great shepherd who has laid his life down for his sheep who shed his blood!

so that you might not experience the wrath of God but so that you might as Jacob will eventually you might receive the great promises of God as your very own let's pray