

March 21, 2021

God and Man

"...he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go..." Genesis 28:13-15

In the accounts of the life of Jacob in Genesis we continue to learn a great deal about both man and God. As we noted last week, God is and always will be a promise keeper. In the accounts of Jacob's life we see God working to fulfill his promises to Abraham which were renewed to Isaac and to Jacob, despite the less than righteous actions and attitudes of both.

From his birth, tends Jacob lives down to his name which can be translated to mean 'he deceives'. To be fair it is often Jacob's mother Rebekah who plots to deceive her husband on behalf of her second son, but Jacob doesn't seem to hesitate to participate in her schemes.

As Jacob's story unfolds he is forced to flee from the wrath of his brother Esau after he buys his brother's birthright for a bowl of stew and after collaborating with his mother to steal the blessing that should have gone to Esau by tricking his aging father Isaac.

Jacob eventually reaches his family in Haran and enters into a bargain with his uncle to win the hand of the beautiful Rachel. In Laban we see the same pattern of deception and deceit that seems to permeate this family. Laban tricks Jacob into marrying his first daughter Leah and then insists that Jacob labor for an additional seven years for the hand of Rachel.

So, after fourteen years Jacob has two wives and two handmaidens and has fathered several sons with them. Jacob and Laban again enter into a third bargain for flocks and herds with Jacob agreeing to take only the spotted or striped young. Of course, God continues to bless Jacob as per his promise to Abraham, but Jacob peels sticks and places them before the breeding ewes thinking the spotted and striped young are produced by those sticks. Sheesh!

After 21 years Jacob determines to leave Laban and return to his homeland and again his plans are riddled with deception. Eventually the two make peace and Jacob returns to his homeland.

Jacob's story is marked by a constant series of shady bargains and questionable deals and yet he is constantly blessed in all that he does. Through these stories we continue to learn a great deal about our God and about ourselves.

God promised to bless Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and God is always a promise keeper even when the blessed credit magic or luck for those blessings. We can understand, I think, that God's integrity is not dependent upon the perfection of those who benefit from it. So, from Abraham onward those from each generation who receive the promises are blessed, even when their behaviors are less than noble at best.

I think we also learn something of ourselves from the story of Jacob. Jacob was often moved to live down to his name, 'the deceiver', but he also suffered at the hands of deceivers as well. Jacob deceived his own father and eventually deceived his father-in-law as well. But Jacob's father-in-law deceived him on numerous occasions too.

We have a catch phrase, "What goes around comes around" and it is too often true. Jacob was both a deceiver and the victim of deceit. You and I often suffer from the same pattern. The very thing we might condemn in others is that same thing we practice.

Thus, the Apostle Paul would warn the believers in Rome, *"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you condemn yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things."* (Romans 2:1) Throughout his life Jacob was a deceiver and throughout his life Jacob was the victim of deceit with the worst lie of all being the one perpetrated by his own sons. How often have we suffered the same thing, falling victim to the sins in others that we ourselves continue to commit?

Counting other people's
sins
does not make you
a saint