

April 21, 2024
The fourth Sunday of Easter
Pastor Matt Duerr

God's Narrative: Emotional Dysfunction

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. As we continue through God's narrative, we continue with the account of the two nations. Jacob and Esau were struggling inside of Rebekah's womb. Esau, last week we saw that he was described as unholy because he despised the birthright and sold it for a bowl of stew. We saw that Esau was also unequally yoked, married to two Hittite women, and these women caused a lot of grief for Isaac and Rebekah.

Oh yeah. And then there's the part that I left out but was in our Old Testament reading this morning. When Esau saw that his Hittite wives caused grief for his parents and since Isaac had passed the birthright on to Jacob, he then went and married a daughter of Ishmael, the son of Abraham through the handmaid Hagar. He had seen that his wives caused his parents some problems. He did this simply to spite his parents. And so now we go from two nations to three nations. The Ishmaelites, the Edomites, and the Israelites. And hence you see why there is still a problem in the Mideast today.

There's a lot of dysfunction, and the dysfunction isn't just with Esau. It only gets worse as we look at Jacob. And you know, that's the beauty of the Bible. Jacob was no saint, neither was Isaac, and neither was Abraham. The Bible shows us these great patriarchs, warts and all. We're all sinners. We all fall short.

So, picking up with Jacob now. Remember, Rebekah told him "Go," Isaac told him, 'go back to Haran, find your wife there from our family.' And he leaves. He goes. He was going to Laban, his uncle, who was the son of Bethuel, who was the son of Abraham's brother Nahor. And when he gets to that area, he has a very similar experience. He deals with it totally differently than Abraham's servant did when he went to find a wife for Isaac, his dad.

He comes, (Jacob) comes to a well. There are three flocks with their shepherds there at the well, and it shows again that kind of hospitality that Abraham had. He addresses these shepherds, and he says, 'my brothers,' treating them as family. Which as it turns out, they basically are. "My brothers, where do you come from? We're from Heran. Do you know Laban, the son of Nahor? Literally it means grandson, but the Hebrew means that once you're in the family, you're always a son. Do you know Laban? We know him. Is it well with him? It is well. And see, Look, Rachel, that's his daughter, she's coming with his sheep.

Now right there this says, this is a patriarchal society. We kind of know about that in America nowadays. Yeah, you got three groups of shepherds with their flocks. They've been there waiting for Rachel and her flock. That says something about Rachel, doesn't it? She's the boss. But it also says something about her dad. Laban is a big kahuna in this area. We could say he's a big shot. But we see something in Jacob here, if we just take the time to look at it. He's very smart, he's very perceptive. He said to them, 'it's midday.' Now was not the time to bring the sheep together. They should be out feeding and getting fat and getting ready for the marketplace. Normally you brought the sheep together at the end of the day and you put them in the sheep pen.

And that's what Jesus was speaking about in our gospel reading this. Why do you put them in the sheep pen? Well, because that's when the worst animal of all comes out. Sinful man. You see, during the day out in the field, the shepherds know what to do. A wolf comes along, a lion comes along trying to snatch the sheep. You go after it. You take your sling, and you go. They knew what to do with that.

We read of David, how he kills a bear, he kills a lion while out there taking care of the sheep and these guys were very good with slings. But you bring them in at night to the sheep pen and you put a wall around them because that's when the robbers come out. The only way they can get in is to climb over the wall because they're thieves. Now, midday, it's time to be eating and growing. The shepherds come back with, well, we can't, we all need to be here so we can move the stone off the top of the well, which again was a common practice. You'd put a large rock over your well in the ground so that those who were against you, who are opposed to you, or wanting to take your

land couldn't poison your well or come and draw all the water out and take it down too low.

And we see another attribute of Jacob. We have seen them as the smooth skin Mama's boy working in the kitchen. This guy is a hunk. He's strong. He goes over and by himself he rolls the stone away, and he waters the sheep of Laban, of Rachel. The total opposite of what was done with Abraham's servant and Rebekah. Jacob is willing to serve. He tells Rachel who he is. She runs the Laban and tells Laban; 'hey, a relative has arrived. Laban runs out to meet Jacob and when he sees him, he hugs him and says, 'truly are you are my bone in my flesh.'

We read that Jacob stayed for a month and worked for Laban. At the end of the month, Laban comes to him and says, 'Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve for nothing? Tell me your wages so I may pay you.' And now we start to see some deception, some dysfunction starting to work its way in. Jacob comes back with a very honest answer. "I'll serve you for seven years. Don't have to pay me but at the end of the seven years I want to marry your younger daughter, Rachel. And Laban agrees with it. Basically, says 'boy, she could do a lot worse than you. Glad to have her marry you. It's a deal.' And we read that Jacob served the seven years and quote, "they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for Rachel." And the seven years are up.

They have the wedding, which would have been several days of feasting and partying, and yes, much wine would follow. And at the very end, Jacob goes to his tent. And Laban sends Leah his older daughter, who is described as having weak eyes. We don't know if that means that she had poor eyesight, or they just didn't have a sparkle to them maybe like Rachel's. But he sent Leah into Jacob along with her handmaid, Zero point. Please understand again, this is at the end of quite a festival, quite a bit of partying. They don't have streetlights; they don't have lamps by the side of their bed. It's dark in the tent. Jacob wakes up in the morning. There's sunlight outside, sunlight coming through, and he turns, and he looks, and it's not Rachel, it's Leah there.

He gets up and he goes directly to Laban and says "what is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you (remember this word) deceived me? Just like he deceived his dad, Isaac. And Laban's

response. It sounds almost political. 'I couldn't give you Rachel. It's the custom of our people that the older daughter must be married first so, I had to follow the custom of my people. I had no choice. But you know, don't worry about it Jacob, just complete this week, basically the honeymoon with Leah, and at the end of the week I will give you Rachel.' But (that giant eraser that erases everything that's just been said.) 'You're going to need to serve me for another seven years. Do you see what Laban was doing? He had a good worker. He was afraid that if Rachel married him, he'd lose his best worker. So, he deceived him. So, he could get another seven years out of Jacobs. And at the end of the week, he is given Rachel as his wife, and Rachel brings along Bilha, her maid servant.

And now we begin what I would call the dysfunctional biblical soap opera. You can imagine. Jacob did not feel too kindly towards Leah. In fact, we read when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, He opened her womb, and she gave birth to her first-born son Ruben. And you can see some grief in Leah. Because she says with the birth of Ruben, 'now my husband will love me.' But he didn't and the Lord blessed her with the second son, Simeon. And what are Leah's words? 'God has given me this son because I am hated, God gave me another.' She gave birth to a third son, Levi; and her words? 'Now my husband will be attached to me.' But he wasn't. She bears a fourth son, Judah. No more talk about Jacob, just putting it right where it needs to be. Leah says. 'I will praise the Lord.'

Meanwhile, we read that Rachel envied her sister and she went to Jacob and she said, and I quote, I don't want to get this wrong. "Give me children or I shall die!" And Jacob's response? We read he was angry with Rachel and said, I quote again. "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" And oh, the potential responses that could come out of this. You know, Rachel could have come back with, '*Well, if you just didn't go into her tent...*' Of course, Jacob could come back and said, '*Well, I have and it's obvious the problems not with me.*' But no, there's none of that; there's actually worse. Rachel takes action. No more words, she takes action based on her emotion of envy and she takes her maidservant Bilhah and says, '*Here take her as your wife.*' To which Jacob says, '*alrighty then!*' And we get son number five Dan, and son number six, Naphtali. Now Leah sees that, 'Oh my goodness, there's

children coming from the Rachel side of the camp. This isn't good. I'm not having anymore children. Something's going on. I've gotta stay ahead, Jacob, I'm not bearing children for you anymore it would seem, *'here take my maid servant, so as your wife and have children for me.'* To which Jacob responds, *'OK, great idea.'* And two more children, son number seven, Gad and son number eight, Asher. But it turns out Leah hadn't hit menopause because then she starts to have children too. Son number nine, Issachar and son number ten, Zebulun. Meanwhile, Rachel has not had any and the Lord sees Rachel and remembers Rachel, and He opens her womb, and she gives birth to son number eleven, Joseph, and then a little bit of time later, number twelve Benjamin.

So, to recap. There are now twelve sons coming from four wives but only one husband. What a mess! But also, two brothers, a total now of seven wives, three nations, a lot of offspring. What a mess! And now getting right down to it. Again, the Bible gives us everything, warts and all. Why is it there for us? For us to learn from it. If you think through everything that you've heard today. You heard words of emotion; love, hate, envy, jealousy, etcetera. They're all emotions that people acted on.

Lesson number one don't act on your emotions because the emotions are self-centered. And, you know, just to be blunt. That's what that number, 666, in the Book of Revelation, is all about. When we make ourselves number one and not God. When we make ourselves number one, guess what? You get a mess. Number two, when we act on our emotions, we tend to act in a sinful manner. Remember that word deception. Remember the word spite. Again, these are how both Esau and Laban worked to deceive or to spite. And both are sinful. It's basically, I want, so I'm gonna do this. Again, it is very self-centered.

That brings us to Lesson 2, which is actually going back and looking at Father Abraham. Why did God commend Father Abraham? Not because of any deceptions, not because he ever acted in spite, but because he was obedient to God. Remember, back in 26:5 "Abraham obeyed God's voice and he kept God's charge, kept God's commandments, kept God's statutes, and kept God's law." This is not our human instinct. Human instinct is to go with our emotions. Our human instinct is to strike back. But yet, whenever we're in the midst of that

turmoil, the mess that we get ourselves in. That's when we turn back to God, and we do what He tells us to do.

Putting it all together. The message is simple, know God's Word, follow God's Word. And don't let Satan use your emotions to create dysfunction by acting sinfully as a result of those emotions.

In our Saviors name, Amen.