

Oblivious to His Grace

Genesis 29:1-14

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Introduction:

Dear Congregation,

As we make our way through the book of Genesis and now as we work through the life of Jacob,

- it struck me at how much that Lord has to give to you as His people.
- He has so much grace for you—and He has told you this—but so often you just don't see this—
 - So often you do not look for His hand in your life—you do not seek His help, nor do you thank Him for His mercies.

Over the last two weeks in Genesis 28, we saw how the LORD went out of His way to make His grace obvious and unmistakable to Jacob at Bethel.

- Jacob, after deceiving his brother Esau to (of all things) get God's blessing, had been forced to flee for his life because Esau was plotting to kill him.
 - He was also going to Haran (or Padan Aram), where his mother was from, to find a wife for himself.
 - And as he ventured out, no doubt a mixed bag of emotions from fear to hope to guilt to pride, the LORD very graciously appeared to him.
- He presented himself to Jacob in a vision with a ladder, showing Jacob that He was busy about his life—busy taking care of him—busy blessing him...
 - The LORD was at the top of the ladder (which was probably more like a great stairway) and the angels of heaven were ascending and descending upon it—ministering to Jacob
 - The ladder itself, as we learned from John 1:50-51, is the Lord Jesus Christ who opens heaven to us so that we may be joined to God in heaven and His blessing even though we are sinners.
 - Jesus crucified is the only ladder, and through Him, the blessings of heaven are brought down to us—through His cross, we are reconciled to God whose way is the way of grace and blessing.
 - If not for sin, God constantly blesses all His creatures with one blessing on top of another.
 - In Jesus when sin is taken away, the LORD is able to do that again.
 - So at Bethel, the LORD shows Jacob (and us) that He is reconciled to us and is committed to bless us forever.
 - He showed Jacob that He would be with him to bless him, and through him to bring forth the nation that would bring forth the promised Son who would restore Jacob and his family as well as all the families of the earth.

We saw how Jacob was greatly encouraged by this wonderful vision and how he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not!"

- That is such a striking statement—it so describes the way it is for us—God is with us to bless us if we are His people and so many times we do not realise it!
 - Like Jacob, if we are indeed among God’s elect, there are times when we are at Bethel and we see that heaven is open to us and we are greatly encouraged to see God’s gracious love and care for us.
 - And like Jacob, we make our vows to serve God forever and we look to a sweet future with our LORD...
 - And like Jacob, we set out to the task that God has given to us with fresh enthusiasm...
- That is what we find him doing when get to Genesis chapter 29...
 - It opens with the words, “**So Jacob went on his journey...**” which in fact is a very poor rendering of this verse which is literally “**and Jacob lifted up his feet...**”
 - It expresses the fact that his footsteps were lightened after meeting the LORD and receiving His blessing...
 - He picked up his steps that had been dragging along with a freshness and a new hope.
 - That is the way we come away from Bethel—from the place where God has assured us once more of His grace.
 - But then after a few weeks have a passed and we have taken a long journey, it is all too easy for us to forget the LORD—to forget how much He has to give us.

Listen now as I read to you of Jacob and of his arrival in Haran.

- I will begin at Genesis 29, verse 1 and read through verse 14.

Genesis 29:1-14: So Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the East. And he looked, and saw a well in the field; and behold, there *were* three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks. A large stone *was* on the well’s mouth. Now all the flocks would be gathered there; and they would roll the stone from the well’s mouth, water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the well’s mouth. And Jacob said to them, “My brethren, where *are* you from?” And they said, “We *are* from Haran.” Then he said to them, “Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?” And they said, “We know him.” So he said to them, “Is he well?” And they said, “*He is* well. And look, his daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep.” Then he said, “Look, *it is* still high day; *it is* not time for the cattle to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go and feed *them.*” But they said, “We cannot until all the flocks are gathered

together, and they have rolled the stone from the well’s mouth; then we water the sheep.” Now while he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep, for she was a shepherdess. And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother’s brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother’s brother, that Jacob went 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 lifted up his voice and wept. And Jacob told Rachel that he *was* her father’s relative and that he *was* Rebekah’s son. So she ran and told her father. Then it came to pass, when Laban heard the report about Jacob his sister’s son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. So he told Laban all these things. And Laban said to him, “Surely you *are* my bone and my flesh.” And he stayed with him for a month.

May the Lord bless the reading of His holy Word.

I. Isn't it wonderful when you first get to Haran on the journey of life?

A. Haran represents a new chapter in your life in which everything seems to be going your way.

- You have those times, don't you?
- 1. It is a time when you feel confident that you have gotten to the place where things are finally working out for you!
 - Perhaps you have just gotten a new job—or maybe a promotion at work.
 - You see the potential for really getting on in your life—what you can do with more income, more responsibility, more meaning in your work.
 - You are excited and encouraged.
 - You feel that you are just finding your stride.
 - Or maybe you have just entered into a new relationship that is really starting to take off, or perhaps you have just started university.
 - Or maybe it is simply that you and your family have made some changes and you are starting have more peace in your home—
 - you have a new schedule and things are running much more smoothly—you are actually getting things done—you are even exercising!
 - You have a new lease on life—you are finding your stride.
- 2. And other people are noticing you too...
 - They are impressed with you!
 - They are seeing the potential in you and they are encouraging you.
 - Maybe they are even starting to ask you for advice and wanting to imitate what you are doing.
 - Even your spouse is starting to praise you and to speak of how much he loves you or of how much she appreciates you.

TRANS> Whatever the particulars may be, Haran is the place of fresh potential!

- It might even be that you have just emerged from a hard time of sickness or a destructive relationship or a time of unemployment—
 - but whatever the particulars, things seem to be falling in place for you.

B. Everything certainly did seem to be going Jacob's way when he arrived in Haran!

- 1. You can see how things worked out for him so beautifully.
 - a. No sooner does he come into the region than he sees a well with shepherds and their flocks around it...
 - Notice how the narrative unfolds—
 - Jacob asks them where they are from and they say, “from Haran!” the very place that Jacob was looking for!

- The narrative continues:
 - **Gen 29:5-6: Then he said to them, “Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?” And they said, “We know him.” 6 So he said to them, “Is he well?” And they said, “He is well. And look, his daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep.”**
 - b. How remarkable this is!
 - They are from Haran, they know his uncle, his uncle is well, and Jacob does not even have to ask them if Laban has any daughters...which is the thing he especially wanted to know about!
 - Even while they are speaking, Laban’s beautiful virgin daughter Rachel shows up with her father’s flock—
 - The shepherds point to her and say: Look, his daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep!
 - c. Boy! Talk about things falling into place!
 - Jacob is overcome with emotion.
 - If we skip down to verse 11, you can see how it explains that this was so as he goes over to kiss his cousin (not a romantic kiss, but an eastern greeting) and begins to weep.
2. You can see his pluck and his energy in his excitement as Rachel approaches.
- a. He too is a shepherd and he has a word of advice for these shepherds...
 - He sounds like one of those bossy, know it all, Jewish guys that you might meet in New York City today (except that he is talking about sheep instead of how to run a business).
 - **Gen 29:7-8: Then he said, “Look, it is still high day; it is not time for the cattle to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go and feed them.” But they said, “We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and they have rolled the stone from the well’s mouth; then we water the sheep.”**
 - He seems rather cocky and arrogant here—a little too impressed with himself and a little too ready to give advice to strangers.
 - Granted, these shepherds do not seem to be very impressive.
 - And Jacob did know a thing or two about shepherding, and what they were doing did not make a lot of sense to him...
 - It would have been much better for the sheep to be grazing and brought in for water later—at least, that is what Jacob thought.
 - And their reasons for doing what they are doing seem a little odd—was it too much effort to move the stone?
 - or was there some kind of agreement that they would wait until everyone was there to water the sheep?
 - Perhaps the water supply was limited and by moving the stone you released the water that had collected in a cistern or reservoir so that the sheep could drink and everyone brought the sheep to drink before the water had run off into the dry ground.
 - We are told that it was a large stone, so perhaps it was there to prevent people from easily opening it.

- But in any case, Jacob speaks with the air of a man that feels pretty impressed with himself.
- b. And now you see his energy and even more of his pluck...
 - Whatever the convention might have been, and however heavy the stone might have been, Jacob finds their custom ridiculous goes over and removes the heavy stone, apparently single-handedly!
 - You can see this in verses 9-10: **Now while he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. 10 And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother.**
 - I started to entitle this sermon, "Mr. Impressive!" because that is what Jacob is here!
 - He is a man of energy!
 - He is a man of take charge initiative and a man of great strength.
 - He is a man that takes control and to gets things done!
- 3. And it appears that he makes quite an impression on Rachel and on her father.
 - a. And you can see how she too is full of excitement upon meeting Jacob...
 - In verse 12, it says: **And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's relative and that he was Rebekah's son. So she ran and told her father.**
 - It appears that she left the sheep with Jacob—for one does not usually run off with sheep—and that is what she does here—she runs!
 - "Daddy, you will never believe who I met at the well!"
 - She had certainly heard the story of how Abraham's servant had come with precious jewels and treasures and had taken Rebekah, Laban's sister off to be Isaac's wife!
 - And now their son had come to town—perhaps to the same well that Abraham's servant had come to many years before.
 - b. And now it is Laban's turn to be impressed with Jacob...
 - Jacob was already impressed with himself, Rachael was impressed with this take charge guy who had moved the stone to water the sheep, and now it is Laban's turn to be impressed...
 - And of course Jacob is just soaking all of this up!
 - So now we are told that Laban runs...
 - We have to remember how he had especially noticed the jewels that Abraham's servant had brought—and perhaps he has some expectations about that!
 - In any case, he ran as verse 13 tells us: **Then it came to pass, when Laban heard the report about Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. So he told Laban all these things. 14 And Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." And he stayed with him for a month.**

- We are told how Laban hears Jacob’s story—likely he even told him about the birthright and the blessing—but possibly not all the details of how he acquired it (but who knows—he may have had to explain why he was without an entourage of camels and servants)...
- But in any case, Laban welcomes him into his home...
 - He says (v. 14): **“Surely you are my bone and my flesh.”**
- And then we are told that Jacob stayed with him for a month...
 - And of course during this time, Jacob would have demonstrated his shepherding skills and his take charge to get it done manner,
 - And if we peek ahead in the narrative, we have good reason to say that Laban begins to see that although this man did not bring jewels and gifts, it would be most advantageous to have him as a shepherd.
- We would note that Jacob does not approach Laban with the manly directness of Abraham’s servant, declaring that he is looking for a wife, but hangs out with Laban until Laban,
 - knowing quite well what Jacob wants, offers him wages for his service.

TRANS> And so as the first month goes by at Haran, everything seems to be falling in place for Jacob—and he is quite taken with lovely Rachel!

- That is what happens when you first reach Haran!
- But oh yes...there is something else we need to think about as we look at what happens at Haran...

II. Wasn’t there something about God? about God helping you and being with you?

- You know, when He came to you at Bethel with His promises and showed you that He was with you to bless you...
 - Wasn’t there something about that?
 - Indeed, but have you forgotten?

A. Where is your gratitude? You are excited, but where is your gratitude to God?

- You know how people will say that they are thankful for something, but their thankfulness is not toward anyone in particular—they are just glad about what has happened...
 - The question is,
 1. Are you thanking God for what He has done for you?
 - If things are going well, it is God’s mercy to you.
 - God is the God of all providence and He has specifically told you that He will be with you to bless you.
 - So do you thank Him when you are at Haran?
 - He is the one that kept you and brought you on your journey safely.
 - He is the one that caused everything to fall into place and to open up for you the way it did.

2. Jacob does not appear to thank the LORD. He does not even mention the Lord.
 - a. The LORD who has done all things for him is not mentioned once in this narrative.
 - Now of course we cannot necessarily read into the fact that the Lord is not mentioned—His name is not mentioned in the book of Esther, but the whole book is about His amazing providence.
 - b. But in this account, we seem to have a deliberate contrast between Jacob and Abraham’s servant (in Genesis 24) who went to Haran a generation before to find a wife for Isaac.
 - Do you remember what he did when he learned that the first woman he approached at the well was the beautiful virgin daughter of Bethuel?
 - Jacob kissed her and wept...
 - But according to Gen 24:26-27, we are told of Abraham’s servant that: **The man bowed down his head and worshiped the LORD.** ²⁷ **And he said, “Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master. As for me, being on the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master’s brethren.”**
 - It seems clear that a contrast is being made that we ought to recognise here.
 - This servant tells his whole story to Laban and Bethuel, and he includes the fact that it is the Lord who has brought him here...
 - In 24:48 he says, **“And I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD God of my master Abraham, who had led me in the way of truth to take the daughter of my master’s brother for his son.”**
 - And then when they welcome the servant’s proposals, we are told that (verse 52) **it came to pass, when Abraham’s servant heard their words, that he worshiped the LORD, bowing himself to the earth.**
 - So you see that at each stage of the proceedings, this man expresses his gratitude to the Lord...
 - Upon arriving and finding the family he was seeking...
 - Upon telling the story
 - And upon receiving an affirmative answer—
 - He gives all the glory to God!
 - c. And Jacob’s apparent ingratitude is all the worse for several reasons.
 - 1) First, because Jacob had been such a scoundrel—and yet, the Lord in His grace was still bringing His blessing to him...
 - When you are forgiven much, you ought to love much!
 - Does Jacob even realise how much he has been forgiven? Do you?
 - 2) Second, because Jacob had just had his experience at Bethel, where the LORD had made it clear to him that He was with him and that He would prosper him...
 - This should have made Jacob all the more alert about seeing the hand of God—He should have been looking to see God’s hand.

- 3) And third, because Jacob is himself the heir and the beneficiary of God's promise—of all people, he should have been giving the glory to God!
 - When you are in a position of leadership—the head of your home, an elder in the church—you have all the more obligation to lead the way in giving thanks to God.
 - Of course it is often the case that a godly servant thanks for benefits that come to the master he serves...as when you work for an unbeliever and you thank God when his business prospers...but Jacob is not an unbeliever...he should have led the way in gratitude.
- 4) And fourth, it is all the more worse for Jacob to be without thanksgiving because he had made a vow at Bethel that he would worship the LORD if the LORD brought him back to Bethel safely...
 - True, he was not back yet, but should he not in the spirit of that vow thank the LORD all along the way as the Lord looks after him?
 - We will thank God when we get to heaven, but should we not thank Him all along on the journey?

3. Now what about you?

- Do you acknowledge the hand of the LORD in your life?
 - Do you only thank Him at Bethel when He specifically makes His grace known to you?
 - Or do you see His hand and thank Him all the way as Abraham's servant did?
 - Where is your gratitude?

TRANS> And I have another question for you, a related question—

- Not only, “where is the gratitude?” but...

B. Where is your dependence on God? Where is the attitude that leads you to pray—the spirit of prayer and supplication?

1. Do you feel that there is no need to pray because everything is going well?

- Are you one of those people who shows by your prayer life that you only pray when you think you need the LORD? and that when things are going well, you figure that you can handle it on your own...
 - Perhaps you don't even pray when you are in trouble...and that is even worse...
 - But assuming that you at least pray when you are in trouble, do you also pray when everything is falling in place?
 - Do you put the matter in God's hands and look to Him all along the way?
 - God wants us to keep praying for our daily bread even when we have it every day and to spare!
 - We are to acknowledge that it comes for Him and that He is the one that provides it.
 - Have you gotten a promotion? a new relationship? a new direction in your family? a new schedule that is working for you?
 - Then give thanks and pray that God will prosper you in it—and pray that He will guide you—and pray that He will shut you down if it is not right.

- Don't just assume that all is well because things have fallen so nicely in place...and never assume that you can get on without the Lord!
 - You may seem impressive, but you are just not *that* impressive.
2. Jacob does not seem to call upon the LORD here...
- a. He is on top of things...
- He is sure that he can handle these good things that have come before him.
 - His mind is full of the opportunities that have presented themselves to him—that is what is at the forefront of his mind...
 - His thoughts are consumed by the sheer delight of what is unfolding before him, and he has no thought of his need for God.
 - I shudder when I hear people say, "I can handle this, why should I pray? Everything is working out just fine!"
 - They don't realise that they might be headed for 20 years of hard labour.
 - They don't realise that in a swell of prosperity, they need God more than ever lest they should be blinded by their enthusiasm...
 - I remember a few years ago seeing a bunch of men I knew completely mesmerised by a business opportunity that they were all rushing into.
 - I remember speaking about the presentation of this multi-level marketing company and how a minister who was mesmerised lashed out at me for my observation...
 - He was caught in the spell of an opportunity to get rich quick...
 - He and about half a dozen others lost a lot of their savings because they jumped into the opportunity without prayer.
- b. Compare Abraham's servant again.
- Abraham's servant prays that the LORD will direct him to the right woman...he knows that it will only be by God's grace that everything will work out...
 - And he puts out a test of the young woman's character—
 - In Gen 24:12-14, he says: **Then he said, "O LORD God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. ¹³ Behold, here I stand by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink' —let her be the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master."**
 - He does this before he tells her who he is to test her—he wants to know her character.

- And even after she passes this test, still, he jumps to no conclusions but we are told that (v. 21) **the man, wondering at her, remained silent so as to know whether the LORD had made his journey prosperous or not.**
 - Young people, if you find out someone you are attracted to is also interested in you, don't rush into the relationship just because there is an opportunity to do so.
 - Pray for wisdom, be patient, don't be impetuous, get counsel, get parental approval.
 - Don't be so full of yourself that you feel that you can see the whole picture.
 - Don't let your emotions and desires blind you to your need for God's wisdom and for the help of those around you.
 - But you adults need to learn the same things...
 - You can be just as hasty and just as foolish.
 - The man I told about that was blinded by the multi-level marketing business was probably in his 60s at the time, and he was a minister who had sacrificed material wealth to preach the gospel...
 - You can rush into a major decision without prayer, without wisdom—just because it looks good—just because she is pretty and she batted her eyes at you or because somebody waved a big pay cheque in front of your face!
- c. We need to be praying because God may have something better for you than whatever you see before you!
 - No, let me rephrase that—the LORD does have something better for you than just what you see before you!
 - He is committed to giving you the riches of His grace—things that eye has not seen and that ear has not heard, but things that He has revealed to us by His Spirit.
 - Don't let yourself be mesmerised by the things that are seen so that you cannot see the things that are not seen.
 - The things that are seen are temporal, but that things that are not seen are eternal.
 - You need to be in a place where you can say,
 - “Lord, I do not even want this relationship or this job or this whatever unless it is going to draw me closer to you.”
 - He has so much grace to give you and you don't even realise it!
 - If you did, you would be asking Him for these riches in glory—you would be praying for that grace and waiting for it and looking for it!
 - You would be hungry for His word and for refreshment in His promises and grace.

III. The beauty of it all is that if God is committed to bless you, He will bless you no matter what!

A. That is what was taught at Bethel...

1. That is what God showed you when He first revealed the gospel to you, showing that heaven was open and that He was connected to you...
 - That He was sending angels up and down to be busy about blessing you and about bringing God's blessings of salvation and grace to you.
 - He shows us that He has even sent His Son from heaven to bless you in turning you away from your sins and in taking your sins to the cross upon Himself to make you eternally connected to God's favour.
 2. And the beauty is that His blessing does not stop...His commitment is still there...heaven is still busy about you even when you don't see it!
 - Even when you are oblivious of how much grace He has to give you...
 - Even when you go along in life without thanking Him as His blessing unfolds in your life...
 - Even when you go along without prayer, without calling out for those blessings and for all that grace that your heavenly Father has to lavish on you.
 - He is still committed and He will see you through.
- But in the meantime,
3. You are missing out on the pleasure of seeing this!
 - You are plodding along and you are not seeing the gracious hand of God upon you.
 - Oh that you would wake up and see!
 - How happy you would be.
 - And besides that, while you are not seeking Him, you are depriving yourself of some of your eternal reward in glory.
 - It is true—you are not laying up treasure in heaven, but treasure on earth.
 - You need to learn to live for eternity!

B. But still, God is going to bring His blessing to if you are elect—

1. And that means that He is going to stick with you to the end, and that over the course of your life,
 - He is going to be busy teaching you to see how much you need Him...
 - And teaching you to see where the true treasure is—to see the riches of glory, of becoming like Christ, of knowing the Lord...
 - And He is going to do whatever it takes to teach you if you are His elect.
 - He will do whatever must be done to break you and show you that you do not live by bread alone, but by His promised mercy and grace!
2. In the weeks to come we are going to see how our gracious LORD comes to Jacob at Haran to give him just what he needs...
 - a. What he needs to break him...
 - to break his pride and make him into a praying man of faith...

- to break his self-sufficiency and make him into a man whose sufficiency is found in God.
 - to break his ingratitude and make him into a man who sees God's hand of blessing and gives thanks to Him.
- b. Jacob needs 20 years of hard labour followed by sorrows and troubles and fears to teach him to look to God alone.
- The lessons will not be easy, but they will be just what Jacob needs.
 - He will come down from his pride, fighting all the way,
 - But his fight will change from a fight to do things his own way, to a fight to hold on to the Lord for the blessing that only He can give.
3. Has that change come to you?
- Are you one who is striving to make your own way...
 - Or are you fighting to hold on to the Lord to obtain His blessing?
 - Where is your treasure?
 - What is your hope?
 - Have you come to the place where you fully recognise that your only source of blessing is in Jesus Christ?

Conclusion: The Lord has so much to give you if you are one of His people...

- If only you could see that and start trusting Him and looking to Him...
 - That in whatever circumstances He brings to you, you would see His gracious hand that is at work in you and would seek His blessing all the way.
 - Jacob has a lot to learn, and I know that some of you do too...
 - So do I.
 - But if we are truly His, He will teach us.
 - And the sooner you start trusting Him, the better it will be.