

Genesis (2011) 29B

- When we meet someone, we rely on first impressions to size someone up
 - Is this person a friend or foe?
 - Can we trust them? Do we have an interest in them?
 - Our first impression can be very helpful to understanding how we should relate to that person

There was a young man climbed his way up the corporate ladder very quickly until one day he was promoted to Vice President over a large division in another state. As he arrived on the first day to assume his new position, the young man was nervous. He wanted to make a good first impression to his staff and employees. As the day begins, he settles into his large leather office chair behind his sprawling desk, congratulating himself for having made it to the top.

Suddenly, his secretary opens the door and announces the executive has his first visitor of the day. The young man looks around the office and realizes his desk is completely free of any signs of work. No papers or books. Even his computer is still turned off. The executive becomes concerned that his visitor will have a bad first impression of the new boss. He wants the visitor to be impressed with the importance of his new position, the high demands of the job, the non-stop responsibilities.

So as his visitor walks through the door, the executive quickly picks up his desk phone and pretends to be engaged in an important and heated conversation about some critical issues. The visitor stands patiently waiting for the conversation to end, and when the boss hangs up the phone, he turns to his visitors and says, "As you can see, I'm very busy this morning, so tell me quickly why have you come to see me?"

To which the man replied, "I'm here to connect your phone."

- That phone repairman certainly gained a useful first impression of the boss
 - But sometimes our first impressions lie to us
 - That's especially true when people pretend to be something they are not
 - This is the situation Jacob finds himself this morning, as he makes the mistake of relying on his first impressions of Laban

[Gen. 29:14](#) Laban said to him, “Surely you are my bone and my flesh.” And he stayed with him a month.

[Gen. 29:15](#) Then Laban said to Jacob, “Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?”

[Gen. 29:16](#) Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.

[Gen. 29:17](#) And Leah’s eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful of form and face.

[Gen. 29:18](#) Now Jacob loved Rachel, so he said, “I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.”

[Gen. 29:19](#) Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than to give her to another man; stay with me.”

[Gen. 29:20](#) So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her.

- After Jacob had lived and worked with Laban for a month, we see Laban has become impressed with Jacob’s skill
 - Laban opens a conversation with Jacob about wages
 - He asked if it is right for Jacob, his flesh and blood, to work for nothing, for free
 - Laban’s message is that I care much more for you than I do for my hired workers, so shouldn’t I pay you as I pay them?
 - This is a generous offer, because the rules of the day generally worked opposite from what Laban said
 - A man paid his hired workers, not his sons
 - Remember the parable of the prodigal son?
 - The son takes his inheritance and leaves the father, but when he gets desperate, he decides to return
 - But remember what the son says to himself as he rehearsed his speech he planned to deliver to his father

[Luke 15:18](#) ‘I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight;

[Luke 15:19](#) I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.’”

- He said he wasn’t “worthy” to be a son, so make me a hired hand

- To be paid wages was not a sign of privilege, they are a sign of bondage in that day
- Remember Paul's analogy in Galatians when he compares our coming to faith in Christ to the experience of a child becoming an heir

[Gal. 4:1](#) Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything,

[Gal. 4:2](#) but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.

- So in Jacob's day, sons were not paid, servants (slaves) were paid
 - Sons had an expectation of an inheritance to compensate for their labor, so they were essentially working for themselves, building up their own estate
 - But in Jacob's case, he wasn't Laban's son, so he had no expectation of an inheritance
 - He had nothing to gain from the work except to pay for his room and board
- Therefore, Jacob had nothing binding him to Laban's household
 - At any time, Jacob could decide to leave and he would owe Laban nothing
- As we come to learn through this story, that reality is Laban's chief concern, which is why he engages in this conversation
 - Laban is concerned that he will lose Jacob's help
 - We've already seen how dysfunctional Laban's operation is, with shepherds wasting half the day waiting to water their sheep
 - So Laban twists reality making it seem like a good thing for Jacob to become a slave, a hired hand
 - This is a trick worthy of Jacob himself, a page right out of Jacob's playbook
 - This is similar to the way Jacob treated Esau
 - Laban's offer is completely legitimate and fair enough

- But it's designed to take advantage of another person's weakness
 - Laban isn't trying to be fair in his treatment of Jacob – far from it
- So what weakness of Jacob is Laban trying to exploit by his offer?
 - The oldest weakness in the book: a man's desire for a woman
 - Laban it turns out is no dummy
 - He has spent a month studying Jacob, recognizing his gift for shepherding, and noticing his interest in one of Laban's daughters
- Laban has two daughters actually: Leah and Rachel
 - And they are something straight out of a Disney story
 - Rachel is beautiful in form and face
 - Form refers to her figure while face refers to...well, the face
 - Rachel's name means ewe lamb, a female lamb
 - Leah, on the other hand, is...how could we put this delicately?
 - Well, her name means cow, which tells us everything we need to know
 - Furthermore, we're told her eyesight is weak, meaning Leah had poor vision
 - In that day, poor eyesight was a real problem, because corrective lenses didn't exist
 - So if you couldn't see well, you were prone to being clumsy, running into things
 - So not only is Leah a cow, but she isn't very useful to a man
 - Now as the father, Laban has the cultural responsibility to marry these women off
 - Otherwise, he is stuck with them for life

- Women lived in the house of their father until the day they were married and joined the house of their husband
- Furthermore, marriages were arranged, and the prospective husband must negotiate with the bride's father to gain the daughter as his bride
 - This is precisely what the servant did with Laban to gain the hand of Rebekah 97 years earlier
- So Laban knows he must find a man willing to marry his daughters and able to pay a price for each
 - Finding a suitor for Rachel won't be difficult, given her fine form and face
 - Finding a suitor for the cow, on the other hand, will be nearly impossible
 - No man would be willing to buy an unattractive and visually impaired wife
 - Laban is likely to be stuck with Leah forever
- Turning to Jacob for a moment, Jacob has taken an interest in Rachel
 - But he came to Laban's house with nothing...no money, no possessions
 - How will he negotiate for the hand of Rachel when he has nothing to offer Laban?
 - Laban has no doubt taken note of Jacob's interest in Rachel
 - And that is precisely why he has offered to pay Jacob wages
 - The prospect of earning wages gives Jacob the opportunity to earn his wife, which Laban knows Jacob will want to do
 - This is why I say Laban is stealing a page from Jacob's playbook
 - When Jacob bought the birthright from Esau, he knew Esau cared little for the birthright
 - He also knew that Esau was ruled by his flesh and prone to making rash decisions
 - Finally, he knew that Esau didn't appreciate that the birthright and the inheritance would go together

- So Jacob made Esau an offer that was legitimate but also built on deception and scheming
 - Laban now does the same to Jacob in return
- Jacob falls for Laban's trap, and offers to work for seven years for Rachel
 - This is a very generous offer for Rachel
 - He is offering 84 shekels for Rachel's hand, a huge sum of money
 - Consider that later in Genesis Joseph is sold into slavery for only 20 shekels of silver
 - And a young male slave was considered similar in value to a young bride
 - Jacob's offer was intended to force Laban to say yes
 - Much like if someone were to offer to buy your house for four times its real value
 - You couldn't refuse
 - This offer also reflected Jacob's great love for Rachel
 - In fact in v.20 Moses tells us that the seven years Jacob spent serving Laban for Rachel felt like but a few days because of his love for her
 - As this story was retold around the hearth in many Jewish homes over the centuries, I'm sure that as this verse was spoken, all the women in the room would respond, "Awwww"
 - It's so romantic
 - And as it turns out, it was also foolish

[Gen. 29:21](#) Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my time is completed, that I may go in to her."

[Gen. 29:22](#) Laban gathered all the men of the place and made a feast.

[Gen. 29:23](#) Now in the evening he took his daughter Leah, and brought her to him; and Jacob went in to her.

[Gen. 29:24](#) Laban also gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid.

[Gen. 29:25](#) So it came about in the morning that, behold, it was Leah! And he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served with you? Why then have you deceived me?"

- After the seven years, Jacob declares it is time to receive his wife
 - Laban responds with a wedding feast and the moment arrives to give Jacob his bride for the first evening in the tent
 - The wedding feast itself was a seven day affair
 - During the celebration period, the bride remained completely veiled
 - And the bridal garments were elaborate and flowing
 - They completely covered the face and form of the person
 - So after the wedding ceremony itself on the wedding night, the bride is placed in the marriage tent by herself
 - The new husband celebrates with the men leading up to the wedding night moment, a bachelor party of sorts
 - And finally he is ushered to his waiting bride in the tent
 - It's night, so inside the tent you can't see anything
 - You're also under the influence of wine, so you don't have all your senses
 - So Laban pulls off the deception he's so famous for: he gives Jacob the wrong bride
 - He also gives Leah a bridesmaid, her own servant, which was customary
 - These bridesmaids play a larger role later in the story
 - By the laws of the day, this wedding was a binding agreement
 - Even though Jacob expected to marry a different woman, by consummating the marriage, Jacob is officially married to this woman
 - And since divorce didn't exist, there was no prospect to end the relationship
 - What was done, was done

- So the schemer and deceiver, as some call Jacob, is now the recipient of a scheme and a deception
 - He has married a cow (Leah)
- Let's ask the important question at this moment? Where was God during these events?
 - We know God had the power to stop Laban's deception, so self-evidently God permitted it to happen
 - But we remember God promised Jacob He would keep Jacob and bless Jacob everywhere he goes
 - So why did God let this happen to Jacob?
 - This is such a horrible deception
 - Can you image working seven years to obtain the wife of your dreams only to find you married her ugly, clumsy sister?
 - But as bad as that seems, God has a great purpose in it
 - The Bible shows time and time again that God brings discipline upon His children
 - Hebrews teaches this principle best:

[Heb. 12:3](#) For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

[Heb. 12:4](#) You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

[Heb. 12:5](#) and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons,
 "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD,
 NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM;

[Heb. 12:6](#) FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES,
 AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."

[Heb. 12:7](#) It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

[Heb. 12:8](#) But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

[Heb. 12:9](#) Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?

[Heb. 12:10](#) For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.

[Heb. 12:11](#) All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

- I know we understand the principle of discipline, the value of being disciplined, the way it causes us to correct our bad behaviors
 - But take a moment to consider what the Bible says it means when God disciplines us
 - Hebrews says in v.8 that discipline means we are God's children
 - To be without His discipline would mean we are not His children
 - The world of unbelievers do not receive discipline from the Father
 - They receive the natural consequences of their sins
 - And they receive God's wrath in the day of judgment
 - But they do not receive His discipline
 - We on the other hand receive His discipline now
 - As proof we are His children, which means we will not receive His wrath in our judgment
 - Instead, we receive His mercy because of His grace
 - Jacob is experiencing God's discipline for his continuing sins of relying on himself instead of relying on God
 - And for his tendency to scheme and exploit others to get what he wants, rather than trusting in God to bless Jacob as the Lord promised
- So how does God accomplish these purposes through discipline?
 - God's favorite way to get our attention is to visit our own sins back upon ourselves
 - If we are a man like Jacob who is prone to scheming and trusting in ourselves, then God will often turn the tables to teach us a lesson
 - He may allow us to experience what it feels like to be exploited

- And He will find creative ways to show us what happens when we depend on ourselves instead of trusting in Him
- In short, He gives us exactly what we asked for until we realize it wasn't what we should have wanted
- Remember how the Lord dealt with Israel in the desert when they grumbled to Him about wanting meat?

Num. 11:16 The LORD therefore said to Moses, "Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and their officers and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you.

Num. 11:17 "Then I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit who is upon you, and will put Him upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you will not bear it all alone.

Num. 11:18 "Say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, "Oh that someone would give us meat to eat! For we were well-off in Egypt.'" Therefore the LORD will give you meat and you shall eat.

Num. 11:19 'You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days,

Num. 11:20 but a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you; because you have rejected the LORD who is among you and have wept before Him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?"'"

- God has given Jacob a wife, Leah
 - And this wife is God's appointed mate for Jacob, though it's not the one he wanted
 - And God did it to teach Jacob a lesson about himself and about God's power and authority in his life
- Consider the parallels God draws between Jacob's past sins and Laban's scheme
 - Jacob was able to deceive his father, Isaac, because he took advantage of his father's blindness
 - Laban was able to blind Jacob with the darkness in the tent and the veil over Leah's face
 - Leah went along with the plan of her parent, Laban, pretending to be someone she wasn't

- Jacob likewise went along with the plan of his parent, Rebekah, pretending to be someone he wasn't
- Jacob was tricked into marrying the older daughter when he intended to marry the younger
 - Isaac was tricked into blessing the younger son when he intended to bless the older
- Jacob entered into a binding agreement with Leah, one he couldn't reverse
 - While Isaac entered into a binding agreement with Jacob, one he couldn't reverse
- This situation has God's fingerprints all over it, once again
 - Jacob need only wake up from his self-centered view of life and realize that the God Who appeared to him at Bethel was the same God working in his life in Haran
 - What's the right thing for Jacob to do at this point?
 - He should honor his marriage to Leah and seek no additional marriage
 - He should fall back on God in repentance and in the hope God would bless this union
 - He should learn his lesson
 - But Jacob is a stubborn man, and rather than looking past Laban, who was merely God's instrument, Jacob continues to depend on himself
 - So Jacob pushes forward in sin still seeking Rachel and inviting yet more discipline