

GO FORWARD!

in Love



SERMON

TITLE

Because of His Love

TEXT

Genesis 29:1-20

KEY VERSE

Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him **because of his love** for her. (Genesis 29:20)

THEME

Jacob's deep love for Rachel demonstrates some positive attributes of true love. True love is patient. True love perseveres. True love is perfected in God. The world's notion of love is often quick and easy - a drive-through kind of love, easily discarded when it becomes difficult. Love that is rooted in God - a love that mirrors His love for us, is long-lasting and life-giving. It compels us to go forward in love and reach others for Christ.

INTRODUCTION

It was just another water cooler romance. Jacob, a new intern experiencing his first day on the job, goes to get a drink from the water cooler. He notices a beautiful young woman standing beside it. She's staring down at her phone, scrolling through her Instagram photos. She looks at him. He looks at her. In that one instant, they connect. Hearts flutter, cheeks flush, and palms become sweaty.

"Hi, I'm Jacob. I'm new here. This is my first day."

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“Rachel,” she answered. I’ve been here for awhile, started as an intern and then got hired on. I know they’re looking to hire more people. Maybe your internship will lead to a permanent position. I can speak to my father, Bill Laban. He’s the CEO.”

“Wow, I can’t believe I’m talking to the CEO’s daughter on my first day,” said Jacob. He tried to sound casual but like most first encounters between a young man and a young woman, it came across as forced and awkward.

“Believe it,” she said. Then she smiled - a bright beaming smile. Angels sang in chorus. Birds chirped, and bees buzzed. In Jacob’s imagination, he was running towards Rachel in slow motion through a field of flowers, arms outstretched, with Tchaikovsky’s Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture playing in the background. He was in love! She seemed equally intrigued.

Her face flushed, she grabbed a plastic cup and plunged it under the water cooler spout. Nothing happened. It was at that moment she noticed that the tank was completely empty. There was a full cooler at her feet waiting to take the empty one’s place.

“Oh,” said Jacob, snapping out of his reverie. “Would you like me to replace the water?”

“Would you, please? It would make me so happy.”

Jacob rolled up his sleeves, and before picking up the full bottle he peeled off the plastic cap on top.

“Uh, won’t the water come out if you do that?” Rachel asked.

“Rachel...Rach, Ra-quel. May I call you Rachel.”

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“Yes, I’d prefer that you do.”

“I’ve interned in many places. I think I know how to change this water cooler,” he said, placing his hand reassuringly on her shoulder. He felt confident. Now was his chance to impress her with a show of his strength. He picked up the full bottle of water and as he attempted to raise it over his head, water came gushing out onto the floor. His feet began to slip in the water and just before he went down he felt a hand reach out, steadying the water bottle. It was Rachel. Her support of the now half-empty bottle steadied Jacob on his feet. Together they placed it on the water cooler platform. Their eyes met again.

“I won’t tell anyone if you don’t,” she said. “Now, clean this up intern.” Picking up her phone, she snapped a photo of the drenched Jacob and later when their romance blossomed into a relationship she instagrammed that very same picture, #WaterCoolerRomance.

Is this how the story of Jacob and Rachel would sound today, if told as a cheesy rom-com movie or sitcom series? Perhaps so. Through this parable of boy-meets-girl in a modern-day office setting, we no doubt see the ancient story of Genesis 29 coming through. The office is the grazing lands of Paddan Aram. The company where Laban the Aramean rules as CEO is the sheep pens where his daughter Rachel works as a shepherd. The water cooler is the watering well - a well that would normally require all the shepherds to work together to roll away the stone before the flocks could be watered. One thing however that this modern parable does not embellish is the deep love that Jacob had for Rachel, and Rachel had for Jacob.

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TRUE LOVE IS PATIENT.

When we think of the great romantic stories of the ages we think of Romeo and Juliet, Cleopatra and Marc Anthony, Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler, and more recently, when Harry met Sally. The truth is while all these stories are significant they are nothing compared to the amazing love stories found in the Bible. The story of Jacob and Rachel in Genesis 29 is one of the most compelling romances you will ever read in scripture. While almost completely devoid of the cheap frills and clichés that characterize most modern romances, at its heart it is a story of love between a man and a woman that endures brokenness and hardship. It also teaches us the consequences of rushing ahead of God's will for our lives. That seems to be the back story to the three great patriarchs of the Jewish nation, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were given a covenant by God but time and time again scripture tells us how they rushed ahead to make things happen in their own time. They were, in other words, out of synch with God. When we're out of synch with God, God has a way of bringing us back in synch with him. As much as Jacob and Rachel serve as a love story to the modern listener, it equally serves as a reminder of God's faithfulness to his people in upholding his covenant.

Jacob, you will remember, was a most unlikely recipient of God's covenant. He was literally born, grasping the heel of his twin brother Esau, the same twin brother whom he would later rob of his birthright. Deceitfully tricking his father Isaac to bestow on him the blessing of the firstborn, Jacob leaves his home to flee from Esau's rage.

He travels to Paddan Aram and there encounters the beautiful Rachel - a shepherdess, tending her father's sheep. Jacob comes to find out that she is his kin, part of his clan. As hearers of the story we don't know the reasons why Jacob fell in love with Rachel, but we do know that their love was sincere. Scripture tells us that after Jacob rolled away the stone at the well and watered the sheep, he kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud. This is a clear indication

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that his new relationship to Rachel had all the elements of romantic love. Physical attraction coupled with emotional connection - the sense that by meeting Rachel he had come home. This type of connection in marriage seems quite unique for this time in history. Most marriages in ancient times and indeed in many parts of the world today were arranged to make strategic alliances between families. Most marriages of this kind, then and now, occurred after only one meeting between the couple. An ancient person in Jacob's day, might ask the question first posed by Tina Turner, "What's love got to do with it?" This is the first instance in scripture that suggests marriage can be more than just a social custom. Marriage can be based on love.

Genesis 29:18 confirms that Jacob loved Rachel. An arrangement is made and Jacob promises to work for her father, Laban, for a period of seven years. At the end of the seven years he will be allowed to marry Rachel. Now think of that for a moment. When was the last time you committed seven long years of your life in the pursuit of one goal? Think of yourself seven years ago from today. If you can remember where you lived, who you were as a person, what your likes and dislikes were, what you thought you'd be doing in the future, - who even knows if the desire of your heart back then would be the desire of your heart today? For Jacob, love meant being willing to invest the time.

True love takes time. More significantly perhaps: true love lasts - a lifetime. Jacob's love for Rachel never waned throughout those seven long years. He never gave up and tried to find an easier relationship. He never threw away his sexual purity on a cheap, one-night stand. Jacob remained committed to his love for Rachel. In fact, scripture goes so far as to put it this way in Genesis 29:20. "...Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him **because of his love for her.**

The so-called wisdom of today's world says that this kind of love is unrealistic. This kind of love is arcane or old fashioned, it hearkens back to a time when people

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had less options. We're so much more enlightened today. We can love when we want and who we want, on our terms, and pursue our own interests. The so-called wisdom of today's world says that this kind of love is not worth waiting for. It can easily be obtained in one fleeting moment. We sadly acknowledge what a destructive lie this has proven to be.

The truth is that Jacob was faced with the same temptations we are today. He could have walked away and found an easier relationship outside the commitment of marriage. But, he chose the better path. He chose to respect Rachel by waiting to marry her. Why? Because true love is patient.

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TRUE LOVE PERSEVERES.

Secondly, **because of his love for her**, Jacob persevered. True love perseveres! If the story of Jacob and Rachel was a romantic comedy, the villain in the movie would not be a rival suitor, it would be Laban - Rachel's father. Laban does not want to sabotage Jacob's love for Rachel, rather, he wants to use their relationship to benefit himself and his interests. He solves the problem of marrying off his oldest daughter, Leah, by disguising her and passing her off to Jacob as his younger daughter, Rachel. (That must have been a Déjà vu moment for Jacob as he played a very similar trick on his own father!) When Jacob discovers the ruse the very next morning, Laban, in a fiddler-on-the-roof kind of way says, "It's not our [tradition] here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work."¹

Jacob surely thought, "Do you think you might have told me about this custom, oh let's say, sometime in the last seven years?!" He was no doubt fuming with anger. But, because of his love for Rachel, he agreed to work for Laban another seven years.

Jacob spent a total of 20 years, laboring for Laban, and during that time his love for Rachel never wavered. It persevered through some pretty tough times. It endured the pain of sister-to-sister rivalry that nearly tore the family apart. It endured the pain of Laban's deceit and scheming. When Jacob finally leaves Laban, he does so in secret. Laban pursues him and angrily asks, "Why did you run off secretly and deceive me?" (Genesis 31:27). Jacob responds by unloading the 20 years of injustice that he received, all for the love of Rachel: "This was my situation," he said. "The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes. It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household. I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters

¹ Genesis 29:26-27 NIV

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and six years for your flocks, and you changed my wages ten times...But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you." (Genesis 31: 40-42)

Jacob and Rachel's love endured a lot. It persevered through many trials, trials – it must be said that came at the hands of others and through their own mistakes as well. These mistakes that nearly cost them their relationship grew out of their own selfish wants. Love is a pretty amazing thing if it can survive all of that. It was truly a love that never gave up. Through their relationship, God was able to build his covenant that he first promised to Abraham, a covenant that would be fully realized in the life, death, and resurrection of God's own son, Jesus. Jesus was himself a descendent of Jacob and Rachel.

One does not have to be an expert in love today to know that many relationships are built on a foundation of brokenness. Even the best relationships will be broken ones if God is not at the center.

In the spoken word poem, "I Met a Girl", by Rael James Mason, we are shown what true love really looks like between a man and woman who build their human relationship on a divine relationship with God.

[Option A: Play spoken word poem video, "I Met A Girl" - see attached electronic resources.]

[Option B: Read poem, "I Met a Girl" - see resources page.]

Did you catch that very significant line? The 'guy' speaking to the 'girl' says, "I care a lot for you, but you'll never be the center of my universe, that place is taken by the One who's always been the center of the universe." God gives us an incredible gift in human relationships, whether that's a relationship between a husband and a wife, a mother and son, or just two best friends on the road of

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life. But a relationship with another person cannot bring us true fulfillment. True fulfillment is found only in a relationship with God. Why? Because God is love.

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TRUE LOVE IS PERFECTED IN GOD. GOD'S LOVE COMPELS US TO REACH OUT TO OTHERS.

Because of **His love**...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.² Because of **His love**... the Lamb will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.³

Because of **His love**...there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

⁴And because of **His love**... God gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.⁵

So therefore, because of His love **for us**...be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.⁶ Because of His love **for us**...do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

⁷Because of His love **for us**...be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.⁸ Because of His love **for us**, love one another.

1 Corinthians 13 says that "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, **always perseveres.**"⁹

² Romans 5:8 KJV

³ Revelation 7:17 NIV

⁴ Romans 8:1 NIV

⁵ John 3:16 NIV

⁶ Romans 12:10 NIV

⁷ Galatians 5:13 NIV

⁸ Ephesians 4:2 NIV

⁹ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

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This year in the midst of the international campaign, The Whole World Mobilizing, the challenge set before us as soldiers and members of The Salvation Army is to **Go Forward in Love**, for love is at the very heart of evangelism. Our Love of God and God's love for us translates into a love for our neighbor and a desire to see God's plan of salvation accepted by every person on this planet. This certainly is the big picture objective of evangelism. The smaller picture may be showing God's saving love to the people around you: your coworkers, your friends, your neighbors, and strangers you encounter on the street.

The world should be able to look at the way we love, not only in our marriages, not only in our 'Jacob and Rachel' relationships - but in the love we have for one another, and exclaim, 'Now that is true love!' Jesus said in John 13:35, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Because of His love, we can **go forward in love**. Let us pray.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, in your Holy Word when your Son speaks about a church in decline he says "the love of many will grow cold". We live in age where the fire of love has grown cold. Love between husbands and wives, love between families, love between friends, love between neighbors, and love for the poor. Lord, we ask today that you would ignite the spark of love within us. Ignite the spark of love in our corps, our community centers, our ARCs. Ignite the spark of love in our officers, our soldiers, and our adherents. Send us a mobilizing love, Father. Send us a love that propels us into our communities where we can share your love with the people around us. This we ask in Jesus' name, the author of all true love, amen.