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[9 : 33] Nearer my God to thee, nearer to thee Nearer my God to thee, nearer to thee In know it be a cross that raiseth me Still all my songs for me Nearer my God to thee, nearer to thee Nearer to thee Though like the wanderer

The sun will come Darkness be over me My restless storm Yet in my dreams I be Nearer my God to thee Nearer to thee, nearer to thee There let the way I fear Steps unto heaven All understandest we In mercy again Angels to be upon me

Nearer my God to thee, nearer to thee Nearer to thee, nearer to thee Then with my Waving cross Thine earth I praise Out of my Stony peace And the light And the light And the light So I might To be Nearer to thee, nearer to thee Nearer to thee Nearer to thee Nearer to thee Nearer to thee

On joyful wind On joyful wind Cleeping the sky Sun would have Starch for me What words I'll find Still all my songs Song shall be Nearer my God to thee Nearer to thee Nearer to thee Nearer to thee If you could turn please now your Bibles to Genesis chapter 29 Genesis 29 Genesis 29 We've spent, for those who are visiting and you're wondering how we got to this passage

We got to this passage because we were in Genesis 28 before it We've been going through the life of Jacob Jacob And before that Isaac And before that Abraham The fathers and the faith And it's It's a bit of a rollercoaster of a story as we follow it through This chapter in some ways is the kind of chapter where if it was on television we'd be saying change the channel for five minutes but there's some messy details within it as we see the life story of the The life story of these characters who are far from perfect and we come to this passage tonight Genesis 29 And we'll read from verse 1 Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east and as he looked he saw a well in the field and behold three flocks of sheep lying beside it for out of that well the flocks were watered

[15 : 00] The stone on the well's mouth was large and when all the flocks were gathered there the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep and put the stone back in its place over the mouth of the well Jacob said to them my brothers where do you come from?

They said we are from Haran He said to them do you know Laban the son of Nahor? They said we know him He said to them is it well with them? They said it is well And see Rachel's daughter is coming with the sheep He said behold it is still high day It is not time for the livestock to be gathered together Water the sheep and go past you them But they said we cannot until all the flocks are gathered together and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well Then we water the sheep While he was still speaking with them Rachel came with her father's sheep for she was a shepherdess Now as soon as Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother Jacob came 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 wept aloud and Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman And that he was Rebekah's son and she ran and told her father

As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob his sister's son he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him And brought him to his house Jacob told Laban all these things and Laban said to him surely you are my bone and my flesh And he stayed with him a month Then Laban said to Jacob because you are my kinsman should you therefore serve me for nothing Tell me what shall your wages be Now Laban had two daughters the name of the older was Leah and the name of the younger was Rachel Leah's eyes were weak but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance Jacob loved Rachel And he said I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel Laban said it is better that I give her to you than I should give her to any other man Stay with me So Jacob served seven years for Rachel And they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her Then Jacob said to Laban Give me my wife that I may go into her for my time is completed

So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast But in the evening he took his daughter Leah And brought her to Jacob And he went into her Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant And in the morning behold it was Leah And Jacob said to Laban What is this you have done to me?

Did I not serve you? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me? Laban said it is not so done in our country to give the younger before the firstborn Complete the week of

this one And we will give you the other also in return for seven weeks Another seven years Jacob did so and completed her week Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife Laban gave his female servant Bilhah his daughter Rachel to be her servant So Jacob went into Rachel also And he loved Rachel more than Leah And served Laban for another seven years Amen And may God bless that reading of his word for us We will sing again to God's praise Raise a prayer as we come to study God's word Speak O Lord As we come to you to receive the food of your holy word Take your

[18 : 58] We come to you to receive the food of your holy word. Take your truth, plant it deep in us.

Shape and fashion us in your likeness. That the light of Christ might be seen today in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.

Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in us all your purposes for your glory.

Teach us, Lord, good obedience, holy reverence, humility.

Test our thoughts, standard attitudes, in the radiance of your beauty.

[20 : 10] Cause our future rise, cause our eyes to see. Your majestic love and authority.

Words of power that can never fail. Let your truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our might. Help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.

Truths unchanged from the dawn of time. That will echo death through eternity.

And by grace we'll stand on your promises. And by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.

[21 : 16] Speak, O Lord, till your church is filled. And the earth is filled with your glory.

Let's pray as we come back to the passage.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. And we pray, as we have sung, that you would speak to us. That you would feed us. That you would give us that nourishment that we need for our souls.

Give us direction. We pray in life. And help us in this passage, even deep in the Old Testament, with much in the way of mess in the lives of your people.

We pray that you would guide us and lead us. And help us to see a reflection of ourselves. We know that our own hearts can be messy.

[22 : 17] We are in need of your forgiveness. We are in need of your grace. And we pray that we would receive that this evening as we bow before you. Help us, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. One of the things that we look forward to at the communion season, with us going into the communion season this coming weekend, one of the things that we look forward to is hearing testimonies.

A testimony, as you know, even if you're very young, you know that a testimony is the story of how God is working in our lives.

And if we're Christians, we should have a testimony. That's one of the questions that's good to think about, even at the outset today. If somebody was to ask you, can you share a testimony?

Can you share your testimony with me? What would you be able to say? Do you have a story to tell of God's work in your lives? And the thing with a testimony is, it has a beginning, which isn't always easy to pinpoint.

[23 : 31] Some people can share a testimony, and they can speak about a very precise moment, a particular thing that happened in their lives, which marks the beginning of God's work in their experience.

For some people, the beginning of a testimony can be sudden and dramatic. For most of us, it's more gradual. A testimony always has a beginning.

But a testimony, it continues. It's always refreshing. You know, like the web pages. Sometimes if you're waiting for a result, an exam result, or whether you've been successful in a competition, you push refresh and refresh and refresh and refresh to see, has anything changed?

And with a testimony, it should always be refreshing. It's always developing. I can think of various people who, when they've been asked the question, you know, why don't you share your testimony at the next communion?

They'll say, I did it before, five years ago. Well, big deal. I'm sure it's refreshed since then. And so, a testimony is a developing story of how hopefully we are drawing, as we sang in the first and second praise, nearer to God.

[24 : 50] And what we're reading in Genesis 29 and 28 is the testimony of Jacob. So, in Genesis 28, we see how God, he appears unexpectedly in a dream to Jacob at Bethel.

And there's the story of the staircase, the stairway to heaven. And Jacob, he, in this dream, in this encounter, he trusts God and he makes a commitment to follow God.

That's Genesis 28. It's the beginning, you could say, of Jacob's testimony. Genesis 29 is where the testimony of Jacob continues.

And one of the things that we noted last time we studied this is that the name of God is not mentioned in Genesis 29. But it's very clear that God was with Jacob, just as he promised to be. And so far in our studies, everything has gone well for Jacob. As he's travelled eastwards, as he's left home under compulsion, because his brother wants to kill him, because he's double-crossed his brother and he's tricked his father.

[26 : 12] So he gets sent off and told, run for your life. And he heads east and he's looking for Laban. And so far, everything has gone well for Jacob in his journey.

He's looking for Laban. And it just so happens that the first man he meets at the well, they know Laban. That's verses 1 to 5. And Jacob, he's headed eastward because in part he's looking for a wife.

And it just so happens that the first girl he meets is his dream wife. Her name is Rachel. That's verse 9. And Jacob loves her and she seems to like him.

And so we're really picking up the story at verse 15, where Jacob meets his father-in-law to be this character who is called Laban.

And in many ways, things don't go quite so well for Jacob from here through to the end of the chapter. Two points tonight. We were very patient this morning.

[27 : 23] Two points tonight. The first point is the sanctification of Jacob. And we'll spend 90% of our time on that. So fear not. And the second point is the salvation of Jacob.

So first of all, the sanctification of Jacob. Let me ask the question of the young ones. Michael's just walked out. Does anybody know?

What does the word sanctification mean? It's a big word. You can impress your teachers with it. They probably don't know what it means. Sanctification means...

Well, sanctification is what God does in the life of his people. When we become Christians, we are, to use the big word, justified.

We are made just as if we had never sinned because of what Jesus did on the cross. That's justification. I always think of that like a zap. The second we believe, we are justified.

[28 : 30] We're cleansed. We are made just as if we had never sinned because we are washed in the blood of Jesus. That's instant. The state has changed.

Sanctification is a process that begins the moment we believe and it continues through the whole of our lives. Sanctification is the way that God works in us to make us more like himself and less like our old selves.

Sanctification is when God works in us to make us more loving, more patient, more truthful, more kind, more good, more like Jesus. So the sanctification of Jacob.

Jacob, although he is, as we find him in Genesis 29, although he is saved from sin, although he was converted, he's one of God's people, there's still a lot of work to be done in the life of Jacob.

He's far from perfect and that was one of the reasons I believe that Jacob met Laban and Laban came into his life.

[29 : 49] So we're going to look at the next part of the Jacob story, the sanctification of Jacob under four headings, just to break it up really because it's a fair chunk.

The first thing we'll look at here is the workplace, where Jacob worked, how he worked for Laban. And then we'll think about the woman that he loved, he loved Rachel.

And then we'll think about the wedding, which is a big messy affair. And finally we'll reflect on the work of God in the midst of all of this. So first of all, as we look in on the life of Jacob, we see the workplace.

verse 14, if we look on verse 14, we're told in verse 14 that Jacob, he's taken into the family home with Rachel and he works for Laban for a month.

He's staying there for a month. We can imagine him just helping out around the place. And then verse 15, Laban said to Jacob, because you are my kinsmen, because you're family, should you therefore serve me for nothing, tell me, what shall your wages be?

[31 : 10] And on the first read of this, this sounds like Laban has been very kind and generous. It sounds like he's saying to Jacob, not only can you stay with me, but I want to pay you something for

the jobs that you're doing around the place.

And so what what Jacob is hearing here is an offer from Laban to be taken into the family business. And at first, listen, it sounds like an attractive, kind, generous offer, but actually this is not Laban being good-natured.

This was Laban's way of getting some control of Jacob. No doubt Laban has heard about the episode in verse 10.

Remember when Jacob is able to lift this stone away from the mouth of the well. This stone that required multiple men to be able to shift. Jacob, on this this feat of strength, manages to to shift this stone.

and Rachel is impressed. And Laban likely is impressed too. He can use a man with that kind of strength in the family business.

[32 : 26] So he takes him onto the staff. And that was the first bad move for Jacob. That was just the beginning of a whole world of trouble for Jacob.

The workplace is the first thing that we see in this passage. And just passing application as we move through this story, we need to be careful where we work.

And even young ones, we need to be careful even in school when we think about the friends that we have and the way that we spend our time. Work is such a big part of life.

It's such a big influence and demand on our time and our energy. And so we need wisdom in the workplace. We need wisdom when it comes to thinking about where we'll work and who we'll have as our colleagues and our friends.

And the thing is, James tells us that God gives wisdom to those who ask for it. But one of the things that we can note all the way through this chapter is that Jacob doesn't appear to ask for wisdom.

[33 : 46] there's no point in this passage where we see Jacob seeking the guidance, the strength, the help of God in prayer.

So the workplace is the first thing we see. Jacob's taken on to the staff of Laban, his father-in-law to be and not the best boss he ever had as we'll find out.

The second point is we think about the sanctification, the life story of Jacob is the woman that he loves. Look at verse 16 to 18. Laban had two daughters.

The name of the older was Leah. The name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak. Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance.

Jacob loved Rachel. And this is where if this was on a big screen we can imagine in our mind's eye this is when the romantic music would start to play as we see Jacob and he's he's looking at Rachel he's distracted by Rachel he's head over heels in love with Rachel.

[35 : 05] And yet even at this stage there are some alarm bells. Faint alarm bells. It says in verse 17 Leah's eyes were weak.

That could also mean her eyes were were soft or gentle. But Rachel by contrast she was beautiful in form and figure and appearance.

She was like a model we imagine. And Jacob is just besotted by what he sees. And he said verse 18 I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.

Now they say that you should never be the first to offer when you're trying to strike up a deal. And Jacob here is trying to deal with a very skilled negotiator in labor.

And Rachel or Jacob is so infatuated with Rachel that his negotiation skills have gone out the window. All he can see is Rachel.

[36 : 22] All he wants is Rachel. All he can think about is a life with Rachel. So when he's speaking with Laban about the prospect of this he offers actually way more than was normal when he says I'll serve you for seven years for your younger daughter.

One commentator says instead of bargaining with Laban in the usual eastern way Jacob responded immediately and somewhat rashly by declaring that he was prepared to work seven years for Rachel.

this was far higher than the price that was normally expected. It showed how desperate he was to marry Rachel.

So the woman he loved he's just besotted with her. He's obsessed with her. And Laban can see this and Laban is loving this.

Laban is more than happy to take advantage of Jacob and make some money out of this deal. So Laban says verse 19 it's better that I give her to you than I should give her to any other man.

[37 : 33] Stay with me. So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and he seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

and that on one hand can sound really sweet and romantic you know the days the months the years just flew past because of the love that he had for Rachel but as we read on into verse 21 there's an unhealthy desperation about Jacob.

The way he speaks to Laban particularly in verse 21 which I'm not going to read again just now and the way he speaks about Rachel in verse 21 it's just a bit off.

It's it's not the most appropriate most delicate the most respectful way that he speaks Jesus said in Luke 6 45 out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks and it seems that Rachel was just filling up everything of Jacob's heart Jacob's love maybe more so his lust for Rachel was all consuming his love for Rachel certainly seems to eclipse his love for God he seems to have elevated Rachel into idol status it's all he can think about all he can speak about all he can see that's the suggestion in the verses

Calvin famously said the human heart is a perpetual idol factory and very often the idols that we make are not bad things but they're good things that we allow to increase and increase and increase in our vision until we go from good things to God things all consuming things you know it can be objects we can make an idol of something as mundane as our car or our clothes we can make idols of our crops we can make idols of people family friends even the girl that we love we can make idols of our job everything has to give way to the job it can be a hobby it can be a sport idols in our experience are generally not little religious statues that stay in temples you know whatever we love more than

[40 : 54] God we make into an idol and it's likely that that's what was going on with Jacob and he's vulnerable to Laban because of that so there's the workplace as he's taken on the staff with Laban there's the woman that he loved and he seems to be all consumed with and then thirdly there is the wedding so looking again at verse 21 if I can politely paraphrase it Jacob essentially says to Laban I want Rachel to be my wife now I am desperate to have Rachel as my wife now but notice Laban's response he doesn't say well yes of course you've worked seven years and the time has come of course what Laban actually says very cleverly he says let's have a party that's how he responds he says let's gather all our friends and family together and let's have a feast

Kirner the commentator says Laban's reply managed to give the appearance without the actual substance of consent he uses very clever words to say nothing so Laban verse 22 gather together all the people of the place and made a feast the word in Hebrew for a feast is a misti which means a drinking feast it was a drinking festival and so the drinking begins and after a day's partying Laban gives Jacob his daughter but the twist in the story is that Laban gives Jacob not the daughter that he was expecting in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob and then in the morning verse 25 when Jacob wakes up behold it was

Leah one commentator calls this whole scene down to verse 30 soap opera ugly and it is this is the kind of thing that we tend to switch off when it comes on to our TV screens to see a scene like this and yet this is what happened and we might wonder how could this possibly happen how could Jacob not know how could he not realise what was going on here but when you dig back into the history of on the traditions of how weddings were in these days in these days a bride and groom spent very lot of time together before they were married you wouldn't see them together all the time they weren't spending time together alone the way that we would see and expect these days there was very little time that they spent with each other alone before they were married and on a wedding day bridal dresses and veils meant that virtually nothing of the bride was seen and the wedding took place in the evening you know why weddings have to happen at a certain time by law here it actually relates back to this this was evening that there wasn't much light and it was a drinking festival so there was lots of drink involved you put all these details together and we can see how easily this kind of thing could happen and so

Jacob the following morning when he wakes up lightly with a sore head he's furious so he confronts Laban and Jacob said to Laban verse 25 what is this you have done to me did I not serve you for Rachel why then have you deceived me and Laban's response must have cut Jacob to the quick Laban said it is not so done in our country to give the younger before the firstborn in other words what Laban is saying you Jacob the younger brother you may have been able to put yourself first in your own home as you put one over your older brother Esau but your tactics are not going to work in my home so Jacob is served a big distasteful measure of his own medicine in this ugly scene and

it's a mess it's so much of a mess it's really uncomfortable to read and have to study and if we want an advert for why we shouldn't get drunk if we want an advert for why we should stay self-controlled and honest then we have one here the workplace the woman you love the wedding and finally in this this point we see the work of God and without trawling over the details of the scene again it's an unsavory episode we see that even in the midst of the darkness of all of this

God was working on Jacob to sanctify him think about Jacob's character his character flaws in particular Jacob what was his specialist sin his specialist sin was deception you could go back to Genesis 27 and see how he deceived his brother and he deceived his father Jacob's name itself meant he deceives and yet Jacob he's met his marching Laban because Laban is a master at deception Laban is running rings round Jacob in this whole episode and although God is never the cause of sin although God is not pleased with any of the dark details in this chapter he is able to use even these ugly events to discipline!

[48 : 01] and to sanctify Jacob you know meeting Laban was a bit like holding a mirror up to Jacob where Jacob would see his own sin and would be moved to repent of it Oswald Chambers says not in relation to this chapter it was in a devotional that I remember as I was going through this Oswald Chambers says notice the kind of people that God brings around you and you will be humbled once you realise that this is actually his way of revealing to you the kind of person that you have been to him I remember the first time I read that and I was really struggling with somebody I was really struggling with a situation and the injustice of all and as

I read it and reflected on it I was brought to a sense of conviction that some of the things that I was so outraged in seeing in another person actually in root they were within me and sometimes God will allow people to come into our lives that people that we struggle with to show us what we are like to show us where we need to repent and where we need to change and Laban was sent into Jacob's life to show Jacob his own sin so that Jacob would keep on repenting of his own sin so that God would sanctify him and make him more like Jesus and less like the old Jacob and so as hard as it is we have to be thankful to God for the

Labans that he sometimes uses to mould us and to shape us sometimes painfully into something closer to the image of Jesus the sanctification of Jacob and finally and really just in a couple of minutes I want to close with the salvation of Jacob and ask the question once more is Jacob saved at this point we've just seen a very clear you know gritty account of what he's like warts and all is Jacob saved at this point and the answer is yes he is Jacob is one of God's people Genesis 28 makes that really clear he's converted he is saved he's one of God's people so how was he saved was it by his own merits and his own works absolutely not because it's very very clear to see that Jacob was far from perfect and if we were to look at Jacob's father Isaac he too was far from perfect we've studied something of his life and if we were to go back and see Jacob's grandfather Abraham and think about some of the things that he did and Isaac did we think about the lies and we think about the failures and the falls the selfishness that riddled them they were far from perfect so how were they saved how could such a messy sinful people be saved how could people who were so clearly affected by the curse of sin how could they receive the blessing of God and the answer is through

Jesus Jacob and Isaac and Abraham they were saved through the one who was promised the one who would come down through the family line of Jacob and if we were to fast forward to Matthew 1 we won't just now we can see a family line laid out for us in that chapter that goes from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob and fast forward fast forward fast forward all the way to Jesus so it's an amazing thing to consider that all these years ago are so far away from here in the life of this flawed man and his messy broken family even there

[53 : 27] God was progressing the details of a plan that would lead some generations down the line to the birth and the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus Jesus who was promised Jesus who came Jesus who lived righteously perfectly the life that none of these guys lived and that none of us have ever lived Jesus lived it for us and then he went to Calvary to die for the sin for the falls for the failures of all his people and to secure the salvation of Jacob and the salvation the blessing of all who will believe in him so do you believe in him it's a question to finish with do you believe in Jesus the one who was promised the one who was righteous the one who died for the guilty and the one who promises salvation to all who will come to him let's pray heavenly father we thank you for your word we thank you for your salvation plan that we can see wherever we look in the scriptures we thank you that even in this dark messy situation you are not absent but lord you

are the god who was at work we thank you that even in the darkest of days and the most perplexing of times and even in the midst of our falls and failures you are not remote from us but you are the god who is able to take even what the devil would design for evil and use it for good for glory for the sanctification of your people so sanctify us lord we pray and help us we pray as we finish to fix our eyes on Jesus the saviour of sinners the one who gives refuge the one who gives strength the one who gives hope to all the Jacobs to all of us help us we pray in Jesus name amen we'll sing to conclude 987 in mission praise here is love vast as the ocean loving kindness as the flood when the prince of life our ransom shed for us his precious blood and think about this with communion in mind who his love will not remember who can cease to sing his praise he can never be forgotten throughout heaven's eternal days we stand to sing to God's praise he has loved us as the ocean loving kindness as the flood where the breads of life are ransom shed for us his precious blood who his love will not remember who can cease to sing his praise he can never be forgotten through our temps eternal days peace and perfect justice is the guilty world in love and now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forever more Amen