

Thanks be to You, our God, for instituting the holy estate of matrimony and preserving it for so many ages against the assaults of that apostate spirit which is an enemy of all that is pure and godly. Make every house Your temple. Fashion the hearts of husband and wife to love children, and cause both parents and children to walk in the faith of Your Son, and be saved. Amen. (Reading the Psalms with Luther, CPH, Ps. 128, p. 312)

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 that 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 in to 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 in to 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 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 serving me 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 to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years.

In Christ Jesus, our eternal Bridegroom, who has made us, the Church, His radiant Bride, dear fellow redeemed:

Most of us probably have or had a "favorite" uncle among our relatives, but there also may be an undesirable uncle in our families, someone who is annoying and unpleasant to be around. Jacob had his undesirable in Uncle Laban. Laban proved himself to be devious and self-serving in his relationship with his nephew. He would work to undermine Jacob while feigning concern for long established customs and a desire to benefit his nephew. Rather, in his sinister plots, he interfered with the marriage of his daughters to his nephew

and their families. But as we can observe from our text for our comfort: **Christ Still Blesses the Estate of Marriage for Sinners.**

I

As God said from the beginning when He instituted marriage in the perfection of the Garden of Eden – He unites one man and one woman, uniting the two into one flesh. Jesus would then add this understanding of God’s original intent by saying: “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” Now while Uncle Laban did not want to separate the union of his daughter with Jacob, his conniving scheme would create marital strife to be sure.

God-ordained marriage is to be between one man and one woman. That was the case from the very beginning. But for some reason God did allow marriages of certain men to multiple women in the lives of several OT figures. For example, when David was confronted by the prophet Nathan with his sin of adultery and murder, he heard God say to him: “I gave you King Saul’s house and ... his wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you much more.”

However, never do we find that having multiple spouses was a good thing in Scripture, it would always be the source of much marital strife. It was no different in Jacob’s life. But can God actually give us something that does such a thing, like happened with David? Yes, but remember, our Lord may give us that for which we desire, even if it is contrary to His revealed will to us, so that in the end we would learn valuable lessons in this life. For example, God did not intend for Israel to have an earthly king. But after they looked around and saw other peoples having a king, they begged God to give them a king. In giving them a king He told them about the negative consequences of having a king and that they would grow to resent it in many ways. And sure enough they became unhappy.

Jacob, who was on the run from his angry brother Esau, was in the original homeland of his grandfather, Abraham and his mother, Rebekah. Already Isaac and Rebekah were disappointed in Esau’s choice of two Hittite women to be his wives. But Jacob was at least pursuing a life and most certainly a wife among their own people. He had stayed a month with his Uncle Laban and the plot was sprung: “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. ... 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 that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.'"

As we see, Laban would actually give his daughter Rachel to Jacob as a wife, but not until he tricked Jacob into taking his older daughter Leah as wife first. Now, I suppose today we would say Jacob had every right to seek an annulment from Leah, but instead he complied and worked another seven years for Rachel. But their society was not as litigious as ours is today. And we can observe this, it was Leah through whom the next son of promise was conceived, namely Judah, not Jacob's favored wife. So God worked through this deception just as He had worked through Jacob and his mother's deception for Jacob to get the blessing from Isaac instead of Esau. *Oh! What a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!*

II

In our Gospel lesson for today we read of Jesus attending the wedding of a couple in Cana. He was not there as a presiding Rabbi, but as a guest. Jesus chose this venue for His very first miracle of blessing. We might critique such a miracle being performed the first time Jesus showed forth His divine glory and suggest that healing someone of a terrible disease or raising someone from the dead would have been more notable and spectacular. But instead we see Jesus interacting with this humble couple in a very mundane need being met, even without their immediate knowledge.

God unites all people in marriage, whether they recognize it or not. He desires to bless their union from beginning to end. Our Lord blesses with such things as children, love, intimacy, companionship, support – physical and spiritual, completion - mentally and emotionally, and the list could go on and on. These are things that God intended for Adam and subsequently Eve in the perfect world. They did not change when sin entered our world and thus our marriages. These blessings are still to be found in marriage today.

A study of Jacob's marital life – with his two wives, sisters Leah and Rachel and their introduction of their handmaidens – Zilpah and Bilhah, reveals how all these blessings from God were corrupted by sin. We see it in the competition with children among all these women and subsequently with the jealousy that would result for the favored sons of Rachel – Joseph and Benjamin.

How have you corrupted the blessings you have received from the hand of the Lord in your marriages or in the marriages of others? What God joined together have you thought of separating? Perhaps you have, not based on what God allows for such dissolution but on purely self-serving motivations like Uncle Laban had.

Reading on from this chapter in Genesis to the end, we see Jacob's life being thrown into turmoil because of these marital blunders, one crisis after another. However God still worked out blessing after blessing for him and his family. So does that justify dismissing the will of God in regard to marriage? - absolutely not! Rather what we can take note of is Jacob remained faithful to his gracious Lord – daily repenting of his sin and desiring grace and forgiveness. This too was passed on to his children, especially as we will note with Joseph.

We live in a culture today, which especially demeans this sacred institution. We can succumb to its “easy” appearing disregard and despise marriage and family, but it will result in spiritual harm for us. Yes, you and I can review our lives and recount our many sins in this area of our lives, but in repenting of them we have forgiveness from God our Savior. While Jesus did not get married, He still fulfilled all righteousness for us in regard to the sixth Commandment. We see it in Cana, supporting this young couple. We see it with His gracious dealings with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well who had been married multiple times and was now living with a man outside marriage. We see it with the woman caught in adultery and Jesus declares to her: “Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.” Oh, my fellow sinners, know and trust that your Savior continues to bless your marriages despite your many sins and failings. Find in that strength the grace to live new lives everyday for Jesus' sake. Amen.