

Text: Genesis 29:1-30

Title: Principles of Match-Making for Married Couples

Time: February 15, 2009 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: One of the good conservative commentaries I have on Genesis was published in 1942 and authored by a man with a German Lutheran background, who taught Old Testament Exegesis in the Capital University Seminary in Columbus Ohio. His name was Herbert Carl Leupold.

Leupold is careful to do battle in his commentary with those in his day, who taught that the Old Testament needed to be deconstructed into a hodgepodge of man-made stories, legends and editorials. Lutherans like Leupold lost that battle as far as their denomination is concerned, and the seminary he taught at eventually merged with what is today Trinity Lutheran Seminary, a school associated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Dr. A. L. Barry, then President of the Missouri-Synod Lutherans, said this about the Evangelical Lutheran Church in a January 2001 publication of the Christian News: "Since ELCA today has now given up what the Bible teaches about Holy Communion, supports abortion and homosexuality, has more than a thousand women pastors, and is taking no action against those in ELCA who deny the virgin birth, deity and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it can no longer be considered a Lutheran Church in any confessional and true sense of the term" [<http://home.hiwaay.net/~contendr/2001/2-1-2001.html>, accessed 2/14/09].

Now even though Leupold was a faithful defender of the faith, he evidently did not think much of Valentine's Day. I have read that the celebration of Valentine's Day really did not catch on in the nation of Germany itself until after World War II, which brought a greater exposure of the customs of the United States to that nation. Evidently, some German immigrants felt the same way.

Leupold writes the following in his introduction to the passage we read this morning: "Writers of our day are inclined to stress particularly the romantic phases of the chapter. These phases are, incidentally, an added ornament; but to regard the whole narrative from this point of view makes the incidental paramount." Well, I have chosen a title for the message this morning that makes me one of these writers: "Principles of Match-Making for Married Couples." There is an important sense in which healthy marriages are not a trivial matter. The topic may have been not very important in 1942, when the American family was still in tact, but today it is of paramount importance; and I believe it to be the major theme of this passage. So I want to notice three principles this morning for match-making among married couples from our passage.

I. Be a match for your spouse by developing an interest in your spouse's interests (vv. 1-9).

Illustration: My family had the opportunity to attend a Baptist church in Virginia, where my mother-in-law's landlord is a deacon. Carl, the landlord, is a saved man and has been a good testimony to Mom. The church is a Bible-preaching church, and the pastor that morning preached a message from John 4, where Jesus meets the woman at the well. I remember the pastor emphasizing the importance of the meeting at a well in Scripture. Every time he said the word *well* in his message, he had his sound man play over the loudspeakers the notes from the Bridal Chorus: "duh-dut-tad-da."

The point he was making was that men and women meeting at wells led to a wedding ceremony at three important times in the Old Testament history of the Jews. We saw the first in chapter 24, where the servant of Abraham met Rebekah in behalf of her future husband Isaac. The second is our passage here in chapter 29, and the third is Moses' introduction to Zipporah, his future wife, in Exodus 2. These are all circumstances during which a match is being made by the Lord.

Application: Now when we think of match-making, we normally think of an activity that is supposed to be done before you get married. We get our idea from eHarmony, right? Fill out the survey, match the compatibilities perfectly, and then get married. If you misunderstood a question, or put your answer on the wrong line, or had simply never heard of eHarmony before you were married, you are simply stuck in an arrangement that is doomed to be less than a perfect match. Your marriage is now doomed to limp along at best or to fail at worse.

The Lord's idea of match-making, however, is very different from this: Husbands, love your wives; wives, follow your husbands (Ephesians 5). In God's view, match-making is an ongoing process that married spouses work at over time.

I believe that our passage indicates that Jacob's love for Rachel and Rachel's willingness to follow Jacob was facilitated by a common interest – they were both shepherds. Jacob evidently had more experience than the men he met that day, for Rachel finds him directing and advising their grazing techniques. This common interest helped them become the match God wanted them to be. You may be very different from your spouse. When you are holding the remote control, you are watching ESPN; when your wife is holding it, you are watching HGTV. You like golfing together; she likes doing home projects together. The differences you have make your marriage a more versatile tool for God's service, but they also threaten your relationship if these differences are handled selfishly. Be a match for your spouse by developing an interest in your spouse's interest.

II. Be a match for your spouse by developing expressions of love for your spouse to enjoy (vv. 10-20).

Illustration: We have an excellent series of tapes by Pastor Mark Minnick on the home. One of my favorite illustrations

he uses is the husband who told him that he loves his wife so much he would be willing to take a bullet for her. She would just have to let her know when it is coming. Well clearly, once the gun goes off and the wife knows the bullet is coming, she does not have the time to tell her husband about the situation. The point here is that heroics are not really the expressions of love that foster a good marriage. Instead, we see in this passage some simpler and more effective expressions of love.

A. Acts of kindness are important expressions of love (v. 10).

Application: The wells of this day were normally holes in the ground, over which was placed a flat stone with a round hole in the middle, on top of which was put a round stone. The stone evidently kept debris and animals out of the well. You will notice that in v. 8 the shepherds had told Jacob that they could not roll the stone away until all the flocks were gathered. Some commentators try to say that the strength of multiple shepherds was needed because the stone was too heavy, and then they say that Jacob demonstrates some superhuman strength in v. 10 either because God supernaturally empowers him or because he simply wants to impress Rachel that much. I think it is better to understand the inability expressed in v. 8 as something contractual. They had agreed to water together. Jacob was not party to any such agreement, so he rolls the stone away for Rachel's flock. A simple act of kindness.

Illustration: Simple acts of kindness go a long way when it comes to expressing love to our spouse. Our best friends and neighbors during the years we lived in Texas saw their home destroyed by unfaithfulness and divorce. The wife especially had gone off the deep end. I can remember learning that the birthday of this wife prior to the disaster had been completely overlooked by the husband and the rest of the family. I cannot help but think that a birthday present may have saved a home. Do the simple acts of kindness for your spouse.

B. Communicating how we feel is an important expression of love (v. 11).

Application: Jacob is very expressive of his feelings for the one he knows God has provided to be his wife. I have seen brothers in Christ become short of breath and tear up a bit expressing thanks to the Lord for the spouse God has provided for them. These are precious expressions. There is an entire book of the Bible that reads like a Hallmark Valentine's Day card that is too personal to read out loud. We need to express our love openly, intimately, and regularly to our spouse.

Illustration: The last chapter of Mrs. Beneth Peters Jones's *Ribbing Him Rightly* is addressed to "Mr. Husband. She describes what she refers to as "Logs" on the train track of love, and her "Log One" is "love assumed rather than expressed" (116).

As men we agree that we love our wives, and that there is ample evidence of this fact of life available for any to see. But somehow, the one who needs to see it the most does not seem able to grasp this. Mrs. Jones explains, "A wife needs her man to say 'I love you.' Those are the sweetest words ever to enter the female ear" (emphasis hers). The Lord constructed our wives to be verbally oriented in their thinking. This makes them tremendously gifted and effective in many important areas. But it also means that they like to be told. "Say it in sunshine. Say it in rain. Say it in prosperity. Say it in adversity. Say it in gladness. Say it in sorrow. Say it when she's an angel. Say it when she's a witch. Speak your love!" (117).

C. Taking a genuine interest in your spouse's family is an important expression of love (vv. 12-20).

Application: Jacob's relationship with his future father-in-law was destined to be a difficult one, but it begins well enough. This closeness to the family of our spouse ought to be one of our goals.

Dr. Griffith of Biblical Family Ministries emphasized this principle in the conference we had here two Octobers ago. The idea he expressed was especially that it is incumbent on the husband to leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife. Jacob does this. Single ladies, if you have someone interested in you but not your family, you need to dump him and wait for someone else.

Notice that part of the interest Jacob takes in the family of his spouse involves a demonstrated ability to meet the financial needs of the future home. Unlike the servant of his grandfather, Jacob comes to Haran with no entourage of gifts as a dowry for his bride to be; he comes empty handed. So he agrees to work seven years to demonstrate an ability to care for the home that he is proposing to share with his future bride, Rachel. This is a good practice for young potential couples to follow; and as husbands we need to be determined to meet the financial needs of our home by God's grace.

III. Be a match for your spouse by refusing to break the vow of marriage, for better or for worse (vv. 21-30).

We have described for us here a set of events that seems in some ways very sordid, very complicated, and very difficult to understand. Yet the one constant that brings Jacob through this passage is his unwavering commitment to the marital vow he makes in verse 18: "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." Nothing is allowed to change this as far as Jacob is concerned. Note that in Genesis 46, where Jacob's wives and sons are listed on their way to Egypt and Joseph, only Rachel is explicitly called Jacob's *wife* (v. 19).

Those of us who are married have vowed a similar vow: "for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health." Jacob experiences a lot of the worse, and yet remains true to his vow. We need to be prepared to do the same by following his example in two ways:

A. Respond forgivingly to the failures of your spouse.

Rachel became Jacob's wife when he completed the seven years of employment (v. 21) by virtue of the vow he had made with Laban in v. 18. That vow was the vow of matrimony, the ultimate expression of love. Yet Laban and consequently Rachel fail to live up to their end of the vow. What is Jacob's response to the failure of these two? Verse 28 - "Jacob did so and completed her week." He had made a vow for better or for worse, and forgiving the failure of his spouse was of paramount importance for his keeping that vow.

The failure of one spouse never excuses the failure of another. That Laban/Rachel failed to live up to their end of the agreement never changes the fact that Jacob made a commitment of love, nor does it ever excuse him from keeping the commitment he made.

B. Respond faithfully in the face of lingering consequences of past failure.

Due to the treachery of Laban, remaining true to Jacob's vow to be the husband of Rachel becomes very complicated with long-term consequences, especially the required presence of Leah. Yet in spite of the incredible complications involved, Jacob remains true to his vow (v. 28).

His persistence in this regard is bewildering to us today because we have become so accustomed to the quick-out solution for marital problems. Jacob had promised to take Rachel to be his wife, and he was determined to endure what he had to in order to be faithful to that promise. Should he have disposed of Leah in the meantime? Perhaps, although the passage seems to indicate that this option may not have been open to him in that day were he to remain true to his vow to be Rachel's husband. Should he have never had children by Ziplah and Bilhah? Undoubtedly. There is plenty here to find

fault with Jacob. But what he did understand was that the marriage vow was for better or for worse, and he keeps his end of the deal for Rachel. Be a match to you spouse by refusing to break the marriage vow, for better or for worse.

Conclusion: Valentine's Day is about the love of match-making. If we are to have strong, godly homes again, married couples need to be determined to work at becoming more and more the match God wants them to be for their spouse. Take an interest in one another, express your love for each other, and never break your vow, for better or for worse, and God will ultimately bless. He did so for Jacob.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching