

Text: Genesis 29:31 – 30:24

Title: “The Lord’s Concern for Our Home”

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Introduction: Alexis de Tocqueville was the French political philosopher who, after touring America in 1831, wrote *Democracy in America* in which he sought to summarize the cause of our country’s greatness. He is normally credited with a quotation that actually does not appear in his book, but which summarizes the theme of the book well:

“America is great because she is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, she will cease to be great.”

One quotation we do find in the book relates specifically to the greatness of the American family in contrast to the European family. Tocqueville wrote in his Chapter 17, “Principal Causes Which Tend to Maintain the Democratic Republic in the United States,” the following about the importance of the American home:

“I do not question that the great austerity of manners which is observable in the United States, arises, in the first instance, from religious faith. . . . Agitated by the tumultuous passions which frequently disturb his dwelling, the European is galled by the obedience which the legislative powers of the State exact. But when the American retires from the turmoil of public life to the bosom of his family, he finds in it the image of order and peace. There his pleasures are simple and natural, his joys are innocent and calm; and as he finds that an orderly life is the surest path to happiness, he accustoms himself without difficulty to moderate his opinions as well as his tastes. Whilst the European endeavors to forget his domestic troubles by agitating society,

the American derives from his own home that love of order which he afterwards carries with him into public affairs.”

Strong families make for strong countries and strong churches. Tocqueville understood this. And he also understood that what made American homes strong in 1831 was their common faith in the Christian God of the Bible. One could describe the family life we read about here this morning in Jacob’s home in lot of ways, but we would not call it “the image of order and peace,” would we?

The home of Jacob struggles to find order and peace for a number of reasons. At the head of the list of these reasons, we would put polygamy. The home violated God’s design for marriage, one man with one woman for life, and so it is suffering consequences for this. There is a lack-of-love problem and there is a lack-of-respect-for-authority problem.

And yet, in spite of all these devastating difficulties, we see a gracious and merciful God care for this home. I want us to see from our passage three ways this morning that He does this, so that we will better understand the way He wants to care for our homes and make them again what they once were in our great land.

I. The Lord sees the needs of our home (29:31-32).

Illustration: I did a search on amazon.com for books related to the topic “marriage counseling.” Assuming there were no repeats among my results, the company presently is offering for sale 9041 different volumes on the topic. #2 on the list really caught my eye. The title of the book is *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work: A Practical Guide from the Country’s Foremost Relationship Expert.*

Application: That is quite a lofty title to claim for yourself – “The Country’s Foremost Relationship Expert.” And not only is it lofty, it is also inaccurate. The country’s foremost relationship expert when it comes to our marriages and our homes is Yahweh.

Our passage presents the Lord as the home expert because He sees. Reuben got his name from this fact (29:31-32). He sees what no other expert can see. He sees the lack of love that troubles your home; He sees the lack of submission that poisons your relationship; He sees the lack of obedience and the lack of example. He understands perfectly the difficulty your home has been through, and He knows exactly how to make it work out. He designed your home; He established your home; and He ought to be recognized as the one in charge of your home. The Lord sees the needs of our homes. Let’s start looking to Him and His word for the solutions our homes need. Man’s expertise in this regard is always a poor and costly substitute.

Before we leave this first point, I want us to see that God claims a sovereign position over not only the home, but also the womb (v. 31). Over and over again the passage tells us not only that women bear sons, but also that they conceive and bear sons. And it tells us that God is sovereign over this entire process, from conception to birth.

This is not to say that taking actions that prevent conception are wrong, but it is to say that once conception happens, God has acted to give life, and He exercises supreme authority over that life even while it is in the womb. To take the life of an unborn child is to usurp the sovereignty of God over the womb.

II. The Lord hears the prayers of our home (29:33 – 30:21).

A. The Lord hears, but His answers take time (29:33-35).

Illustration: My sister's family lived on the island of Guam in the South Pacific for a number of years before moving to Oklahoma in 2007. Kim had flights all scheduled and ticketed for their family's return to the mainland, but they needed some governmental papers, I cannot remember which exactly – but I believe it was a passport, and the local bureaucrats on the island were being notoriously slow and unresponsive about the whole matter. They were giving Kim such a hard time that it appeared that she was going to not receive the papers in time for her flight.

I called my senator's office. I was living in South Carolina at that time, so it was Lindsey Graham and Jim DeMint, and Senator Graham's office was especially helpful. Kim got the papers she needed very shortly after that phone call.

Application: Now a story like that may make you want to reelect Lindsey Graham and throw the bums out in Guam, right? But who is more like the Lord who answers our prayers? Remember how the Lord told the parable about the unjust judge, and how that His disciples would have to keep on asking and keep on seeking and keep on knocking if they were going to receive, find, and have opened?

When it comes to our relationship to the Lord in prayer, we should expect it to be more like dealing with the local bureaucrats in Guam than like the responsiveness of senators from South Carolina. Prayer is a demonstration of our faith that the Lord hears, and because of this God's answers can take time. We need that time to demonstrate our faith and to ready our souls for the right answer.

Leah demonstrates that kind of faith here. In verse 33 she is praying and she testifies that the Lord is hearing with the birth of Simeon.

In verse 34 she is praying hopeful that Jacob would show some attachment to her, and I believe that here the answer finally comes. Did you notice the phrase, "Therefore he was named Levi." That phrase would normally be translated, "Therefore, he called his name Levi." In every other case, the wife of Jacob names the son. Only in this case is the phrase different. I believe that Jacob takes the initiative here, in answer to Leah's prayers, to name Levi for his attachment to Leah. When the fourth child comes, Judah (v. 35), Leah is rejoicing in the joy of answered patient prayer. Our prayers need to be patient prayers if they are to be answered prayers.

But this joy is short-lived, because as we also see from what follows in chapter 30 another truth about our prayer life.

B. Because His answers take time, we often chose powerless substitutes for patient prayer (30:1-21).

1. Resentment toward others fails us where prayer lacks patience (30:1).

It did not seem fair to Rachel that Leah had four sons while she was barren. The inequities, injustices, and difficulties of life are things that we must handle in prayer, or they will become a problem in terms of our relationship with others. Rachel gets jealous of Leah and discontent with her own humble circumstances because she is not sustained in this context by her prayer life.

She lives the opposite of the advice of Peter (1 Pet. 5:6-7): "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of

God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." Prayer can help us be humble; prayer can help us wait for exalting; prayer can keep us content.

2. Reliance on others fails us where prayer lacks patience (30:1-2).

When we fail to pray, we begin to expect men to do for us what only God can. We have a need for the fellowship, sustenance, and joy of a prayer-relationship with the God of heaven. When we put things in this place, that place that should only be a place for God, we are actually bowing down to idols, things that cannot satisfy, cannot save, cannot empower, and cannot meet the need of our hearts and home.

Do not rely on your spouse and kids for what only the fruit of the Spirit can give: a life of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance. Only God can give you these things, and you shall not have them without prayer.

3. Degrading schemes fail us where prayer lacks patience (30:3-13).

When degrading schemes take the place of obedience to the Word of God, because we have just gotten fed up with the time it takes for patient prayer to work, we find that we begin to credit God with sanctioning what we have done in much the same way the world credits good luck.

Rachel says "God vindicated me" via adultery; Leah says "I had some real good luck" via adultery. Both phrases are semantically equal. When we are doing things contrary to the

Word of God, they may be successful or lucky, but we should not confuse that with the blessing of God on our disobedience.

4. Disorder fails us where prayer lacks patience (30:14-21).

Remember Tocqueville's comment about the order of the American home? He said: "But when the American retires from the turmoil of public life to the bosom of his family, he finds in it the image of order and peace."

The great wisdom of that comment lies in its ability to connect peace with order. Jacob's home knew little peace because it new little order. He fails to provide spiritual leadership, and his wives fail to provide followership. The women are calling the shots in the home here, and the whole thing is a superstitious, chaotic mess.

Men need to provide leadership, and if they do not 1 Peter 3:1-2 tells us how wives are to respond: "In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior." Peter makes plain that order in the home is even more valuable to it than demanding that your husband obey God's word.

III. The Lord remembers the covenant of our home (30:22-24).

Application: Rachel is one of three people in Genesis whom the Lord is said to have "remembered." The other two are Noah (8:1) and Abraham (19:29). In every case what God is remembering specifically is a covenant, and the same is true here for Rachel. She was the wife of covenant (29:18).

We need to remember the covenant of our home the way the Lord does. He does not forget it; neither should we. We need to let Him be sovereign over our homes, and faithfulness to the covenant that He remembers is where the happiness of the home begins.

Conclusion: The health of our nation and churches will be determined by the health of our homes. We need the Lord to take away our reproach as He did for Rachel. For her, polygamy and barrenness reproached her. For us, divorce, infidelity, and rebellion reproach our home. Let's patiently pray that the Lord would remember the covenant of our homes, and that He would cause us to remember it too.

“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