

SHIFT Sermon Series: WEEK THREE
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A LARGE STONE ON THE WELL

A reality of spiritual work is that we can spend a lot of time working with religious material and still not really get it. We may know some teachings from the Word; we may be able to discuss religious ideas at length; we may even have seen glimpses of what lies within the Word and the plan that God has for us; and yet we still don't really get it. This is pictured by Jacob coming to a well but it being covered by a large stone.

What's been motivating Jacob so far? A desire for wealth, a desire to be more important than his brother, self-preservation—not particularly good motivations. We start the same way—we want to have everything we like, we want to be important, we want to get our way in everything. And, though we might not want to admit it, this is at least part of what motivates us to study religion. We want to impress people with our spiritual knowledge;

To the extent that someone is under the influence of self-love and love of the world, and of the desires that go with these loves, the Word is to him closed up. For those loves have self as the end in view, an end which fosters natural light but extinguishes heavenly light. As a result people see clearly the things that belong to self and the world but nothing whatever of those that belong to the Lord and to His kingdom. When this is so they may indeed read the Word, but their end in view is the increase of personal position and wealth, or that they may be seen by others; or else they read it because it is the done thing and therefore merely from force of habit, or they read it as a religious duty, but without any amendment of life in view. To these people the Word has in different ways become closed up. (Secrets of Heaven 3769:3)

we want to be able to use religious arguments to support what we want to do; we love being “right.” When these sorts of things are motivating us we cannot get to the life giving truths that lie within the Word but instead we stay on the hard stony surface, looking for things to use to our advantage.

Fortunately, though, the Lord has a way of helping us move beyond this step on the stairway and it's different than we might think.

SEEING RACHEL

What motivates you to work on your spiritual life? What made you decide to do this program? One thing that motivates people to change is that something really

isn't working about the way their life is currently going. Think of Jacob leaving Canaan because Esau was threatening to kill him. So far we've mostly been focusing on that side of things—the side where we have to work to identify a problem and gain knowledge so that we can understand the problem and how to address it.

But there was also another reason why Jacob left Canaan and there's another kind of motivation that can inspire us to work on our spiritual lives. Jacob was meant to find a wife and when he found Rachel his life was changed forever.

“And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother” (Genesis 29:10).

Rachel is “beautiful of form and appearance” (Genesis 29:17) and represents a beautiful vision of who we want to be and a desire to become that person. “I want to be a person who always has time for other people, even if I’m busy.” “I want to be a more patient person, to not get upset when my children don’t always do what I ask them to.” “I want to be humble—not hung up on myself and being successful but focused on other people and how I can serve them.”

This is the first time in the story when Jacob has been motivated to do something for someone other than himself and it can be the same way in our lives. We notice some people who need help and feel called to do something for them. We look at our wife and children and really want them to have a good husband and father. Rachel is a desire to become a better person, not for our own sakes, but for the sake of other people.

OPENING THE WELL

When we are motivated by an unselfish desire to become a better person we are then able to get beyond the surface of the Word; just like Jacob, inspired by seeing Rachel, was somehow able to roll the stone off the well and water the flock that Rachel was leading. There are two reasons this works. First, on a deeper level, the Word is all about how to become a better person—how to love the Lord our God and our neighbor as ourselves. And if we’re looking for that, we will find it. And second, and more importantly, Rachel represents not just a desire to know how to be a better person but a desire to be a better person—a desire to learn the truth so that it can be applied today. That humble desire to learn the truth so that we can apply it, more than anything else, is the key to opening the Word.

After Jacob had opened the well he “kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept” (Genesis 29:11). Especially when we’ve become very aware of our shortcomings, it can be a profound experience to remember who it is we want to be. And this can inspire us to do work on our spiritual lives with a new energy and excitement.

Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ Jesus said to him, ‘“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 22:35-40)

WORKING FOR RACHEL

Jacob’s love for Rachel inspires him to do far more than just open the well. Even though his original intention seems to have been to only stay in Haran for a short period of time,

Jacob agrees to serve Laban for seven years to earn the right to marry Rachel. Seven years is a long time. Imagine being engaged for seven years. And yet the years “seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her” (Genesis 29:20).

Have you ever been so focussed on a project that the hours feel like minutes? Maybe you're working on a restoring a newly bought house, staying up late into the night for weeks on end, covered in paint and dust, barely held back by lack of sleep because you're so eager to get the home ready for your family. Or maybe you've been working on a song to sing for a friend's wedding, and you don't mind using up every minute of free time to make sure the song is as special as you know it could be.

We can have similar experiences in our spiritual work. Times when we are inspired to be a better person and seem to be able to make progress. We catch ourselves before we lose our temper. We find ways of getting out of our own heads and lives more and do a better job of making time for the people around us. These states are gifts from the Lord and can help sustain us through our whole process of spiritual growth. Enjoy them and make the most of them.