

99-09-22a

Let's continue our worship this Sunday morning by turning for our Scripture reading to Philippians chapter 1. Philippians chapter 1. There is a principle which has been brought to my mind of late that has been illustrated in a number of ways. We know that in the faith, hope, and love trilogy, or threefold aspect of the Christian life, faith being the means, hope as the motivation, and love as the byproduct or the outcome, the fruit of our lives is born and measured in many respects in love, that it has two directions. We have a vertical and a horizontal.

People have illustrated this literally with the cross of Christ, that you have vertical as a priority because our relationship with God comes first, but there is also the horizontal aspect of our love. The entire Old Testament was summed up by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Law and the Prophets. He said that the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength, and the second is like unto it, to love our neighbor as ourselves.

In these two commands, all the Law and the Prophets are summed up. We have been emphasizing for some time now, and lately especially, the importance of making sure that our relationship with God is set on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ, and that we understand who we are in Christ, and why we are here, and what our calling is, and that first and foremost we are called to bear fruit, the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit that is measured in the soul, not in the world. When you find a principle in Scripture, there is an observation that I have made, that any time you find an outstanding doctrine or principle or promise in the Word of God, there is always at least one other that should be considered along with it, to balance it and make sure that we don't carry it to an extreme.

There is a balance reflected in that horizontal and vertical relationship, that to focus exclusively on our relationship with God, we run the risk of ignoring our responsibilities in the horizontal arena, and just as we are to develop love and joy and peace and patience in the soul, as we contemplate our relationship with God, and as we move through life, living it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men, if we took that alone, and we said, well, I'm going to disregard men, and I'm just going to focus on trying to be pleasing in the Lord's sight, we would run the risk of ignoring opportunities, and that second commandment, to love our neighbor as ourselves. So in our Scripture reading this morning, we see Paul, as he talks to the believers at Philippi, exploring both aspects of the believer's areas of responsibility. We're going to begin in chapter 1, verse 19, and we will read through chapter 2, verse 17.

Paul, in talking about the fact that Christ is preached, even though his own personal circumstances have not been what you would consider to be ideal, he has been arrested, he is imprisoned, he is under the watchful eye of the palace guard in his imprisonment, but his chains are in Christ, and this has become evident to all of those around him, and his life and his circumstances, although not what we would choose, and probably not what he would have chosen, given his druthers, have nevertheless turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, and this gives Paul great joy. And he says, "In every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached, and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice."

Then in verse 19 he says, "For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance, through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death." The wonderful thing when you think about Christ being magnified in our lives is that this is something that is in view in both of those areas. When God looks at our lives, does he see the glory of Christ reflected? Hopefully so.

That's Christ being magnified in our body. But there is also the human observation of that, and this is what Paul also has in view here, that he will not be ashamed, but with boldness, as always, so also now, Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. Then he says, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

You may recall that I believe that what Paul actually originally wrote here is not Christos, but Chrestos, which is the Greek word that means something that is good. For me to live is good, and to die is better, is what he's saying. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor.

That's the good. Yet what I shall choose I cannot tell, for I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. And you can see that if you amend, and I think correct, verse 21, Paul—it's the topic sentence of a paragraph.

He says, "Living is good and dying is better. If I live on in the flesh, this is fruit from labor, but it's hard for me to choose. I'm hard pressed between the two because I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better."

Nevertheless, to remain in the flesh is needful for you, and that's a good thing. That's Chrestos, C-H-R-E-S-T-O-S in the Greek, rather than C-H-R-I-S-T-O-S. But you can imagine that in the early days of copying this manuscript, if someone inadvertently said Christ, they would never change it back.

How could you take the name of Christ out of a passage? But it's always been somewhat of a puzzlement, and it's given launch to no end of sermons: "For me to live as Christ." It's kind of a strange statement. It's been invested with all kinds of poetic meaning, but in the context, I think Chrestos makes more sense.

To live on in the flesh is more needful for you. Being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Christ Jesus by my coming to you again. What's the point here? For Paul, the better thing, as far as his personal interest is concerned, would be to depart and to be with Christ. Given a preference, just strictly looking at it from a selfish point of view, what could be better than having already had a wonderful ministry as an apostle, to depart and be with Christ?

But yet, he says, I know it's needful for you that I remain here in the flesh and continue with you all for your progress and your joy of faith. So, in a sense, this is a self-sacrificial point of view, and we know that this is one of the great ways of expressing the definition of love. Love is sacrificial toward self and beneficial toward others. And so, although Paul could pray for release from this earthly life, and from chains and imprisonment and the physical afflictions that we know he had, and the cares of this daily life, to depart and be with Christ, he is willing to forego that and remain here because of his love for fellow believers. So, you see that tension that ties together the horizontal with the vertical aspects of love in the soul of a believer.

And it's illustrated here with Paul. And when you think about it, Paul, who had seen Jesus Christ, who had heard the voice of Jesus Christ, who had been transported at one point into the third heaven and had seen things that he couldn't even talk about, would have that longing to go and be with Christ, probably in a way that we can't even begin to understand. And yet, he is willing to put that on hold, to delay that joy of his own for the sake of his fellow believers.

And what is the specific expression of that love? "Continue with you all for your progress and your joy of faith." That's what he says in verse 25. So, then he encourages the Philippian believers, and by extension, we are encouraged to have a similar attitude.

Look at verse 27. "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel, not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of deliverance, and that from God. For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear is in me."

And once again, this is an expression of a balancing principle. We have noted, for example, in looking at Matthew 28:19, in Jesus' instructions to the apostles, you find it again in Acts 1:8, their mission of being ambassadors for Christ, being witnesses to him in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the outermost parts of the earth. And we have noted that this was a specific instruction for them. It is not primarily to be taken as the marching orders for the entire church. This was the mission of the apostles.

And yet, we find here Paul saying that believers should have the same conflict that they have seen in Paul and that is in him, which is that tension of desire that on the one hand, what a great thing to go and be with Christ. On the other hand, it is necessary for us to remain in this life, to learn, to grow, and to minister to one another for the progress and joy of faith. And so we remain as an encouragement to one another. We are to strive together for the faith of the gospel. This is an exhortation to fellowship and to a relationship with other believers and to develop the horizontal aspects of love as well as the vertical.

And this is a wonderful passage for meditation and reflection because we know that our relationship with God has priority and we know that things have to be done out of faith and out of hope and out of love that develops as we learn and grow in our personal relationship with God. The easy thing and the slippery slope to fall down is to begin to substitute a works-based ministry or a superficial form of fellowship and ministry for one that is

truly rooted in a heart of faith and a heart that has been brought to maturity through the things that we emphasize.

But this is what Paul begins to talk about in chapter 2. "Therefore, if there is any consolation in Christ, if there is any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness or humility of mind, let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

This is the sound scriptural basis for what has come to be known as outreach or ministry. It is legitimate, it is biblical, it is a part of the fruit of the Spirit that is born in our souls. We just have to caution ourselves because so much of what is done today is not an extension of spiritual growth.

It is rather a superficial and works-based effort to achieve righteousness, or it is a zeal for God, not according to knowledge. But to recognize that much of what is done in the church today fails the test of being genuine fruit, we do not want to lose the baby with the bathwater, so to speak, and say, "Well, so much of that is done in a bad way. We are going to avoid that."

This reminds me of what happens in the church where there was sort of a truism going around some years ago that all of the problems in a church start in the choir. The choir gets together and they conspire and gossip and talk, and all of these bad things come out of the choir, and this is the source of division and splits and so forth. So some churches said, "Well, we will fix that. We just won't have a choir." And that is getting an infected finger and chopping off your arm instead of just treating the point of the problem.

So we don't want to do that. We don't want to say, "Well, since much of ministry today is executed in a wrong way, we just won't have any ministry." We want to understand the right and biblical way to function in that area. And so Paul gives us the means of so doing in verses 5 and following.

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Effective ministry, and by effective I mean pleasing to God. When God looks at it, he sees the glory of Christ. When believers who have discernment look at it, they see the glory of Christ. This is how it is done. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

It begins in the thinking. It begins in the motivation. He, being in the form of God, did not consider it a thing to be grasped. It says robbery in your New King James, but it's not robbery. Robbery is when you go and grasp something that doesn't belong to you. But he did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, to be seized and held on to. He let go of it. He made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and came, or coming, in the likeness of men.

Now think about this. What is our goal as believers in our growth? We're pursuing Christ likeness, aren't we? We want to be more like him. One of the hymns that Dan played at the opening of the service this morning, "More and More About Jesus." We want to learn about him and grow to be like him. That's our goal. Our mission in life is to be like him.

Yet in some circles we pursue that so exclusively that that's the thing to be grasped. We become single-minded in the development of our spiritual life and our spiritual growth, almost to the exclusion of all else. We can begin to overlook opportunities to express our Christ likeness because to be like Christ is to be selfless and to be outward looking. Jesus didn't sit up there at the right hand of the Father and say, "Well, those poor humans down there in their sinful fallen state." He took an action. He made a movement in our direction that was not prompted by any action on our part.

But he initiated by leaving his Father's side, turning loose of equality with the Father and coming down and taking on the form of a servant. This is the mind of Christ. Paul says this is the mind that we need to have ourselves. He made himself of no reputation. He took on the form of a bondservant, coming in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross, which was a humiliating death.

Therefore God also has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and of those on the earth and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

The love expressed by the Lord Jesus in being selfless—and you remember this is what Paul was saying earlier. He says, you know, my circumstances are not that great. He is imprisoned and so forth, but it is working out to the glory of God and that pleases him. He is willing to stay here on this earth rather than going to be with God for the sake of believers who he can encourage in the faith and encourage in growth. That is the mind illustrated in Jesus' case, illustrated in Paul's case. That is the mind that is to be in us.

So a natural result of our growth should be a concern for others and a desire to find legitimate and God-glorifying ways to express that love and that selflessness. Verse 12: “Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own deliverance with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you, both to will and to do, his good pleasure.”

What does this mean, work out your own salvation or your own deliverance? This is not so much working out our eternal salvation from the lake of fire, but you remember the first chapter of—I always get confused whether it is Colossians or Galatians—where Paul says that Christ died to deliver us out of this present evil age. We can have a life that counts for something. We have a life of meaning and definition and purpose. We have been delivered from the waste and the fruitlessness that characterizes human life apart from God through not only our salvation, but through our growth in Christ.

We have learned, we have been taught how to redeem the time, how to have the power of God active in our lives, and how to bear eternal fruit. Paul says here, not just when he is present, but also in his absence, work out that deliverance with fear and trembling. It is God working in us to will and to do his good pleasure.

So do all things without complaining and disputing, so that you may become blameless and harmless children of God, without fault, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world. It reminds us of what Jesus told the disciples: “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

That is the tricky part because a lot of people have this little light of mine and they are going to let it shine, but it shines on them. When people see their good works, they glorify the people doing the good works, rather than glorifying our Father who is in heaven. Rather than saying, “Well, I am just not going to have any light shining at all, because it is liable to shine on me instead of the Lord,” we need to learn how to let our light so shine, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, so that God is glorified.

Verse 16, holding fast the word of life. This is the way to do that. To hold fast the word of life. To keep our roots in our vertical relationship with God and make sure that our horizontal expressions are a result of and are rooted in an understanding of God and his purpose. One of the fundamental departures in modern Christianity is to misunderstand God's purpose and seek to glorify God in ministry, in ways that really don't glorify him, because it really doesn't reflect his purpose.

Misunderstanding God's purpose, misunderstanding God's plan, is going to inevitably lead to bad implementation in the horizontal realm. So we need to hold fast the word of life. Paul says, “So that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason, you also be glad and rejoice with me.”

Once again, it's an expression of the sacrificial-toward-self, beneficial-toward-others attitude, which Jesus Christ had, which was mirrored in the life of Paul, and which should also be mirrored in our lives. So as we spend our time in meditation and reflection on the word of God, the things that we learn, the growth that we experience in our own souls, we also want to be alert and sensitive to the opportunities that God brings our way to let that light shine in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

The great pitfall and the thing that we want to avoid is doing that in a wrong way, doing it in a self-glorifying way, failing to see those opportunities, failing to take advantage of them because of the failures of others in that area. It's an area that requires meditation. It requires reflection. It requires us to actively hold fast the word of life so that we do those things in a way that is pleasing in God's sight and glorifying to him.

There are legitimate and wonderful ways to express our love in the horizontal. There are ways in which we can be lights that shine in the world. Given a choice of shining badly or not shining at all, I would choose to not shine at all. I would rather err by not glorifying anybody than err by glorifying myself rather than the ultimate goal, which is to glorify God.

But as we learn and as we grow, we gain discernment. God the Holy Spirit, when we cultivate his use of the word of God in our souls to guide us and to help us see the straight path, the narrow way that leads to life, we don't want to neglect the opportunities that God brings us because as we grow those opportunities will come. We have an obligation. It is a part of our life as believers to learn to do this in a right way. The fact that many around us are failing, that many have failed in the past, should not prevent us from even making the attempt. We want to try to do this and do it in the right way.

So that is a balancing principle. It is something that we want to think about not only individually but also as a church, as a fellowship of believers, to watch for those opportunities. I have been thinking about this, and we'll have a congregational meeting, if you will, after class today very briefly to discuss some of the ways in which we might be able to do this.

But let's return now to our study of the word of God in Genesis. We resume our study this morning in chapter 28. We have seen that the focus of the story has shifted in our era of the patriarchs, the age of the patriarchs, Abraham and Isaac. It is now moving to Jacob. We've seen the comparison and the contrast of Jacob and Esau, who are twins. They have the same parents, the same household, the same opportunities.

Esau is in fact the favored one. He is the firstborn. And yet because of the decisions that he makes, the priorities that he sets, he gives away what is rightfully his, his by birthright. He gives away his birthright. The blessing that comes to the firstborn, he misses out on.

Why is there this big deception? We always wrestle with this idea that he was cheated out of it by deception. Why does God allow this to happen? Why doesn't Esau return 20 minutes sooner and interrupt the scene between Jacob and Isaac? Why does God allow Rebekah to hatch this plot and have it go forward? It is not a right thing to lie. It is not a right thing to deceive. We don't see a wonderful God-glorifying picture as Isaac blesses Jacob who is standing there wrapped in the steaming skins of the goats, passing himself off as his brother.

It is not a noble scene. It is not worthy of Abraham and God speaking with Abraham in front of the tent and saying, "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I am about to do?" It is not in that category at all. It is ignominious. It is underhanded. It doesn't reflect the glory of God. And yet God incorporates it into his plan.

And as we are going to see this morning, God honors the transaction that takes place in the tent of Isaac. And it is an amazing thing. And it gives us pause for thought. And it is something worthy of our meditation and reflection. Even the mistakes, even the failures in our lives are woven into the fabric of God's plan and can result in good.

I think the most outstanding example of this is the betrayal of the Lord Jesus Christ by Judas. That is in nobody's definition a good thing. You can't find a way to make Judas betraying the Lord Jesus for money a good thing. Anybody who hears tell of that in any walk of life is not going to say, "Go Judas. Yay Judas. Let's put Judas' face." You don't find people naming all kinds of biblical names. You don't find people naming their child Judas, do you?

He is a byword unto this day. He and his name represent a curse, always have and always will. He wasn't any great shakes even before the betrayal where his focus was on the money box from which he would pilfer. But if you think about it, the greatest event in human history and the means by which we obtain our salvation is the cross of Christ. And God uses the actions of Judas to bring that about. God incorporates the failure of Judas into his plan, and it is that betrayal.

It's the same thing with the denials by Peter. That isn't a happy event. Certainly the low point in Peter's life, something which drove him to great despair afterward. He wept bitter tears and was very insecure in the presence of the Lord after the resurrection because of it. It was a wound in his soul that needed to be healed and was healed through the gracious words of Jesus on the shore of the lake there when he asks Peter the three questions, "Do you love me?" and gives him the means of demonstrating that love. "Feed the sheep. Care for the lambs." Jesus says, "Feed my sheep." Once again, getting past personal failure and looking to the expression of love toward others.

But what we want to notice here is this is not an act that we can look at and find divine approval or our own approval. When we look at Jacob and Rebekah conspiring together to deceive Esau—Esau is trying to do

something that is wrong. I'm sorry, Isaac. Maybe it's because they both start with vowels. Isaac is trying to do something that is wrong by blessing Esau. He knows better.

The word of God has already come down and said, "The elder shall serve the younger." But Isaac is, for his own reasons and his own purposes, trying to get around that. And we're tempted to see two wrongs making a right here. Isaac trying to do the wrong thing by blessing Esau. Rebekah and Jacob doing the wrong thing in deceiving Isaac and obtaining the blessing for Jacob.

And the outcome is not happy. This whole sordid affair is not good. But God will work it together for good. And there just isn't any getting around it. God incorporates these failures into his plan. He doesn't excuse them. He doesn't stop them. He doesn't prevent them.

He doesn't prevent Isaac from saying what he says to Esau. He doesn't prevent Rebekah and Jacob from perpetrating the deception. But what he does do is incorporate these things into his plan and purpose. Because it is God's purpose that Jacob be the line of blessing. That Jacob be the line through which the covenant promises that God made to Abraham will be fulfilled. And you just can't get around it. God incorporates these things into his plan.

We're going to see this as one of the themes of Genesis that is more and more evident. It is through the failure of Adam and Eve in the garden that God is going to reveal his character and reveal his grace. Without the fall, you don't have the plan of salvation. And without the plan of salvation, you don't see the mercy and the grace of God manifested. God did not excuse. God did not prevent the failure in the garden. But God incorporates it. In fact, it is essential in the fabric of God's plan.

The same is true of the murder of Abel. Could God have prevented Cain's murder of Abel? Could God have appeared and parted the heavens and said, as he did to Abraham up on Mount Moriah, as the knife is about to be plunged into Abel's neck by Cain—could God have stopped that? Could he have spoken from heaven and prevented it? He could have, and he did not. Because although it is a sin, although it is something that will result in Cain's expulsion and wandering as a fugitive and a vagabond, it results in the end of Abel's life.

Abel, who is the obedient one, the faithful one, it doesn't seem like there's any way that could be a good thing, but God works it together for good. And the picture that is provided to us in the death of Abel and his resurrection, as it were, through his younger brother Seth, so that the line of faith and promise will continue, this is all incorporated into the woven threads of God's plan revealed in the pages of Scripture.

God works all things together for good, to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose, who recognize that calling, who respond to the calling, who live out that calling. Even the failures, even the sins, will work together for good. And it's a powerful thing. It is something that requires reflection and meditation on our part because it's an easy thing to echo Paul's words, "Well, shall we continue to sin so that grace may abound?" That's certainly not the goal. But neither are we to be impeded by our failures or our sins or the sins and failures of others. To recognize that God will work these things together for good, to move forward and to seek to live in a way that is pleasing in his sight.

So, having seen these things, we know that Esau, in verse 41 of chapter 27, hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him. Esau said in his heart, "The days of mourning for my father are at hand. I will kill my brother Jacob when Isaac dies."

We have to ask ourselves, why does Esau decide that he will wait until Isaac has died to kill his brother Jacob? Isaac is obviously enfeebled. He's not going to rise up and do anything physical to Esau. If Esau were to walk right over to his brother's tent and slay him, why does he want to wait until the days of mourning for Isaac? What is his hope, do you think?

If he waits until Isaac has passed away to kill his brother Jacob, to whom will all of the worldly goods go? He's the next of kin. In that way, he could retrieve what has been lost, the double portion, in fact, the entire portion of Isaac's goods. Is he in that way going to obtain the birthright that is a part of the birthright and that is a part of the right of the firstborn? He has no hope of retrieving that through a murder, does he?

So, what is in his heart? This is another reflection. This is another expression of the reason why Esau, although the firstborn, does not obtain the birthright, does not obtain the blessing, why God allows this to be taken from him and ensures that it doesn't go to him. Because in his heart, his desire is for the material, to satisfy his own

appetites. It is satisfaction of his appetites that got him in trouble in the first place, isn't it? Wanting the stew and trading away his birthright.

Not valuing the spiritual aspect of the blessing. Why does Esau cry out when he discovers that Jacob has received the blessing? He already knows that he doesn't have the birthright, the area of possessions. Why is he so upset that there is no blessing? Is he concerned about relationship with God and carrying forward the plan and the purpose of God, manifesting through himself and his descendants the covenant promises and blessing of God that was made to Abraham? Is that what is on Esau's mind when he cries out these bitter tears?

What was he really after? It is hard to know because the blessing, the prophecy that is pronounced on the head of the sons, on the deathbed of the father, is largely one of, this is what your future is going to be. You get the idea that he has a superstition or a mystical view of the blessing, that even though he has lost the birthright and the actual inheritance of the possessions, that he could regain this through the pronouncement of his father. His father saying, "You will have the fruit of the dew of heaven and the bounty of the earth." That somehow what he has traded away in terms of his father's current possessions, he can get back through a mystical pronouncement by his father.

But in none of this does he cry out to God. He doesn't go to God and say, "Oh Lord, why am I not privy to your blessing and to your covenant?" He doesn't even do like Hagar does and respond to God and look to God for a solution to this. It all seems to be in the earthly realm.

But we have to ask ourselves this question. Why is he so upset if the blessing is divine favor? Why does he not pursue it on his own? Why does he cry these bitter tears? What does he think he is going to gain by murdering Jacob after Isaac's death? What does he think he is going to gain? Primarily here we get the idea that he is going to revenge himself on his brother. That he is so embittered that the satisfaction of ending Jacob's life is a goal in and of itself.

And that through that he is going to regain at least the birthright, the possessions that would have fallen to Jacob. Jacob at this time has no heirs or assigns. He is not married. He has no children. So to murder Jacob is to retrieve the inheritance of Isaac. Why does he want to wait until Isaac is dead? Isaac could dispossess him as a murderer and give his inheritance to a servant in the house as Abraham contemplated doing with his servant.

So by waiting until Isaac is dead he is not going to disappoint his father. He is not going to be estranged from his father. The only rationale I can figure out is he figures he is going to get the possessions.

This is where we will pause and take our break. Because when we come back we are going to find Rebekah fearing for Jacob's life, sending him away. And we are going to enter a new section in Genesis, a new cycle of stories. We have been in the Jacob and Esau realm. Jacob is going to be removed from that. And we are going to enter into the Jacob-Laban period, which will last for some 20 years in the life of Jacob.

And as it begins we are going to find a very striking episode taking place. And this is going to be the left bracket, which will be complemented by a right bracket after these 20 years are ended. And it is a divine action. It is a divine intervention. Something we want to look at closely. Because what has Jacob done to merit this? What is it about Jacob that is going to cause God to come in?