

Yes. Here is the sermon translated into English.

Well then, let us begin with a word of prayer.

Loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your grace.

Thank you for gathering us here this morning.

From this moment, we will listen to your word. Please open our hearts.

And please help us to understand well the will you wish for us to grasp now.

We pray in gratitude, in the name of our beloved Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Good morning.

Good morning.

Today, I had you read only one verse, but the full passage was actually quite long, so I thought it would be too much to read it all and decided on just one verse.

The content covers from Genesis chapter 29, verse 1 through to verse 30.

Yes. I will discuss the contents of Genesis 29, verses 1 to 30, by dividing it into about three parts.

The first part is from verse 1 to 14.

Then, from verse 15 to 20. And the final part is from verse 21 to 30.

From chapter 29, this is the passage where Jacob truly goes out on his own to the land of Haran.

When I look at Jacob's life as a whole, what I recall is the word from Psalm 119, verse 71.

I will read that first. It is Psalm 119, verse 71.

Yes. I will read it.

"It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees."

When I look at Jacob's life in its entirety, this is the verse I remember most often.

Looking at Jacob's life, in the beginning, when he was at home, he and his mother deceived Esau to take his birthright and blessing, and he also deceived Isaac to take the blessing.

However, after he went to Haran, it was his turn to be deceived and to endure hardship.

Through such experiences of being deceived and struggling, Jacob's own character is transformed.

When I see this, the verse from Psalm 119:71, "It was good for me to be afflicted," feels like a very fitting confession.

We, too, undergo various forms of training by Jesus.

Through that, we ourselves are changed.

We are remade into the likeness of Jesus.

In that process, the parts of us that need to change do change, while the parts that don't need to change remain, and we continue to grow.

In this way, we as a church become like Jesus.

In the church, there are truly many different kinds of people.

People with various personalities and gifts gather, and that becomes the church.

While everyone is gradually transformed by Jesus, the fact that each person's individuality still exists—this is the church.

In this respect, it is perhaps a little different from a cult.

If it becomes a cult-like religious group, everyone becomes like a cookie-cutter mold, with the same expressions, the same way of speaking, the same way of thinking, and the same way of laughing.

The Christian church is different from that.

In the Christian church, the unique aspects of each person's personality and character remain as they are, yet somehow, everyone comes to resemble Jesus. That is the kind of place it is.

Yes. From today, we continue the story of Jacob, which has been ongoing for a while. This is the part where Jacob becomes independent from his family and begins his own life. As we go through this, please also pay attention to what parts of Jacob change and what parts do not.

First, today we will begin with chapter 29, from verse 1 to 14.

Here, Jacob goes to the land of Haran and meets some shepherds.

I will read from verse 1 to 5.

"Then Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples. There he saw a well in the open country, with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well. The stone over the mouth of the well was large. When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well's mouth and water the sheep. Then they would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well. Jacob asked the shepherds, 'My brothers, where are you from?' 'We're from Haran,' they replied. He said to them, 'Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?' 'Yes, we know him,' they answered."

From this point, God's amazing and miraculous work begins.

Jacob is walking along.

He finds a well, and beside it are three flocks of sheep.

He tries talking to the shepherds there.

When he asks the shepherds, they all say they came from Haran.

And when Jacob asks, "Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?" they all say they know him.

From here, God's plan, or rather His providence, begins to unfold.

Here, on top of the well, there is a large stone.

It's in the latter half of Genesis 29, verse 2: "The stone over the mouth of the well was large."

This is the cover on top of the well.

A large stone is placed there as a lid.

Yes. As we read a little further, this becomes a key point.

I will read from chapter 29, verses 6 to 8.

"Then Jacob asked them, 'Is he well?' 'Yes, he is,' they said, 'and here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep.' 'Look,' he said, 'the sun is still high; it is not yet time to gather the flocks. Water the sheep and take them back to pasture.' 'We can't,' they replied, 'until all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep.'"

Here, Jacob asks, "Is he well?" and they reply, "Yes, he is, and here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep."

At this point, Jacob probably saw from a distance what kind of person Rachel was; he seemed to have understood.

After that, Jacob likely wanted to speak with Rachel alone, just the two of them.

And so in verse 7, Jacob says:

"Look, the sun is still high; it is not yet time to gather the flocks. Water the sheep and take them back to pasture."

He is saying, "You are all just sitting here doing nothing, but you should hurry up, water the sheep, and take them back out to graze. Why don't you do that?"

This is a very serious suggestion, but it also carries the nuance of, "Hey, could you all please leave quickly?" That's the kind of expression it is.

However, Jacob, though a stranger, gives orders in a bossy way.

He says something like, "Aren't you all being a bit lazy? Why don't you work a little harder?" and the shepherds are probably a bit irritated by this.

Before this, they had been answering him curtly, but suddenly they start talking a lot.

They said, "We can't, until all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep."

Jacob wants them to hurry up and leave, but instead of doing so, they begin to talk at length, even though he hadn't asked for a long explanation. That is what the shepherds did.

From the words of these shepherds, we can understand that the stone on the mouth of the well seems to be quite large and heavy.

It seems it was a large stone that required all the shepherds to gather and roll it away together with a great effort.

And then, Rachel arrives at the scene.

I will read verse 9. "While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess."

Seeing this, Jacob was probably very surprised; it seems it was something like love at first sight.

I will read verse 10. "When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of his mother's brother Laban, and Laban's sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle's sheep."

Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud.

This Jacob, a stone so large that it couldn't be moved without several men, he rolls it away all by himself.

This is incredibly impressive.

From this, in Jewish tradition, there's a legend that Jacob was a man of great strength.

Jacob probably thought, in modern terms, "Wow, she's incredibly beautiful." That's the kind of feeling he likely had.

He probably thought, "Here's my chance to show her what I can do."

He shows off his strength, "I'm this amazing," and tries to win over Rachel. We can see that kind of attitude here.

Jacob, according to the setting here, is supposed to be around 40 years old.

But looking at him here, he has the atmosphere of a young man in his late teens or early twenties.

And after that, Jacob tells Rachel who he is.

Then Rachel runs back to Laban's place, and to Laban, her father, she explains that a certain person is here. Then Laban comes and meets Jacob. And he takes Jacob with him to his house. That is the process that follows. Here again, seeing them run to report and run to do things, we can somehow see that these people have a family connection to Abraham and others; we can get a sense of that.

Looking at this, I think what comes to mind most for us is God's plan.

This seems like a great coincidence.

Jacob travels, arrives in the region of Haran, and when he speaks to the shepherds there, it turns out they are from Haran and also know Laban.

This is a great coincidence.

However, we can see from this that God has set this up in advance.

We often use the term "God's plan."

But recently, I've been thinking that perhaps a better term than "God's plan" is "God's providence."

Providence. It's a word that isn't used much in modern churches, I feel, but in older literature, the term "providence" is often used.

The word for providence in English is "providence."

This word is derived from words meaning "to see beforehand."

To see beforehand.

From there, it implies that something is already decided.

Originally, it's a concept that arose in places like Greece and Rome, but when "providence" is spoken of in the Bible, this concept of "seeing beforehand" is used in a certain passage.

Where was it used? It was in Genesis chapter 22, verse 8.

Genesis 22, verse 8.

This is the passage where Abraham is about to offer Isaac as a sacrifice.

There, Isaac asks, they have the fire and wood, but where is the sacrificial animal? He asks Abraham.

And Abraham's answer at that time uses this expression of "seeing beforehand."

It's chapter 22, verse 8.

"Abraham answered, 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.' And the two of them went on together."

This phrase "will provide the lamb" in the original language is "will see."

God says He "will see."

When this was translated into Latin, it was rendered with an expression meaning "to see beforehand."

And that phrase "to see beforehand" was then changed into the term "God's providence."

What we can understand from this is that God providing and God seeing beforehand are the same thing.

What does that mean? It means that beyond what we can see, God sees even further ahead, sees the more distant future, and prepares things in advance for us.

And what the word "providence" means is to trust in this God who sees more than we do, and to trust that this God who sees beyond our sight has prepared good things for us. This is what is contained in the word "providence."

The world a child sees is, after all, smaller than the world an adult sees.

Simply put, their height is different.

When a child looks, there is a range they can see from their eye level.

However, when a taller adult looks, they can see much further.

I have a medium-sized vehicle license.

Well, for those who got their license long ago, this might not be relevant, but I was a bit late, so it was during the time when licenses were divided into regular, medium, and large.

And I got a medium-sized vehicle license.

After that, at the church, I drove a 29-passenger bus and so on.

People who have only driven regular cars might think that driving medium-sized vehicles or large buses and trucks is difficult.

However, in reality, with medium-sized or fairly large vehicles, driving is easy.

Why is that? First, there are many mirrors.

Because there are many mirrors, you can see all around the vehicle, and you know exactly where you might hit something or not.

The front is also very easy to see, and you can clearly judge the distance to the car in front.

Another reason is that the vehicle height is high. The high seating position is a reason why it's easy to drive.

Because it's so high, you can look down on all the other regular cars, giving you a full view.

So, it's really easy.

Well, another reason is probably that with a large vehicle, other cars tend to get out of the way, but because it's high, the view is good, and you can see further ahead than you could in a regular car. This allows you to anticipate and plan ahead while driving.

Indeed, when you are high up and have a wide view, it's easier to prepare for things in advance.

Perhaps God, well, God is omniscient and omnipotent to begin with, but God sees things beyond what we can see.

And when we are about to go somewhere, He has already prepared the way.

To trust in such a God, this is providence.

God protects us in such a way, prepares things for us in advance, and guides us.

This, this kind of work of God is called providence.

When Jacob walks here, and goes to Haran, I believe that such providence of God is at work.

Or rather, it is at work.

When we use the word "plan," it feels like something is already decided, but the reason I find the word "providence" so appealing is that we are looking, and there are still things we cannot see.

And when we go to a place we haven't seen, we find that God has prepared good things for us. That's why I think there's a sense of wonder in it.

It's not that everything is predetermined, but that as we move forward, God has prepared good things. That's what I think is in the word "providence," and that's why I find it so appealing.

Yes. Next, from verse 15 to 20.

Ah, yes. Before that, I'll read verse 14.

"Laban said to him, 'You are my own flesh and blood.' After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month,"

So, Laban meets Jacob and says, "You are my own flesh and blood."

Flesh and blood.

When Eve was given to Adam, there is the expression "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."

It implies that he is a truly close, family-like being, and that is contained in the words "my flesh and blood."

However, after that, Laban's attitude changes.

Verse 15.

"Laban said to Jacob, 'Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be.'"

From here, the relationship between Laban and Jacob shifts from a family relationship to something like a work relationship between a boss and a subordinate, or a business partner for transactions.

And verse 16.

"Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, 'I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.' Laban said, 'It's better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me.' So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her."

In this passage, you'll notice that the word "serve" appears many times.

Regarding this word "serve," Jacob was actually originally in a position to be served.

There are various blessings concerning Jacob.

Let's see,

in chapter 25, verse 23, it says, "The LORD said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.'"

In this way, the older will serve the younger.

In this case, it's Esau, but it was prophesied that Esau would serve Jacob. This was the divine message given first.

After that, when Isaac gives his blessing to Jacob, this word "serve" is also used.

Yes, that's chapter 27, verse 29.

I'll just read the beginning.

Chapter 27, verse 29: "May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you."

Here too, the word "serve" is used.

Also, in chapter 27, verse 40, this is what Isaac says to Esau:

"You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother."

In this way, in all the blessings, Jacob is in a position to be served.

He is mentioned as being in a higher position, to be served.

However, in chapter 29, here Jacob is now in a position where he himself serves.

This is a very important point.

And Jacob says to Laban that he wants to marry Rachel.

And for that, he will serve for seven years.

He receives Rachel in return for working for seven years. That is what is being said here.

By the way, the amount of money for seven years of service is actually quite large.

At that time, it was customary for the groom to give presents or money to the bride's family after getting married.

In the Bible, in Deuteronomy chapter 22, verse 29, it states what the amount of money was at that time.

If you look at Deuteronomy 22:29, it says 50 shekels.

Well, in this case, it's not so much a formal marriage, but rather if a man does something wrong and, as a result,

has to marry the woman, the amount of money he pays to her parents is written there, and it is 50 shekels.

Well, it's not certain if this applies perfectly to the biblical era, but in the Neo-Babylonian Empire of that time,

one shekel was, for the most part, the wage that an adult male could earn by working for one month.

So, 50 shekels means 50 months.

In other words, a little over four years.

An amount of money equivalent to a little over four years' wages was assumed to be the betrothal gift, I suppose, the money paid to the other's relatives at the time of marriage.

However, Jacob here works for seven years, so he is working considerably more.

He really should have only needed to work for about four years and a bit, but the fact that he works for seven years

means he is doing more for Laban than the amount usually received at marriage, which is hinted at here.

And as seen in verses 15 to 20, through this work of Jacob serving, he must learn the hardship of serving.

And that will lead to Jacob's personal maturity.

What I want to focus on today is verse 20.

"So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her."

I had you read this part today, and I think this is very characteristic of Jacob, and at the same time, it's a verse that I believe holds a lot of insight for us as well.

The phrase "they seemed to him but a few days" is, in a modern drama, like a series of quick, successive cuts showing the passage of time, with music playing in the background, conveying that although it was a long time, he was living a very fulfilling life. It's a passage that creates that kind of image.

And at this time, Jacob was probably happy.

It's true that because he loved her, time might have felt long, but Jacob at this time was likely happy, and his days were fulfilling.

Because he was so fulfilled, even though it was a long time, it passed in a flash; it felt like it went by in an instant.

This period for Jacob was truly a time of training from God.

He would later father the children who would become the twelve tribes, and Jacob is the father of those twelve tribes.

Therefore, a very mature character is required of him.

The training period for that was this time.

And when we hear the word "training," we usually imagine something painful or difficult.

However, Jacob here seems to be having a great time.

He appears to be living a very fulfilling life, a life full of joy.

This, I think, is a very important thing for us as well.

God's training exists in our lives too.

And at first glance, it can be a painful thing.

But God has prepared joy within it.

He has prepared fun in it.

That kind of...

Fun... It's tough, it's hard, but it's fun. Have any of you experienced something like that recently?

You have a goal, and you haven't reached it yet, but the process, each step you take, is enjoyable. Have you experienced that?

This feeling of it being difficult and painful, but finding it enjoyable to do.

In psychology, this is called a state of "flow."

A psychologist named Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi proposed this concept.

An athlete is playing a sport, and it's very grueling, physically demanding, their body is tired, their body is struggling, they feel pain, and they have to use their mind, which is also very tough.

However, the time they spend doing it is very fulfilling, and after all, it's enjoyable.

Or, for example, a painter is creating a painting.

That too is very tiring, and there are many things to think about and do, but the time spent doing it is, after all, enjoyable.

In this way, you pour your own strength into something, you concentrate, you become absorbed, and you do it.

The feeling we get during that time, that it's painful, but there's an irreplaceable joy and fun in it. That's the state that Csikszentmihalyi calls "flow."

This "flow," if you translate it into the common language of modern Japanese people, I think it can be described as "ikigai" (a reason for living).

Ikigai.

What is ikigai? Well, it's the same thing, but

it's a state where you're struggling with something, but it's enjoyable.

Other people might not feel the same enjoyment.

But you, when you do it, feel a great sense of fun and joy.

For the sake of that ikigai, you might even wake up early in the morning.

Because you have that ikigai, you are able to live through the other times in your life.

It is that kind of thing.

That ikigai, this is by no means in conflict with God's plan.

We tend to think that if we are enjoying ourselves or having fun, doing enjoyable activities, that it's different from God's plan.

However, this ikigai, if you translate it into biblical terms, it also becomes a "gift."

A joy that no one else can feel, you feel it yourself, and you can become absorbed in it and continue to enjoy it.

Because it's fun, you keep doing it.

And because you keep doing it for fun, you start to form relationships with other people, and your world expands in various ways.

That, that is truly ikigai.

And if you have that ikigai and engage in some activity,

you might even begin to see God's plan.

Well, this is a very simple example, but since April of this year, I have been attending a class on Old Testament studies at Tohoku Gakuin University.

I'm an auditing student, but why am I attending? Well, there are a few reasons, but one is that I was curious about how academic biblical studies are conducted. That was the main reason.

And I've been attending and have found it very interesting.

Then I noticed that the professor there is unusually knowledgeable about the Book of Jeremiah.

I wondered why he was so knowledgeable about Jeremiah, and when I looked at his background later, I found out that he has been researching matters related to Jeremiah for quite some time.

When I give messages at Yagiyama, I have been speaking from the Book of Jeremiah for a long time. And while it's true I wanted to know how the entire Old Testament is analyzed, I had no idea that the professor was an expert on Jeremiah.

But I came to learn that later.

I think this kind of thing happens to everyone.

You're doing something simply because you like it, and from that, something completely unknown, or unknown human relationships, emerge. Or you're doing something for fun, and you meet a Christian, or you meet someone who wants to know more about Jesus. These things happen.

Doing something you love, doing something as your "ikigai" (reason for being), is not in conflict with God's plan.

Rather, God uses what we do because we love it.

And what we do for fun becomes a precursor to spreading the gospel.

If you look at the New Testament, I think you'll find the word "joy" appearing many times.

The Christians of that time, they were all joyful. This is something you can understand first by looking at the epistles of Paul in the New Testament.

There must have been many situations that were not joyful at all.

But they were joyful.

Why was that? I think this too, in modern terms, is because their "faith" was their "ikigai."

Believing in Jesus and walking with the community, this, for them, was their reason for living, I think.

It was something that no one could stop, no matter how they tried. It was always a source of joy, it seems.

We have God's commandments and things we must do.

But if it's just something we have to do, we can't continue.

For us to truly continue,

we need something that brings us joy, something that we alone find fun. Otherwise, we can't keep going.

Please do not take such joy and fun lightly.

Instead, consider how it relates to God's plan and God's providence. Please turn your eyes to that.

Yes. Now for the final part. Verses 21 to 30.

I will read verse 21. "Then Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to make love to her.' So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and Jacob made love to her. And Laban gave his servant Zilpah to his daughter as her attendant. When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, 'What is this you

have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?' Laban replied, 'It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work.' And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. Laban gave his servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her attendant. Jacob made love to Rachel also, and his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years."

Yes. Here too, the word "serve" appears many times.

And here, we can also see the two-faced nature of Laban.

Laban is, well, a very greedy person, fundamentally a greedy person, but when his daughters get married, he also gives them a slave.

This was apparently a common practice at the time.

He gives a slave, or even if not a slave, something very valuable.

Why is that? It's a consideration so that even if they divorce, they won't struggle to live.

Laban is a character who seems willing to use even his own daughter to gain profit for himself, as we see here.

However, we can see that he did, at least, love his daughter.

And in this passage I just read, Jacob is well and truly deceived.

He thought he was going to marry the younger daughter, but he ends up marrying the older one. In this way, he is deceived.

Previously, he had deceived his brother.

And he had also deceived Isaac.

In the same way, it is now his turn to be deceived.

The pain of what he did, the kind of suffering he inflicted on others, he now experiences it himself.

In this way, experiencing the pain of his own actions was also necessary for Jacob's growth.

When he was at his parents' house, Jacob often obeyed Rebekah.

Both Rebekah and Laban have a very authoritarian air about them.

They have a tendency to act as authoritarians towards those beneath them.

However, Rebekah, she acted authoritatively out of concern for Jacob.

Laban, on the other hand, tries to use Jacob solely for his own profit. There is that difference.

Jacob must have felt all these various differences.

And that leads to Jacob's growth.

Yes. Today's content is as such.

Overall, what we can see is the figure of God guiding Jacob within His own plan.

And in that, was Jacob only suffering? Not at all.

Rather, within that, there is also fun and joy. We can see that as well.

We too have God's plan and protection in our lives.

And within that, there is also hardship, which is given to us as training for ourselves.

Even within that training, we have joy.

There is also fun.

And we must truly cherish that joy and fun.

Our "ikigai," our reason for being, might actually be found there.

For us, what is that ikigai? Please think about it.

And through that kind of ikigai, what kind of plan is God trying to reveal to us?

The things you do because you love them, the things you do even though it's hard, how do they connect with God? Please think about that as well.

Yes. Today's message ends here.

Let us pray.

Loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your grace.

Today, we were able to see you guiding Jacob, and how even in the midst of his suffering, Jacob found fun and joy.

We too are those who walk within your plan.

In that, while we know you are always protecting us, there are also difficult times.

There are painful situations.

And we also know that through that pain, there are times when you intend to train us.

Please help us, even in the midst of that, to always be able to walk with joy.

Please grant us the grace that this life, walking with Jesus, may become our "ikigai" (reason for being).

Also, each and every one of us has been given different gifts.

In that, that too becomes our "ikigai."

We may not see it yet, but God uses each and every one of those gifts to expand His kingdom,

and we know that we are used as a single part in expanding that kingdom.

Please, teach us that.

And as we believe what you teach us, please guide us so that we can always walk with joy.

We pray in gratitude, in the name of our beloved Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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