

PEACE WITH PARENTS + + +

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Well, good morning, everybody. I'm going to start today's message on family matters with a story. The story is going to teach a principle that we're going to apply all throughout the rest. You're going to see it actually comes from the scriptures. It starts this way. Not with a phone call. Actually, it does start with a phone call, to be honest. The story starts this way. Denzel, your daddy called. He's asking you to go and shovel his walkway. And Denzel responds, Mom, why would I have to go? He left us. He moved to another house. Why do I have to go and shovel his walkway? His mama said, because your daddy asked you to.

So Denzel takes his shovel over his shoulder. He walks all the way over to his dad's house through the Vernon cold, through the snow. And he starts to shovel away and shovel away. And all the time he's like practicing this kind of monologue or dialogue in his head with, how could I talk to my dad? And maybe how could he and I reconcile our relationship? Maybe if I just say the right things, maybe if I do the right things, maybe if my facial expressions show the right kind of characteristics, maybe then he'll listen to me, talk to me. Maybe he'll love me. And so he shovels and he shovels. No dad.

He goes home.

Later on in the winter time, Denzel, your daddy called. Mom, why do I got to go back again? I go there all the time. Why do I have to serve him? And she said, because he's your daddy. So he went and he shoveled.

Christmas Eve comes around. Phone call comes. Mom says to Denzel, Denzel, your daddy just called. He needs you to come over and shovel again. So he goes, practicing this monologue that he wants to say to his father. And he's saying it in his head. And he's practicing the facial expressions as he's shoveling. He's like, my goodness, it's Christmas Eve. He's got to be able to receive me. So he finishes doing everything that his dad asks. He knocks on the door. Dad opens up the door. After Denzel had gone through all the things he was going to say. And Denzel's dad just closes the door right in his face again.

And on and on this true story goes. Through summers where Denzel would faithfully mow his father's lawn and pick up the weeds. And shoveling every winter. But there came a day. When he asked one more time. And his mom said, look, you're not doing this. Because your daddy is good. You're doing this. Because someone else is making you good while you're serving.

I forgot a really important part of this story. So dad's name is Denzel. Son's name is Denzel. And while they were still living in the house. Mom would call and she'd say, Denzel, come here. And both of them would come running. And so there reached a time where she said to both of them, look, both of you. Every time I call, you come running in. So I'm going to change the way I say your names.

Dad, from now on, you're Denzel.

Son, from now on, you're Denzel. Denzel Washington.

Do you wonder why a man like that. Who had replayed so many monologues and dialogues and practiced facial expressions. To try to earn the love and favor of his unjust father. Is so good that he would win two Academy Awards. Screen Actors Guild Awards. BET Man of the Year Awards. Tony's on live stage.

Do you want to know why that is? Because in moments of obedience. He wasn't doing what he did because the authority, his daddy was good. Who, by the way, was a preacher. So should have known better, but didn't do better. In those moments. Denzel Washington, the guy you know, but may not have known his story. Learned a very special and specific lesson about the authority that's above him. About obeying your parents, even if they're not worthy of it.

And that is this. God doesn't ask you and I to submit because the authority above us is good. God asks you to submit. Because he's making you good.

Now you're going to learn that this isn't just like some hooks that's come up with for a sermon. It actually is something that is taught all throughout the scriptures. And so what we've been doing in this last week, this week, and then next week. Is doing this family matter series through the lens of Jacob's family.

Now last week we learned about the amazing story of brotherly love and affection through Jacob and Esau. And they had a significant conflict. And we learned through that, through their story. And how the Lord can work through that and through sibling conflict with us. That forgiveness is a, do you remember? Forgiveness is a must. But trust takes time to adjust.

That's a pretty hard lesson to learn. And in our families, because they matter, we've got to learn hard lessons. And ours today is how do you deal with parents who are above you, authorities who are above you. That are unjust. That are deceptive. That are manipulative.

Well, we're going to learn that lesson through this story. It starts with Genesis chapter 29. To give us a little bit of a time narrative here. We kind of jumped in different parts of Jacob and Esau's story last week. Remember there's a 20 year gap in between there. We're in that gap right now. Where Jacob is kind of walking around and he's trying to find his way in life. He still can't be by Esau because it's still dangerous. So he's wandered to this place called Paddan Aram.

Whether you're online or here, say Paddan Aram. You have now learned Hebrew. Good job. You learned something. That's great.

All right. Well, this is where he lands up and he looks to a place where he's got relatives. His uncle Laban has settled there. And his uncle Laban has been doing very well. Jacob doesn't really quite know how he got to where he got or what kind of character this man is. He's looking at all that he has and he's like, this guy must be doing things well.

And while he's there, he's kind of looking around. He's like, oh, hello there, Laban. You've got some daughters here. Which, by the way, let's just address this. This is gross. This is his nieces. But there, then, acceptable. Now, I'm not teaching that. Don't go do that. That's gross.

But here's what happens in Genesis 29, 15. This is kind of the beginning of some seeds being planted here from Laban's perspective.

Laban says to Jacob, because you're my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Because Jacob was just kind of palling around working there for nothing. Tell me what your wages will be.

Come on. You knew what Laban was thinking. He knew he had two daughters. He knew that Jacob was kind of like batting his eyes at some of his daughters. You'll find out which one in just a second. He knew what was going to happen.

Because, you see, back in this day, there's this thing called a mohar. And a mohar was a gift that would be provided, either financially or in service, from the groom-to-be to the father-in-law. And the reason why this is set up is because once this young lady would be removed from her father's household, he would have one less worker.

So a mohar would be a way to kind of replace the expenses that would be lost, that the groom would give to the father-in-law. And you know Laban knows this is coming. So he's like, oh, you can't work for me for free. Tell me what your wages will be.

But this politeness is actually masking a manipulation. He sees how vulnerable Jacob is. How much time did Jacob have to take all of his belongings that he had stolen from Esau? Had the inheritance been given out yet? No, absolutely not.

So Jacob is vulnerable and he's eager. And Laban knows this. And maybe you've seen this in your parents as you're looking at whether they should be obeyed or not. Because you're like, Seth, I know my parents manipulated me in much the same way that I'm feeling that Laban is about to manipulate Jacob.

And so I'm already seeing Seth that like the authority above me is not worthy of obedience or humility or service.

Well, let's see how this plays out in the story, because maybe that will help the way, shape the way that you address your parents too.

Genesis 29, 17 to 18, Jacob is looking at Laban's daughters. Now we're going to use some stuff with our eyes here. He looks at Leah and it says that Leah's eyes were weak. Now, maybe she just had trouble seeing, but that's most likely not the case. Because we have a contrast in the next clause.

And so what Moses as the author here is trying to get you to do is nicely understand that Leah was ugly. And you see that because it says Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. Jacob loved Rachel.

And he said, look, I will pay you Laban. I will give you the mohar that's expected. I will serve you for seven years for your younger daughter, Rachel.

And it starts fine. Jacob's willingness, it starts like really energetic and eager. It's getting tested over time. You know, you kind of got to wonder as you know, how the story plays out, how many times Laban would be like, yes, I'm so glad that you're working for me, Jacob. Leah's going to be, Rachel is going to be a great wife.

How many times did Laban like let it slip a little bit, but then Jacob, because he didn't quite know better yet. Kind of like we are when we're young and our parents might be doing some things that, that might manipulate us. And we just don't quite know it yet.

So Jacob served in Genesis 29, 24, seven years for Rachel. And it seemed him, but for a few days, because of the love that he had for her.

The scene that I get in mind is like, I love movies and TVs, TV shows. The scene I have in mind is, did you guys see Elf yet? Like, have you started watching the movie? You know, the movie is seen where after he has this really great date with Jovi and he's like, I'm in love, I'm in love. And I don't care who knows it.

That's like these seven years for Jacob. He doesn't care who knows it. It doesn't care if he's maybe being manipulated. And in this moment, God is still forming Jacob through obedience. And none of this is easy, but he's still going to do it. Because he's got a little bit of trust in the authority above him.

Well, finally things kind of change a little bit. We moved to Genesis 29, 22. Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. This is very common. And so this is an out of place. And oftentimes what you'll find is that covers for deceit not only can happen in something that's good in the Bible, but it can also happen in your life as well.

So maybe there's a celebration and mom and dad are now going to manipulate you into saying something or doing something that you are not prepared for at all. Why don't you tell us about what's happening in your relationship over the Thanksgiving dinner that we knew you broke up already, but we just kind of want to humiliate you in front of all your brothers and sisters.

Because sometimes those in authority and position above us can use distraction, like even a good thing like a feast to manipulate us. And that's where submission gets real costly. When we start to realize what's happening to us, when Jacob started to realize that maybe everything wasn't what it was supposed to be, but he doesn't quite see it yet.

But that deception, it's coming.

The very next verse, verse 23, Jacob goes to the tent after the marriage feast was coming to a close. And did you notice the time period that Laban grabs his daughter and brings her to Jacob's tent? Is it at the apogee of the sun where that's the most bright and all eyes can see whether the weak eyed daughter or the one that is weak on the eyes is going to be making her way forward? No.

It says in the evening, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob and he went into her.

So how many light bulbs do you think were going on in the tent as Leah made her way into the darkened area? This was intentional deception and darkness was used as a disguise to carry it out.

It's kind of interesting, right? What was it that we learned last week that Jacob's name meant? Deceiver. And now what's happened to him after he had deceived Esau yesterday, after he had deceived his father last week, now he's the one that's being deceived.

So in just a couple of verses, he wakes up in the morning and verse 25, he says, this is Leah. We got some real housewives of Padana Ram going on right here. We've got the original sister wives.

And Jacob says to Laban, what is this you've done to me? Did I not serve you for Rachel? Was that not our contract? Why have you deceived me?

Jacob demands an answer because now he knows it's not just a slip of the lips. It's not just a little bit of a mistake, a feeling of deception or manipulation. He now knows that Jacob had been deceived by Laban. Jacob had been deceived by Laban.

Well, Laban responds with cultural excuses, which is why we know he had planned this whole thing all along. He's like, oh, we don't do that here. We marry off the older daughter first, then we marry off the younger daughter.

He planned the whole thing out. So now, now Jacob's got full knowledge that his authority above him is manipulative and deceptive and wrong.

So what does he do? He volunteers to work another seven years, knowing full well that the authority above him is not going to be his. The authority above him is not godly, is not right, is not kind, and doesn't live up to his word.

And yet he still continues in relationship with him. There's no cancellation here. Jacob doesn't look at Laban and say, I'll have nothing to do with you, although he had every reason to be that way.

Why? Because he needed to learn the same lesson that we are learning. And sometimes it's nice to see even a scoundrel teaching it to us, that God does not ask you to submit because the authority above you is good. God is asking you to submit because he's making you good.

Now, look, we see this attitude in our houses all the time, in our families all the time. We see younger teenagers resisting their parents. We see full grown adults completely cutting off their parents because, well, they said this, they did this, it doesn't matter.

For some reason, we find it acceptable that the people that we are called to love, even if they don't love us the right way back, that we can just get rid of them. That all of a sudden, the fourth commandment that says you and I should honor our father and our mother no longer applies because somebody else did something to us.

This is a really hard teaching. It might be easy to hear when you're the parent. But it's hard when you're the child. It's hard when you're the child of adult parents. It's hard when you're the child of adult parents who've never owned their wrongs over you.

It's hard when you're working in a job that you know the person above you is a scoundrel and will manipulate you and those around you and will deceive you. It is difficult then to look at that person and say, I am still called to submit to your authority.

Now, that doesn't mean do anything wrong. That doesn't mean do something unethical. That doesn't mean compromise your Christian witness. It doesn't mean any of those things.

What it means is you still have a job to do. Either that is to obey your parents and shovel the sidewalk or your boss and finish the Excel sheet. We're still called to honor and serve.

And here's the thing. Scripture actually assumes that you and I are going to be put in this position in our families and in our society. There are many places, but I want to give you three because I want to give you an example of where Peter is telling his church that they are still called to submit.

Paul is telling the Roman church that they're still called to submit in a hostile culture. And Jesus himself is saying that we are to submit. And he himself submitted to an unjust authority above him.

In 1 Peter 2, verse 13, Peter tells his church this, be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution. Do you know which emperor was in power while Peter is saying this to his church? Nero.

Was Nero a friend to Christians? Absolutely not. Nero is credited with some of the greatest persecutions of removing Christians' lives.

And yet this Peter is still saying, you don't have to agree with him, but he is still the authority placed above you. And be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution.

Paul says in Romans 13, 1, let every person be subject to governing authorities. How did the Romans do just in general in caring for the Jewish people at the time? Many of whom Paul is talking to in this letter.

The Romans oppressed, murdered, killed many Jewish people. And yet Paul is still saying, let every person be subject to the governing authorities. That starts with parents and then moves out even further.

When Jesus was asked, to whom taxes should be paid? Jesus responds and says, render unto Caesar what is Caesar's. And yes, unto God what is God's.

What about Pilate? Pilate tells Jesus that he needs to give an account of who he is and what he's done. Pilate is not a good dude. Where he's at in the biblical narrative is his last stop. He has messed up so many other jobs before this, that this is his last one.

And so he's going to do everything that it takes, even if it's manipulation and deception, to save himself, even at the expense of those who serve him. And yet Jesus still submits under the authority of Pilate.

So do you have to agree with governing authorities? No. Do you have to blindly comply? No. But is there still honor to be given? Yes, as difficult as that might be.

Because God is not asking you to submit because your parents are good. He's not asking you to submit because the authority above you is good. God is asking you to submit because he's going to be making you good.

And that's exactly what Jacob does in these next verses. Verse 28, it says, For seven more years. Seems like a long time. But really, when you think about it, we can think of Jesus.

Philippians 2 says this, Look, you and I mess that up all the time, the obedience part. Because we want to justify that we shouldn't have to obey someone who is a bad father, who's not going to open the door for us on Christmas Eve, a bad mother who's manipulated us and gaslighted us.

We want to push against that we should just be able to cancel and move out of their lives because there's no value anymore in this.

And yet, look at the lengths that Jesus was willing to go to, to reclaim you from your disobedience and my disobedience.

And we look at the scope of seven years that Jacob is going to work for the not as attractive Leah.

And just think that that's the way that you and I could have looked to the father. We did look really unattractive to him because of our disobedience, because we justified the way that we treat other people.

And yet Jesus didn't just work seven years for the ugliness of our sins or even like seven years for the beauty of all the good things we did in obedience.

Jesus worked and worked and worked and worked to cover over all of the good that we think and all the bad that we are until he could say, not just seven years is finished. Not just 14 years is finished.

But brothers and sisters in Jesus, he could cry out for all eternity. It is what? Finished.

The good work of God. It's finished for you.

What would that been like if Jesus would have looked at all of us and said, I have submitted myself to them, but they're an unjust authority. And so I'm going to cancel them and walk away.

But that is not the story of your Jesus. That's not what his obedience did.

And the blessing is his obedience in that moment didn't make him good. He was already good, but he took the good that he is, and he gives it to you and he gives it to me.

So that in these moments when we're challenged by unjust authorities, bad parents, bad employers, bad political figures.

We can learn that God doesn't ask us to submit to those above us because they are good or we are good. He's asking you to submit because he's making you better.

Look, as a teen, your parents are imperfect. Listen to them. They're praying for you. They love you. You may not understand everything they're asking you to do. They're going to mess it up sometimes. They're going to look unjust over you sometimes, but they love you.

And for those of you who know that you have parents that don't actually love you, I am so sorry. Know that you have a father who does love you very much. And he is the authority that is over you.

And you might still be asked to do something incredibly difficult, and that is live in life with people who could care less about you.

But in that moment, know that it's not about them. It's about the faithfulness that your father has for you.

Employees work faithfully. I've seen so many people check out just because they think they have a bad boss and they don't do what they're supposed to do.

That's uncalled for. It's not what God has called you to do. You can do better.

Husbands and wives jockeying for authority over one and the other. Trying to put them in a position where they serve you, where you serve them.

How's that working out? It's usually not great.

Maybe it's time to see that you can both kneel to the authority of Jesus, and then your marriage will be blessed.

Citizens, people that are part of the life and body politic. How much did you pray for Biden when he was the president? How much do you pray for Trump as he is the president?

Look, there's two sides here. We're still called to pray for both.

And whether you agree or disagree with their points of politic, or even their character, we're called to pray for them.

And if you disagree, and you think they're in the wrong, how much more do they need our prayers than us just to cut them out?

And that way we have a calling to serve, even those we don't agree with.

Stop waiting for a perfect authority to be over you, for you to start serving humbly.

Because things can actually change.

When God works in you good. Biblically, things change.

They have an effect in the world.

Submission can actually expose the injustice of corrupt authority, where people look at your behavior, and they look at your character, and they see it in contrast to the other people around you.

And they appreciate what God is doing in you.

That's what happens with Jesus in Matthew 27 under Pilate. Jesus gave Pilate no answer.

He could have retorted, but he doesn't, not even to a single charge.

And what is the response? The governor is greatly amazed.

Truth in obedience can actually make a difference in this world.

Submission, it can win over unjust authority.

Joseph was overseen by Pharaoh's officials, and they didn't appreciate that at all.

But the Lord was with Joseph in Genesis 39, and showed him steadfast love.

And that steadfast love then was a blessing to all of Egypt later on.

Submission can open doors that rebellion never could.

Do you remember the story of Saul and David in the cave? Where David could have murdered Saul, because Saul was an unjust authority.

And yet instead, David cut a piece of cloth off to show he was there.

He could have rejected, he could have canceled, he could have taken life.

But instead he comes out and he shows the cloth, and Saul then weeps because of David's humility and service.

And he said, is that your voice, my son?

And then Saul weeps.

Your submission can also plant seeds that outlast you.

Think about the story of Paul and Silas as they're praying, and they're in prison, and they're singing hymns to God.

They were being obedient that they were jailed, even if it was unjust.

And you want to know who listened to all of those hymns and prayers? The rest of those in jail, the prisoners were listening to them.

Witnessing to unbelievers is an aspect of your submission that can plant seeds.

Final story. Denzel and Denzel lived at odds for a really long time.

But Denzel always responded to the authority of his father.

Even when Denzel was a well-known actor, if his dad needed something, he could call and Denzel would help.

And the great thing to this story is on his father's deathbed, he brought his son near to him.

They shared some of the most honest moments that a father and a son could actually share together, despite all of the manipulation, deception, and difficulty that dad put over son.

They reconciled.

And Denzel Washington credits all of that to his faith in Jesus.

And that's because in all of those moments of difficulty, God was working a lot of good in Denzel's heart.

And I know that as you do the same thing, he's going to work a lot of good in yours.

Because in a family that matters, God does not ask you to submit because the authority above you is good.

No, no, no.

God is going to make you, in Christ, good.

Amen.

Let's close with a word of prayer.

Jesus, we know there's a lot of fallenness in this world.

We know that you've placed people in positions above us.

And we know it's a hard teaching because most of the time, these are people that we come into contact with on a day-to-day basis.

And they're probably a close relation to us, whether it's a father, a mother, an uncle, whatever.

Jesus, we would ask that you'd give us your heart to beat in our veins.

One that would serve and serve and serve because we know that in these difficult situations, in this family of ours, you are making us good.

Amen.