

- I. All change is hard, but some elements are harder than others. One of the hardest is coming to terms with how self-serving our motives have been up until now
 - A. It's an unavoidable reality: The point of growing spiritually is learning to love more than we have, and we can't do that unless we see that our current ways of acting and thinking are not what we'd like
 - B. To do this we have to confront that part of us likes those ways of being. It's as if we have to move forward with part of us kicking and screaming about the change, and another part feeling guilty about being so self absorbed.
 - C. Change is hard
- II. The story we read today describes a big change in Jacob's life. He'd been with Laban for twenty years, and was now going home to his own father
 - A. This journey describes a monumental shift we make when we move from doing what's right driven significantly by self-serving motives, to when we consciously choose to do what's right because it's right, meaning because the Lord said we should
 - B. The changeover is messy. We like our self-serving reasons for doing good, and yet part of us feels guilty for being so self absorbed.
 - C. Our story takes us through the process it takes to start to choose what is good for more heavenly reasons
- III. Our final reading today laid out the framework that helps us see what's going on
 - A. All of us are connected to heavenly and hellish communities based on all the truth and good we possess, and all the evil and falsity we possess
 - B. We live in that place. And just as Jacob lived for a time in Syria and was now returning to Canaan, we have to shift communities we live in, which is hard
 1. We live our lives by plugging into spiritual communities, much like the old style switchboard operators would patch people's calls through by plugging them in to the right line
 2. This explains in part why our thoughts and feelings can vary so widely as we tune in to different heavenly or hellish communities
 - C. One benefit of thinking this way is that it gives us space from the thoughts and feelings that we experience.
 1. It is one thing to say, "I am greedy," or even the more mild "I commonly have feelings of greed."
 2. It is another thing entirely to say "I am attached to spiritual communities that inspire feelings of greed."
 3. In this way of thinking about it we don't take undue credit for good feelings and thoughts – they are gifts from the Lord and the angels – and we don't feel unduly tainted by the selfish thoughts and feelings.
 4. And we feel more able to make changes. It is easier to say, "I don't want this hellish community influencing me" than it is to say, "I want to stop myself from feeling greed." The first feels much more possible.
- IV. To understand today's story, we need to back up a bit.

- A. Jacob was a pretty selfish young man, treating Esau shamefully several times
- B. He ran away from Esau to save his own life. While running, he had a vision of the Lord that changed him and then he fell in love with Rachel, for whom he worked, eventually, 14 years.
- C. Jacob's time in Haran with Laban describes our beginning efforts to do what is right, to move away from selfishness and toward doing what the Lord says
- D. Two parts of the story show what this early stage is like
- E. When the Lord appeared to Jacob at the top of the ladder going up to heaven, Jacob made this vow: "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."
 - 1. Notice the conditional quality of this vow. If, God, you do a lot of good things to me, then as a reward I will follow you.
 - 2. It describes our early efforts to do what is good. We are doing good, partly because it's good, but also largely because of what we get out of it
- F. New Church teaching calls this mediate good. Today we say mixed motives
- G. And this brings us to the second part of the story that depicts this time. When Jacob had finished working for Laban to gain his wives, he offered to work further for Laban, and his payment was the speckled and spotted among the sheep
 - 1. Laban thought this was a really good deal for him, since sheep are rarely multicolored, but the Lord blessed Jacob with many of them
 - 2. These speckled and spotted sheep describe our mixed motives, such as:
 - a. Pride that drives us to learn good things we'd not have otherwise
 - b. Doing good for the reward we get, thus learning what a life of good is
 - c. Relationships we enter into for what we get out of it, only to learn what it means to love another human being on the journey (cf. AC 4075:2-3)
- V. It can seem depressing to think about having many mixed motives, as if looking deeper shows that all we do is secretly tainted. But that's not a very good way of seeing it. Think about it this way
 - A. The Lord is leading us with amazing clarity and care, using *even* our selfish motives to move us forward
 - 1. And here's the most striking thing about this. It is the Lord who links these mixed motives to us to get us to move forward, and when He does it good things happen. If we consciously choose to act out of pride or for our own benefit, that has an entirely different and much more negative effect (AC 4073:2)
 - 2. But when the Lord subtly, and without our noticing uses these motives then He can bring good. That presents a very different picture!
 - B. One of the miracles of this process is that He uses our selfish motives to lead us to understand and live the truth of His Word. And that truth that we learn,

- albeit for partly self-serving motives, is untainted
- C. When we do see our selfish motives, and realize they have been present in us for a long time, the answer is not that we are bad or that we should give up, but rather it is a chance to be grateful that the Lord has led us so far despite imperfect motives
 - 1. The hard part is that we have to come face to face with the fact that we have been less spiritual than we'd like to think
 - 2. The good part is that the very seeing of our imperfect motives is a chance to change, a chance that did not exist until we saw what was driving us
 - D. We know, when we look at our private thoughts, that we can be filled with some pretty selfish thoughts and feelings. This body of teaching gives purpose and direction to those feelings – the Lord is in charge and using many of them
- VI. Our story is about starting to leave behind the motivations that drove us before
- A. As we try to be good people, at first all of our focus is on getting ourselves to do the right thing
 - 1. I'm not ready to want to apologize, but I am willing to make myself apologize because I know in part of myself that I was wrong
 - 2. I'm not inspired to work, but I will make myself go to work, partly because I like to eat and have a roof over my head, but in part because I know it's good to be useful.
 - B. Over time we come to see that we'd like to be more loving about those same actions – apologizing now from the heart, or working from a true love of being useful. And that starts us on the journey of leaving Laban
- VII. Jacob's first step is to tell Rachel and Leah, his wives
- A. Rachel and Leah stand for our affection for truth – our inner and outer desire to see and understand what is true and real
 - B. They are Laban's children. At first our desire to see what is true stems from worldly desires, but when Jacob tells them the Lord has told him to return to Canaan they readily assent
 - C. This is the first stage of change. Our intellect can see that we have been acting from worldly motives and recognizes the need to change
 - D. So, we read, Jacob puts them up on camels and leaves with them and all his possessions. That putting them up on camels describes lifting up, perhaps for the first time, our perspective, so that we see a new way of doing and being
 - E. And we move forward
- VIII. Right as she left, Rachel took the teraphim – the household idols – Laban had
- A. Ordinarily we'd think she'd done a bad thing. Idol worship is strongly prohibited in Scripture: it's a big part of the first of the 10 commandments
 - B. Yet what Rachel is doing is good. Those idols stand for the sense of holiness that comes from trying to be a good person, even if with imperfect motives
 - C. In all our messy efforts to be good, the Lord sees and develops the part of us that wants to do what is right
 - 1. Rachel's taking the teraphim stands for our trying to be good from a deeper motive now, and taking with us the sense of holiness that comes

from that deeper focus. (AC 4111)

- IX. But there's a downside. The spiritual communities that have been with us that inspire worldly motives lose something. They lose that sense of holiness, and they act resentfully. Here's a passage from New Church teaching describing that:
- X. "Communities do not readily depart from someone with whom they have been present; but when a person with whom they are present departs they become annoyed, and they react in a way similar to Laban's behavior here towards Jacob. Indeed even if they do perceive that some good has come to that person through them they say that it has done so from them; for when they are annoyed evil governs what they say. A similar situation exists with a person who is being regenerated. That is to say, the Lord applies communities to that person which serve to introduce genuine goods and truths, not from those communities but through them. And when the one who is being regenerated is transferred to other communities those which have been present hitherto are annoyed" (AC 4077)
 - A. Laban's pursuit, and then claiming that his daughters and grandchildren are in fact his and not Jacobs is an illustration of this attitude
 - B. And you can see from those stories that the way we change is by being exposed, sometimes painfully, to the selfish quality within our motives that leads us to change. This leads to humility which opens us to the Lord
 - C. This leads us to establish clear boundaries, as our story depicts, which describes a clear and intentional desire now to do good because it is good, not because we get something out of it.
 - 1. It's not the end of the story. That intention takes a long time to make a reality. But it is the beginning of a new chapter, one in which a new kind of intentional living is our primary goal.
- XI. One of the passages describing this transition speaks of a marriage. When we are first attracted to someone, we notice their appearance, good manners, outward compatibility, and such. But later we come to join minds such that "in which one wills as the other does and finds delight in doing that which is pleasing to the other" (AC 4145:3)
 - A. Pretty early on in a marriage, we'd say we have moved beyond being concerned about the other's appearance or good manners
 - B. Yet the reality is that those matter a lot to us for a long time
 - C. It can be a rude wake up when married partners realize that this person they married does not cater to their wishes in the ways they'd hoped, or that the outward compatibility they'd seen isn't as strong as they hoped
 - D. We want both – the outward pleasing qualities, the natural beauty, and the inward connection, but for a long time the need and desire for outward pleasure is stronger than we'd like to see
 - E. Over time we leave Haran. We decide that to be married we are going to make serving that other person be our primary goal, and serving the good of the marriage higher still.
 - 1. At that point we try to treat the other person well even when they are not pleasing, even when they are not compatible.

- F. When people divorce, they commonly say, "I never really loved you anyway." I would say this is normally a failure at this very juncture. They are seeing the selfish motives that had, it is true, been present.
 - G. What they needed to say was, "Up until now I have not loved you as much as I should. Now I choose to love you more fully." That is leaving Haran, leaving those communities of spirits overly concerned with what we get out of things, and going back to a more intentional way of living.
- XII. To start, we want to do spiritual things from worldly motives. The Lord's goal is to get us to want to do things in this world from spiritual motives. He wants the practical-minded Jacob part of us to be connected to the deeper, spiritual Isaac part of us, and to act from that real love
- A. Consider sight of past mixed motives as a vote of confidence from the Lord that we are ready to move on to the next stage of becoming more loving people.

Gen 31 Jacob sent, and called Rachel and Leah to the field to his flock. And he said to them, "I see your father's face, that he is not at all favorable toward me as before. The God of my father has been with me. And you know that with all my might I have served your father. And your father has deceived me, and has changed my wages ten ways, and God has not allowed him to do evil to me. If he said, 'The speckled shall be your wage, then all the flock bore speckled; and if he said, 'The mottled shall be your wage,' then all the flock bore mottled. And God has rescued the livestock of your father, and has given it to me.... And the angel of God said to me in the dream, saying ... arise, go out from this land, and return to the land of your birth.'"

And Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Do we have any portion or inheritance in our father's house? Are we not reckoned as foreigners to him? ... Now do all that God has said to you."

And Jacob arose, and lifted his sons and his women on the camels. And he drove all his livestock, and all his possessions which he had acquired ... to come to Isaac his father, to the land of Canaan. And Laban went to shear his flock; and Rachel stole the teraphim [the household idols] which her father had. And Jacob stole the heart of Laban the Aramean, by not telling him that he was running away....

And Laban was told on the third day that Jacob had run away. And he ... pursued after him a journey of seven days, and overtook him in the mountain of Gilead. And God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night, and said to him, "Take heed that you not speak with Jacob good or evil."...

And Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done that you have stolen my heart, and have driven my daughters like captives of the sword? Why did you hide yourself by running away, and stealing my heart, and did not tell me? And I would have sent you away with gladness, and with songs, with timbrel, and with harp. And you did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters.... Why did you steal my gods?"

And Jacob answered and said to Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I said, 'Perhaps you will take your daughters from me force.' With whomever you find your gods, he shall not live...." Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them....

And Laban ... came into Rachel's tent. And Rachel had taken the teraphim, and set them in the straw for the camel, and sat upon them. And Laban felt all around the tent, and did not find them. And she said to her father, "Do not let there be fierceness in the eyes of my lord, that I am not able rise before you, for the way of women is with me."...

And Jacob was incensed, and rebuked Laban. And Jacob answered and said to Laban, "What is my transgression? What is my sin, that you have chased after me? ... What of all the vessels of you house have you found?"

And Laban answered, and said to Jacob, "These daughters are my daughters, and the sons are my sons, and the flock is my flock, and all that you see is mine. But what will I do today for these my daughters, or for their sons whom they have brought forth? And now go, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be for a witness between me and you."

And Jacob took a stone, and set it up as a pillar. And Jacob said to his brothers, "Collect stones." And they took stones, and made a heap, and they ate there upon the

heap.... And Laban said, "This heap is a witness between me and you today.... Jehovah watch between me and you, for we shall be hidden a man from his companion. If you afflict my daughters, and if you take women over my daughters, even if there is no one with us; see God is witness between me and you."

And Laban said to Jacob, "See this heap, and this pillar which I have set up between me and you. This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I should not pass beyond this heap to you, and that you should not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for evil...." And Jacob promised by the Dread of his father Isaac.

AC 4067:2-4 Countless communities exist in the next life, and these are arranged and set in order by the Lord according to all the kinds of good and truth; also communities that are the complete opposite, according to all the kinds of evil and falsity. They are so arranged and set in order that no kind of good or truth exists ... which does not have [a link with] such angelic communities, that is, to which angelic communities do not correspond. Nor on the other hand does any kind of evil or falsity exist ... to which communities of devils do not correspond. Interiorly, that is, as regards his thoughts and affections, everyone is within a community of such angels or devils, although he is not actually aware of it. Everything that a person thinks and wills originates there, so much so that if the communities of spirits or angels in which he dwells were taken away from him, he would instantly cease to have any thought or will at all; indeed he would instantly fall down completely dead....

[3] A person chooses certain communities for himself, that is, he places himself within one of these; for like is brought into association with like. For example, one who is grasping chooses for himself communities of like-minded spirits who are motivated by his kind of desire; one who loves himself pre-eminently and despises others chooses for himself others who are like himself, ... and so on.... But one who is not grasping, or one who does not love himself pre-eminently and does not despise others ... dwells in a community of like-minded angels and through them is led by the Lord.... And as he allows himself to be led to good which is more interior and more perfect, so he is conveyed to more interior and more perfect angelic communities. His changes of state are nothing else than changes of communities....