

A Love Worth Waiting For

The Rev. Kenneth J. Alden

Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed but a few days to him because of the love he had for her (Genesis 29:20).

The strength of Jacob's love, which made seven years seem like only a few days, can represent a far deeper love than even Jacob could have experienced. In the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church, we find descriptions of a love that is so beautiful it has inspired single people to hope for marriage, widows and widowers to hope for the resumption of their marriages after death, and couples looking forward to marriage or in the first days of marriage to pray to attain this ideal:

The states produced by this love are innocence, peace tranquility, inmost friendship, complete trust, a mutual desire of the mind and heart to do the other every good; also, as a result of all these, bliss, felicity, delight, pleasure, and, owing to an eternal enjoyment of states like this, the happiness of heaven. All of these states are inherent in conjugal love and consequently spring from it... (Conjugal Love 180).

Yet, Jacob awoke after the wedding at the end of the seven years of labor to find he had been given Leah, not Rachel. He didn't even know that Leah was part of the bargain, let alone the whole bargain. Although the time had passed quickly, he was still indignant that he had not been given what he had worked so hard for. So it might be with a single person hoping for a marriage of love truly conjugal; they may have led a decent religious life and diligently followed principles of chastity and virginity, but still not found a suitable partner. So also for a couple at their seventh anniversary; although they are still together and happily married, although the time may have passed quickly, and their marriage has brought them much enjoyment, still, their love may not be as deep and intimate as they had imagined it would be.

Jacob receiving Leah instead of Rachel represents a state of life in which "as yet there [is] conjunction only with the affection of external truth" (*Arcana Coelestia* 3834). In such a state, we know the ideals and even have a kind of acknowledgment of and belief in internal truths, but we are not yet conjoined with them. Just as Jacob realized what had happened when the morning arrived, so when we are in states of enlightenment we may realize how far we actually are from the true married love we had sought (see *Arcana Coelestia* 3837).

Although perhaps it is to be expected that after seven or even fourteen years of marriage we will discover ourselves to be much further from our ideals concerning marriage than we had hoped to be, still we are disappointed. We get absorbed in all the work of establishing a household, getting settled in our career, pursuing further education, meeting major expenses like a car or house or retirement planning. There are also endless demands on our time and attention from raising children. These needs keep our attention on natural concerns and often keep us from having time for thinking about the Word together as a couple, let alone reading or studying it. When we come to worship at church, we find we are more concerned with our children's behavior than we are with the meaning of the prayer, hymns, or sermon.

There are also other ways in which we may feel as cheated as Jacob did when he discovered he had been given Leah instead of Rachel. Perhaps the death of our husband or wife has seemingly arrested our ability to cultivate the interior things of marriage. Perhaps the obvious shortcomings and sins of our partner, or a divorce from him or her, has completely changed our perception of where we thought we were in our labor for true married love.

Jacob was indignant when he discovered that Laban had deceived him, and so might we be when we find ourselves, not at the end of our labor for true conjugal love as we had hoped, but at the beginning. The Heavenly Doctrine tells us that seven years of labor represented “a diligent effort, to be made during a holy state, to the end that [good belonging to our natural life] might be joined to internal truth” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3824). This joining together results when truths are “learned, acknowledged, and believed” (*ibid.*). Up to this stage we have loved interior truths, but not yet with genuine affection. But the good of our natural life is joined to interior truths when we are “affected with them for the sake of the use of life” and “they are loved for the sake of life” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3824).

Our lives reveal when there has been a joining together of internal truths with natural life. Nothing becomes our own until we act from it *because* it is our will to do so. When we *will* something, we have gone beyond just doing it because we know we should. Eventually, we see the joining of internal truths to our natural life when we spontaneously do what those truths teach (see *Arcana Coelestia* 3843).

So what happens when we are faced with what is represented by another seven years of labor for Jacob to acquire his beloved Rachel? We see that it will take even more work to develop the intimate states of marriage we had sought, to achieve a richer innocence, peace and trust, to develop a delight in willing and thinking as the other and a willingness to be one in our approach to the Lord and obedience to Him. Seven further years of labor represent continued diligent effort (see *Arcana Coelestia* 3845). When we are required to expend such effort to reach our goal, is it time to be indignant, or despairing, or changing our direction? If we are inclined to depart from the Lord’s path that we have been on, what direction shall we choose?

The Heavenly Doctrine tells of a time when Swedenborg and some spirits saw represented

a broad way which led to hell, and a narrow way which led to heaven. The broad way was planted with trees, flowers, and the like that in outward form appeared beautiful and delightful, but unseen snakes and serpents of various kinds were hidden there. The narrow way did not seem to be so much adorned with trees and flowers, but appeared sad and dark; and yet there were in it angel infants most beautifully adorned, in delightful paradises and flower-gardens, which the spirits did not see. They were then asked which way they wished to go. They said, the broad way; when suddenly their eyes were opened, and in the broad way they saw the serpents but in the narrow way the angels. They were then again asked which way they wished to go, whereupon they remained silent; and so far as their sight was opened, they said that they wished to go the narrow way; and so far as their sight was closed, that they wished to go the broad way (*Arcana Coelestia* 3477).

We, too, experience such uncertainty, unless our sight is completely closed or completely opened. If we have waited for love truly conjugal and it has not come, shall we behave as those in the parable (see Luke 12:35-45) did who beat the male and female servants when their master's coming was delayed, and ate, drank and were drunk? Or shall we do as the Lord advised, and have our lamps burning, gird our loins, watch, and prepare for the coming of the Lord with, in this case, true married love?

In this story, Jacob chose to continue working for Rachel after he had expressed his outrage and had been answered by Laban. In the spiritual sense of this story, there is no anger or desire for revenge in the indignation expressed by Jacob, but rather zeal, which comes from a good love (see *Arcana Coelestia* 3839:3-4). Jacob showed a willingness to diligently continue his work of caring for the flocks—flocks which represent innocent states in our lives. Although it is not stated in the Word, there is no reason why his second seven years could not also have seemed like a few days. Likewise, there is no reason why seven years or seventy years of marriage or waiting for marriage could not seem like a few days for us.

What makes time fly? The Heavenly Doctrine says it is affection or love. We read in *Arcana Coelestia*, “And they seemed but a few days to him because of the love he had for her’...signifies a state of love, namely that it was free from tedium” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3827). The state of love here referred to is one of affection for interior things, as we read further:

When a person is in a state of love, or of celestial affection, he is in an angelic state, that is to say, as if not in time, provided there is no impatience in the affection.... By the affection of genuine love a person is withdrawn from bodily and worldly things, for his mind is elevated toward heaven, and thus is withdrawn from the things of time. The reason why time appears to be something is that we reflect upon things that do not belong to the affection or love, thus which are tedious (ibid.).

How do we avoid impatience and keep our reflection on those things that do belong to our love for marriage? We work diligently at those uses that the Lord sets before us—uses of marriage, uses of family, uses of employment. We begin with the first element of charity: shunning evils because they are sins. In our present context, we turn our thoughts away when we find ourselves dwelling on what does not belong to our love but makes it tedious. We avoid impatience by bringing our thought back to the states of true married love that we find inspiring—states of innocence, peace, and beauty.

For example, we can reflect that innocence is “loving the Lord as one’s Father by doing His commandments and wishing to be led by Him and not by oneself, thus like a little child.... It is because true marriage love is innocence that the playfulness between a married pair is like the play of little children” (*Apocalypse Explained* 996).

Or we might reflect on peace: “Marriage love is also peace.... Peace is bliss of heart and soul arising from the conjunction of the Lord with heaven and the church, as well as from the conjunction of good and truth, when all conflict and combat of evil and falsity with good and

truth has ceased” (*Apocalypse Explained* 997).

Other beautiful states that belong to true married love are intelligence and wisdom, power and protection against the hells, youthfulness, and beauty (see *Apocalypse Explained* 998-1001). There are, in fact, many wonderful states to focus on—and to be given—as we place our attention on our real goal, even in times when it seems distant and many things stand in the way. When Jacob is finally given Rachel, the Word says that he loved her more than Leah, which means having a greater love for internal truth than for external truth (see *Arcana Coelestia* 3851).

The beautiful states leading up to marriage and the first states after the wedding give us a glimpse of the kind of love attributed to Jacob—one in which seven years can seem like only a few days. The innocence, peace, beauty, protection from the hells and other states belonging to marriage are gifts from the Lord that need not decline, but can increase. They are worth every bit of effort, even when we have labored long and find the ideal still beyond reach.

When we don’t achieve our goal right away, let us shun the anger of disappointment that is directed against the Lord or one’s partner, and get back to work, tending the flocks—the innocent things the Lord puts under our care—as Jacob did. Let us focus our eyes on what is from the Lord, what is internal and heavenly, so that our next seven or seventy years of labor may pass like a few days. In following the Lord as a little child, we may be certain that the internal ideal will come!

“So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed but a few days to him because of the love he had for her” (Genesis 29:20).

Amen.