

Genesis (2011) 31B

- Jacob made his case to his wives that it was time to leave Laban and head to a new place
 - God had appeared to Jacob and given him the instructions to pack up and move
 - Laban had turned against Jacob because of Jacob's success
 - And Laban was probably looking for any reason to accuse Jacob and recover his lost herds
 - But Jacob needed to bring his wives along with him in this change
 - They are Laban's daughters, so Jacob deals with them in a respectful way, seeking their support and agreement
 - He pleads his case and waits for their response
 - Let's take note of how these women respond and see what we can learn about their hearts today

Gen. 31:14 Rachel and Leah said to him, "Do we still have any portion or inheritance in our father's house?"

Gen. 31:15 "Are we not reckoned by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and has also entirely consumed our purchase price.

Gen. 31:16 "Surely all the wealth which God has taken away from our father belongs to us and our children; now then, do whatever God has said to you."

- Jacob made his case to his wives in a two-part argument
 - First, he said the family's situation was now in jeopardy because Laban had taken notice of Jacob's gains and was hostile toward Jacob
 - In fact, Jacob's gains were designed by God to come at Laban's expense
 - So it was no surprise that Laban has become upset
 - Secondly, the Lord has called Jacob to return home
 - The call came in a dream, where God reminded Jacob that he had made a vow to return
 - So Jacob had little choice but to obey God's call

- In their response, the wives focus on the issue of the inheritance and the wealth of their father
 - First, they ask if they have any inheritance in their father's house?
 - Since Jacob wasn't a true son of Laban, he wasn't entitled to any of Laban's wealth
 - That's why Jacob has been required to earn it
 - And since Jacob had fallen out of favor with Laban, they assume correctly that Jacob will never receive anything
 - Secondly, the daughters themselves had no inheritance since only the men could inherit property
 - So the women conclude that there is nothing to expect from their father in the future
 - Secondly, they say he has treated them as foreigners because Laban sold them to Jacob
 - Remember that normally women were betrothed with a purchase paid to the father
 - The higher the price paid, the more it honored the woman
 - But Laban allowed Jacob to buy his wives through labor
 - And the value of that labor remained with Laban
 - He alone profited by that labor
 - Thus he consumed the purchase price that Jacob paid rather than using it to bless the daughters with their dowry
 - So the wives' second observation is that they have been treated poorly by their father all along
 - They have little reason to cling to their father's household
 - Finally, they acknowledge God's authority in the situation
 - They see the hand of God doing all these things to enrich Jacob
 - They tell Jacob to do as God directed

- With that begins Jacob's personal exodus out of Laban's family
 - This is a fascinating story with more intrigue than meets the eye
 - As we study this section, remember the main theme of Jacob's story:
 - The sovereignty of God working through the sin of people
 - Jacob is showing helpful signs as a man who knows the Lord's work and trusts in Him to a degree
 - But he still has a tendency to rely on schemes and deception to make things happen
 - And his wives follow in his footsteps

[Gen. 31:17](#) Then Jacob arose and put his children and his wives upon camels;
[Gen. 31:18](#) and he drove away all his livestock and all his property which he had gathered, his acquired livestock which he had gathered in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac.

[Gen. 31:19](#) When Laban had gone to shear his flock, then Rachel stole the household idols that were her father's.

[Gen. 31:20](#) And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he was fleeing.

[Gen. 31:21](#) So he fled with all that he had; and he arose and crossed the Euphrates River, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead.

[Gen. 31:22](#) When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled,

[Gen. 31:23](#) then he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him a distance of seven days' journey, and he overtook him in the hill country of Gilead.

- Jacob aims to make a midnight escape from Laban
 - He knows that Laban doesn't want to see Jacob leave his employment
 - This is especially since Jacob will be taking most of Laban's wealth with him
 - Therefore, Jacob makes a run for it
 - In v.20 we're told Jacob deceived Laban by not telling him he was leaving
 - Here's a wonderful verse to remind us that deception can take the form of withholding truthful information

- Jacob knew that the proper thing to do in this case was to tell Laban of his departure
 - After living in Laban's house for 20 years and having married his two daughters, Jacob would certainly be expected to inform Laban
- In fact, he was under a legal obligation to seek the patriarch's blessing for this action
 - As a hired man, Jacob was bound to remain in Laban's employment until Laban released him
- Therefore, Jacob purposely withheld the news that he was leaving, and in not telling Laban something he should tell him, Jacob was deceitful
 - Reminding us of James' instructions

[James 4:17](#) Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, **to him it is sin.**

- We don't need the Bible to spell out godly living down to the last detail of life
 - The Holy Spirit living in each of us provides a compass in our heart true enough to point out right from wrong in any situation
 - When we know what is right, we sense it by God's grace and by that knowledge, we instantly become obligated by God's word to do the right thing
 - When we go against that knowledge, we sin
- Jacob was right to leave Laban, but he was wrong to do it in this way
 - Once again Jacob relies on deception, complicating his obedience to God
- Meanwhile, Rachel makes a move of her own
 - Laban is out shearing the flock, which is a multi-day endeavor involving many men
 - This leaves the homes empty of men, so Rachel takes the opportunity to steal Laban's household idols

- Among pagan worshippers, each household would adopt its own idols
 - These idols could take many forms, and were represented as small figurines a few inches high
 - The idols became associated with the household's identity, protecting and blessing the house
 - They might be inscribed with the family name
 - The patriarch of the family held these idols
 - They were passed down to the next patriarch of the family
 - So the idols also indicated family authority and the right to rule the inheritance
 - Nuzi tablets of this era have been found with instructions that whoever possessed the family idols could lay claim to be the legitimate heir
 - So whoever possessed these idols could assume ownership of Laban's estate upon his death
- Reading that Rachel took these idols leaves us wondering if her intentions were to worship them
 - The suggestion is that she didn't have a faith in God but retained her pagan religious views
 - While this is possible, the issue of inheritance is much more likely
 - Rachel took these idols as leverage against her father and protection against his threats
 - She took the "keys to his kingdom," which would have left Laban very vulnerable
 - Perhaps she wanted some insurance that Laban wouldn't attack them
 - Or maybe she intended to use them to claim some of the estate that Laban has withheld from her and Leah when he denied them a dowry
- Regardless of her reasons, her actions mirrored those of her husband

- While Jacob was deceiving Laban, Rachel was stealing from Laban
 - Aren't these two tempting God by their actions?
 - As readers we know the Lord has promised to act in Jacob's best interest, but will their mischief cause God to go back on his promises?
- It's important to remember that at this early point in the Bible, a reader is still trying to understand the character and nature of this Creator God
 - And Moses is teaching us about God by recording God's responses to men in their sin
 - In the first part of Genesis, God showed that sin has consequences
 - Adam and Eve received consequences for failing to keep God's word
 - So God is a God who responds to sin
 - Then later in the face of worldwide rebellion, God judges men through a worldwide flood
 - But God promises to preserve a family of godly people if Noah builds an ark
 - So God is a God who executes judgment while offering mercy to those who hear Him
 - Now we watch as God makes covenant with men, covenants that hold no requirements for men
 - And as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob experience sin in their lives, God has shown Himself faithful regardless
 - So God is a God who honors His promises unconditionally
- Clearly, the relationship we want with this God is one based on His promises, and not one based on our performance
 - When our relationship with God depends on man's performance, the outcomes are disastrous
 - When we turn to God's mercy, rescue will come

- And when we rest in God's promises, nothing can shake God's faithfulness
 - Still, even if our sin won't break God's covenants, it will bring consequences
 - We've seen this throughout the story of the patriarchs, especially in the story of Jacob
 - He continues to introduce deception into the work of God
 - God is preparing to show Jacob a better way, but for the time being continues to rescue Jacob
 - So Jacob reaches Gilead, which is directly east of Bethel across the Jordan
 - Jacob has crossed the desert directly, which is the hardest way to travel but it indicates how quickly he was trying to move

[Gen. 31:22](#) When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled,

[Gen. 31:23](#) then he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him a distance of seven days' journey, and he overtook him in the hill country of Gilead.

[Gen. 31:24](#) God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream of the night and said to him, "Be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad."

[Gen. 31:25](#) Laban caught up with Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen camped in the hill country of Gilead.

[Gen. 31:26](#) Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done by deceiving me and carrying away my daughters like captives of the sword?"

[Gen. 31:27](#) "Why did you flee secretly and deceive me, and did not tell me so that I might have sent you away with joy and with songs, with timbrel and with lyre;

[Gen. 31:28](#) and did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters? Now you have done foolishly.

[Gen. 31:29](#) "It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful not to speak either good or bad to Jacob.'

- It takes three days before Laban hears that Jacob has left with his family
 - Remember that Laban made his sons move their flocks three days journey away from Jacob
 - This distance is the reason for the three day delay in the news reaching Laban
 - But as soon as Laban hears, he rushes to catch Jacob

- Moses offers no commentary on what is motivating Laban's haste to catch Jacob, but is there really any mystery?
 - More than likely Laban intends to kill Jacob and take his daughters and the herd back
 - Jacob's escape is reason enough in the ancient world for Laban to take this action, and he would love nothing better than to have an excuse to reclaim his herds
- Before Laban reaches Jacob, the Lord appears in a dream to give Laban a warning
 - This is the first time we've seen the Lord appear to Laban and the second time in Scripture that we see the Lord speaking to an unbeliever
 - As such, it's a remarkable moment, and it's proof that saving faith isn't simply a matter of knowing about God
 - Like Abimelech before him, Laban has come to know about the living God and even receive a vision from Him
 - Nevertheless, they remain outside God's mercy since they have not received a promise and rested in it by faith
 - Instead of a promise, Laban is given a stern warning not to say anything good or bad to Jacob
 - This is a strange command
 - We might have expected God to say something like "don't raise a hand against Jacob" or maybe "don't say anything bad"
 - Why does God tell Laban not to say anything good to Jacob?
- God is intent on protecting Jacob, but he's also intent on teaching Jacob a lesson along the way
 - The protection of God is evident in the instruction not to say anything bad
 - The command not to speak anything bad implies not doing anything bad either

- A man's word was his command, so Laban has been prohibited from commanding anything negative against Jacob
- But the chastisement of the Lord will become evident in His second instruction that Laban say nothing positive either
 - Laban might have been inclined to make an offer to entice Jacob to return or to tempt Jacob to stay longer
 - God wants Jacob to rest entirely in His promises and not on the mercy of unbelievers
- So as Laban catches up, he gives Jacob a sob story of concern and hurt feelings
 - Laban says Jacob deceived him, which is true
 - And Jacob denied Laban the chance to say a proper good bye to his daughters, which is also true
 - Now it's Laban's turn to deceive
 - He says had he known of Jacob's departure, he would have celebrated the event in songs of joy
 - Finally, Laban accuses Jacob of denying him the chance to kiss his daughters goodbye
 - After living with Laban for twenty years, Jacob wouldn't have possibly been fooled by this show
 - But the show must go on, because saving face and posturing was built in to the culture
- Finally, Laban declares it is in his power to do harm to Jacob
 - The Hebrew word for harm is *ra*, which means evil or disaster
 - Clearly, this would have been Laban's choice, by his own words
 - For if God had not stopped him, he would have gone forward in this act
 - Clearly, this man has understood the power of God
 - But notice he describes God as the God of your father in v.20
 - Laban hears from God, knows God's power and obeys God, yet he doesn't have a personal relationship with God

[James 2:19](#) You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

- A relationship is based on more than knowing about God or even hearing from God or even conforming to God's decrees
 - The demons do all these things at times but to no good outcome...they still shudder
 - The only test that matters is whether we have entered into a personal relationship with God
 - And only through a covenant can man have a saving relationship with God
- Here we see God acting according to His word through a covenant with Jacob to protect Jacob
 - God said:

[Gen. 28:15](#) "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

- In v.19 we see God at work as Laban reveals that God is holding him back from bringing harm to Jacob
 - God's protection is both a result of His promises and the natural consequences of Laban's behavior
 - Laban's hatred of Jacob and his poor treatment of Jacob have left God no choice but to bring calamity upon Laban
 - God's word was to deliver Jacob back safely and to curse those who curse him
 - Jacob has done wrong things to Laban, but nothing in Jacob's behavior could cause God to go back on His word
 - Nevertheless, Jacob has deceived Laban and his wife has stolen from Laban
 - And will God deal justly with these mistakes?