

## **When Enough Is Enough (2) | Reading: Genesis 31**

When assessing the behaviour of all the characters we meet in the life of Jacob, including Jacob himself, there are two things we need to consider.

Firstly, these people had only limited revelation of the will of God. These characters had never heard of the 10 Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount or the Golden Rule but we have & we read, study & apply these stories as those who have. We look at these stories not as isolated events but as part of the larger redemptive story of Scripture & as disciples of Jesus who as our Lord has called us to follow him. Because of this we have a fair idea of the rights & wrongs as we read through the stories.

Secondly, the Bible honestly records what these people actually did. It doesn't attempt to edit out the bad & only leave the good like some biographies do. The Bible is a Divine Book that is honest & real about the human condition. It does not say that God approved of their actions, but it is transparent about their actions. Most of the characters we have met were in some sense people of God – but only by reason of his grace, not because they deserved or earned the status. In his prayer in the following chapter Jacob freely admits this reality when he says to God (32:10); **“I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant.”** Grace really shines through in the life of Jacob! It's the story of a sovereign, patient & faithful God straightening out a twisted man with his grace. Yet that is not just Jacob's story, it's our story – it's the story of every individual who receives undeserved favour from God! When grace comes down to us it makes us face up to us & begins a long journey of character transformation that leads us back to our Father's house. It was Jacob's trickery that led to his departure from his father's house but it is grace that firstly promised his return & finally led him home again. That's a story that echo's all through Scripture, yet that same grace had a lot to teach him on the journey & in the exile.

In this chapter we read of Jacob fleeing, secondly we read of Laban pursuing & thirdly we read of their confrontation which led to a covenant between them.

### **1. Jacob Flees (1-21)**

Why did Jacob flee? Well he overheard a conversation; he overheard a narrative about him. Laban's sons were saying; **“Jacob has taken all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has gained all this wealth.”** This of course was not the complete truth but it was enough for him to learn he was no longer in favour with Laban. At this point the LORD says to Jacob, **“Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you.”** As Jacob learns he is out of favour with Laban God comes into the story & guides Jacob & assures him he has not lost Divine favour. Even though he has lost favour with those he has served for years God still had a future for him & God was still with him. In life there may be

times when you lose favour with people: People may give up on you, people may change their opinion about you, people may cast you aside when you are no longer any use to them, people may turn on you or people may even gossip a false narrative about you. At such times we like Jacob need to especially know God still has a future for us & God is still with us. People's favour can be fickle but as Jacob himself testifies in the next chapter God's favour remains faithful – dependable, steadfast & unwavering. Even though Jacob lost favour with men he still had favour with God.

So Jacob sends & calls for his wives & points this very thing out; (5) **“I see your father does not regard me with favour as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me.”** Jacob also tells his wives of a dream he had (11-13) which included the command to return home. Rachel & Leah could see they also had been mistreated by their father & therefore came to the conclusion in verse 16; **“Now then, whatever God has said to you, do.”** So they escaped while Laban was busy shearing his sheep.

## ***2. Laban Pursues (22-24)***

It was three days before Laban realised they were gone & it took him seven days to catch up. But during this time something very important happened which helped temper Laban's obvious anger. Verse 24 says; **“But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night & said to him, “Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.”** God was not only able to speak to Jacob he was also able to speak to Laban, Jacob's pursuer. How would this story have turned out if God had not intervened in this way? Probably not as well as it did! Is there someone you have a difficulty with? God can speak to them just like he did to Laban on behalf of Jacob. God can get through in a way you never could, he can even get through to those who are “after us” metaphorically speaking. These few verses about Laban pursuing Jacob might be the shortest part of the reading but it is God's intervention here that made the difference to how this story turned out (29). Let's be a people who trust in God to intervene on our behalf. I don't believe Jacob initially trusted in God's intervention in this chapter that's why I think he fled on the sly. He feared Laban more than he trusted God. Yet even so this was the case God still intervened on his behalf. As Christians if we believe God ultimately intervened on our behalf by sending his Son to die for our sin then surely we can trust him to intervene in every lesser way needed as we journey through life.

## ***3. The Confrontation & the Covenant (25-55)***

All lot happens in this section. It begins with Laban playing the victim card, playing the hurt father & making out that if Jacob had have left in the right way he would have looked after him. As if, well all know Laban by now! In reality Laban would have been mad at being outwitted by Jacob again yet he was obviously maddest because the household gods were missing. This is the act that really seems to bring things to a head. In the first part of the reading it is casually mentioned in verse 19; **“Laban had gone to shear his sheep, & Rachel stole her father's household gods.”**

These gods would have been passed down through generations & were believed to bring good fortune. So Laban would have felt his heritage & future had been robbed at some level. Jacob had no idea Rachel had taken them so in verses 31 he answered Laban's questions. Firstly he had fled secretly because he feared Laban would take Rachael & Leah from him. Secondly he was so confident the household gods were not among his tent he said; **"Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live."** At this point the suspense rises in the story, what will this mean for Rachel? Thankfully Rachael tricks her father & saves her own skin with the "it's my time-of-the-month" excuse. Yet it is this very 'household gods' issue that ignites courage in Jacob to finally speak up & confront Laban. Would this have happened if Rachel had not stolen the gods? It's all the little twists & turns that God uses to bring things to the surface.

It's as though things are orchestrated so Jacob has to face Laban. God had told Jacob to return home but the sneaky escape plan was not God's idea. Back in chapter 30 Jacob backed down to Laban's manipulation, here in this chapter instead of facing him with God he had fled from him in fear but now he finds himself face to face with Laban at the point when enough is enough. He finally finds the courage to speak up & stand up to him (38-42). Notice how this led to a change of heart from Laban. Laban had not come back, he knew Jacob was right & offered him an upfront covenant on the spot. Jacob had wanted to run from Laban, to avoid confronting him, but God seems to have orchestrated things so he had to face Laban & in this he learns to truly trust the God who promised to be with him. It takes more trust in God to face our Laban's than to run from them. God wanted Jacob to head home on the path of faith not fear.

Jacob had freely admitted in verse 31 that he did what he did because he was afraid of Laban but God orchestrated things so that he had to leave via facing Laban head on. Because of this Jacob left for home with a solid covenant that secured a free future for him & his family. God's way might be harder but it will bring much more freedom & security in the end! Fear of man is never the motivation of God. For this reason in his mercy God will sovereignly orchestrate our lives so that we learn to confront & face our fears instead of running from them. This is evidence of his favour on us so that we grow in trusting him more.

God's wants us to be a people who are characterised by fearless faith not fleeing fear. A people who confront what needs confronted in our lives, in the church & in the world! In the struggle between Jacob & Laban Jacob had shown great patience & many years of servitude. These were great & godly qualities to develop but now Jacob had to learn something new, he also had to learn to overcome fear & confront Laban. He also had to learn when enough was enough & stand up for what was right & fair. True faith teaches us these lessons. Jacob's struggle with Laban in these chapters is essentially a struggle for freedom, freedom from fear of a man, a freedom that could not be gained in the fullest sense by running away. Ultimately it is truly knowing & believing the favour of God that enables us to face our fears with courage. If God is with us who can be against us!

***Sources used for this sermon***

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