

Genesis (2011) 31A

- The story of Jacob in the book of Genesis is fundamentally a story of God's sovereignty working in and through the flawed lives of men
 - Standing at the the head of the line is Jacob himself
 - God intended to give Jacob the blessing, but he took it for himself through dishonest means
 - God intended for Jacob to take a wife from Abraham's relatives in Haran, but Jacob's deception required him to flee there under threat of death
 - God intended to give Jacob one fertile wife, but Jacob chose to take three more in lust and
 - Each of these decisions will cause him grief in one way or another

A pastor was addressing his congregation one Sunday with a message of preserving their bodies, the temple of the Lord.

"The material we put into our stomachs is enough to have killed most of us sitting here years ago. Red meat is awful. Soft drinks corrode your stomach lining. Fast food food is loaded with preservatives. High fat diets can be disastrous, and none of us realizes the long-term harm caused by the germs in our drinking water. But there is one food that is the most dangerous of all. Can anyone here guess what food causes the most grief and suffering, even many years after eating it?"

After several seconds of quiet, a 75-year-old man in the front row raised his hand and said, "Wedding Cake."

- His life is a tug-o-war between trusting God and relying on himself
 - Increasingly God has revealed Himself to Jacob as the One in authority and control in Jacob's life
 - But Jacob is a slow learner, so he's struggling to trust and rest in God's authority and control
- Today Jacob takes another step in that direction even as his family lags behind

- Jacob's family becomes an increasingly bigger focus in this story
 - Such that we'll see the true consequences of Jacob's sin play out in the lives of his family whom he has influenced by his sin

[Gen. 31:1](#) Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what belonged to our father he has made all this wealth."

[Gen. 31:2](#) Jacob saw the attitude of Laban, and behold, it was not friendly toward him as formerly.

[Gen. 31:3](#) Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."

[Gen. 31:4](#) So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to his flock in the field,

[Gen. 31:5](#) and said to them, "I see your father's attitude, that it is not friendly toward me as formerly, but the God of my father has been with me.

[Gen. 31:6](#) "You know that I have served your father with all my strength.

[Gen. 31:7](#) "Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times; however, God did not allow him to hurt me.

[Gen. 31:8](#) "If he spoke thus, 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flock brought forth speckled; and if he spoke thus, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock brought forth striped.

[Gen. 31:9](#) "Thus God has taken away your father's livestock and given them to me.

- Jacob works for six years under these new terms, building a large and impressive inheritance for himself (v.38)
 - In that time, Laban's son have taken note that their inheritance has withered away to nearly nothing
 - The part of the herd that belongs to them is weak and getting weaker even as Jacob's flock is growing
 - And Jacob gets word that Laban's sons are beginning to accuse Jacob of theft
 - They conclude that Jacob's strength is coming at their expense
 - But they go a step too far to assume that Jacob has done something unfair in the process
 - We know from last week that Jacob's actions were in keeping with the agreement he made with Laban

- Jacob acted entirely in his own self-interest, resulting in large strong herds of spotted, speckled, and black lambs and goats
- The inevitable outcome of this breeding was to leave only weak animals in Laban's herd
- So Jacob wasn't stealing from Laban, as the sons suggest
 - He was fulfilling his end of the bargain in the most advantages way he could
- Jacob took note of these accusations and then observed that Laban was not friendly as he was before
 - The Hebrew literally states that Laban's face was not toward Jacob as before
 - Laban's entire attitude toward Jacob has done an about face
 - Before Laban was inclined toward keeping Jacob and favoring Jacob so long as Jacob worked for him
 - The reason for that favoritism was simple: Jacob was increasing Laban's wealth
 - Now that Jacob was hurting Laban's wealth, everything was different
 - This is the world's form of friendship
 - The world is friendly toward those who give us what we want
 - Whether money, power, fame, compliments, sex, whatever
 - If the thing we want disappears, then the reason for the friendship or relationship goes with it
 - This is conditional love, the world's kind of love, the only kind of love sinful flesh has capacity to experience
 - The love of God is entirely different
 - It is agape love, self-sacrificial brotherly love that is unconditional
 - It doesn't seek relationship for what it can get out of it, but what it can give to it

- This is a type of relationship that the world cannot know apart from the love of God in their lives

[Luke 6:32](#) “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.

[Luke 6:33](#) “If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.

[Luke 6:34](#) “If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount.

[Luke 6:35](#) “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.

- With that recognition, Jacob hears from the Lord
 - This is the first time Jacob has heard from God in twenty years since leaving the land
 - Now the Lord is directing Jacob to leave Haran and return to his own land
 - The fact that the Lord is speaking now tells us that the Lord has wanted Jacob to remain here for the previous twenty years
 - Those years served a purpose in Jacob’s life, but now the time has come to go home
 - Jacob apparently hears this while in the field shepherding the flock, so he calls to his two wives to meet him there
 - Away from Laban and Laban’s sons, Jacob explains his situation
 - After six years of working for Laban, Laban’s daughters would have naturally assumed this would be their life forever
 - They had no reason to suspect that Jacob would ever return to his father’s land
 - Essentially, Jacob has been working as an adopted son of Laban
 - And this work has obviously benefited Jacob’s family

- So Jacob must make a strong case for these women to follow him
 - Though they have a legal obligation to follow him, Jacob is working to win them over to the plan
 - He knows he will have a fight on his hands with Laban, so the last thing he needs is divided allegiance among his wives
- Jacob begins by noting that his relationship with Laban has changed in recent years
 - Laban is not longer Jacob's ally and friend
 - Yet Jacob is blameless in their work relationship
 - Jacob has always served Laban in good faith
 - And yet Laban has been nothing but dishonest
 - In fact we learn here that Laban has changed Jacob's wages ten times
 - In v.8 Jacob says that after Laban saw Jacob's flock growing, Laban unilaterally changed the rules
 - He would declare that only the speckled sheep and goats were to be Jacob's rather than speckled and spotted and black
 - But then the herds would produce speckled only
 - Then Laban would respond by declaring that only the striped would be Jacob's
 - And then the flocks began producing primarily striped
 - This was particularly unfair, since a striped animal was very unusual
 - This switcheroo happened no less than ten times in the course of the six years
 - Clearly Laban was making every effort to cheat Jacob
 - He wasn't interested in a fair deal; he was only interested in manipulating Jacob into remaining in his employment

- But now after six years of watching his wealth disappear, Laban is no longer friendly toward Jacob
- In v.9 Jacob tells his wives that the Lord has been behind this surprising increase of the flocks
 - We know from chapter 30 how Jacob accomplished the process of mating the herds and interbreeding the animals
 - He used his knowledge of animal husbandry and careful breeding to select for the kind of animals he wanted
 - But as Laban changed the rules ten times, how did Jacob's breeding process respond so quickly?
 - The nature of the breeding process would have made turning on a dime very difficult
 - Once the Jacob had isolated the desired types of animals, he would have found it nearly impossible to begin selecting for different characteristics
 - Yet somehow he managed to continue collecting the kind of the animals he wanted
 - Now Jacob knows that the real secret behind his success has been God all along
 - As Jacob worked to respond to each of Laban's unreasonable demands, he successfully produced exactly the right kind of animals
 - Jacob says this was proof that the Lord was at work enriching Jacob at Laban's expense
 - We can understand why the Lord may be blessing Jacob, because God has promised by His word to bless Jacob
 - But why does the Lord choose to bless Jacob at Laban's expense?
 - This is also a result of the Lord's promises
 - The Lord said that He would bless those who blessed Jacob and curse those who cursed Jacob
 - Laban is a perfect example of this promise played out

- For the years where Laban was blessing Jacob, the Lord ensured that the relationship resulted in a reciprocal blessing for Laban
 - Laban gave Jacob a home and wives, so Laban saw his flocks increase under Jacob's care
 - But now that Laban has turned against Jacob and continued to cheat him, the Lord has brought these sins back against Laban
 - Meanwhile, the Lord continues to bless Jacob
- How did Jacob come to the recognition that the Lord was behind these blessings? He tells his wives...

[Gen. 31:10](#) "And it came about at the time when the flock were mating that I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the male goats which were mating were striped, speckled, and mottled.

[Gen. 31:11](#) "Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am.'

[Gen. 31:12](#) "He said, 'Lift up now your eyes and see that all the male goats which are mating are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you.

[Gen. 31:13](#) 'I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth.'"

- Jacob received a dream from the Lord
 - The dream was simple: everywhere Jacob looked in the flock, all he saw was striped, speckled and mottled male goats mating
 - Remember, Jacob is caring for both Laban's flock and his own flock
 - So in real life, the make goats and sheep would have also included the white and solid colored
 - But in the dream, the entire herd was speckled, stripped, etc.
 - The message of the dream was that regardless of what the animals looked like God would produce the kind offspring Jacob needed
 - The entire flock had the DNA necessary to ensure Jacob success
 - This was God's work behind the scenes

- So what do we conclude? Did Jacob's efforts at interbreeding lead to his success or was it God's grace to bring Jacob success?
 - The answer is yes
 - Jacob's work led to the outcome and God's work made it possible

Prov. 16:1 The plans of the heart belong to man,
But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.

Prov. 16:9 The mind of man plans his way,
But the LORD directs his **steps**.

- It doesn't diminish the Lord's sovereignty to acknowledge that the Lord works through the plans and actions of men
- In the end, we must recognize that all good things come from the Father of lights, as James says
- It's another encouraging sign that Jacob received the dream in the proper perspective and recognizes the Lord's role in His success
 - And this is his argument to his wives as well
 - The Lord has been the one protecting them in the face of Laban's tricks, and this same God is now telling Jacob to leave Laban
 - The Lord will protect and care for them so they can trust His direction and leave this good situation
- This is a challenging call for these women, and perhaps even for Jacob himself
 - Essentially, Jacob has called a family meeting with his wives, and he has announced that the Lord says I must quit my job and move away from our home
 - This life is all the wives have ever known
 - And the work has made Jacob's family rich
 - But now Jacob is expecting the women to simply pull up stakes and move to a great unknown future
 - Similar to the way the Lord called Abraham in the first place: leave everything and follow me to a new place

- Don't you think this would have been a difficult request for the women to accept?
 - And look at how Jacob tries to gain their confidence...he says their provision is from the Lord and not from Laban
 - This is the essence of following the Lord successfully, especially in the area of our material life and material needs
- God is control, including of your finances and your wealth
 - Some men are wealthier than others and this will always be the case
 - God made Solomon the richest man in the world and yet it was Jesus Himself who said we will always have the poor in the world
 - God isn't unconcerned with our physical needs, but the word says clearly in many places that His first concern for us is our obedience, not our net worth
- Like Jacob, we can and should contribute to our own needs, but what comes of our efforts is directed by the Lord and His grace
 - Therefore, we are to exhibit contentment in whatever He gives us
 - Otherwise, our pursuits for greater wealth will become an impediment to our spiritual development

[1Tim. 6:6](#) But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.

[1Tim. 6:7](#) For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.

[1Tim. 6:8](#) If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.

[1Tim. 6:9](#) But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.

[1Tim. 6:10](#) For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

- Jacob finishes his testimony to his wives by recounting the word he received from God
 - In v.13 Jacob says the Lord spoke and reminded him of the pillar of stone Jacob anointed in Bethel before he left the land

- Jacob's anointing of the pillar was something he did in connection with a vow Jacob made
- Do you remember that vow?

[Gen. 28:20](#) Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, [Gen. 28:21](#) and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. [Gen. 28:22](#) "This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

- The Lord has done all the things that Jacob expected
- Now the Lord says it's time to keep that vow, to return to the land and worship
- So Jacob has presented his case to these women, and though Jacob isn't exactly the best model of a godly husband, there is something husbands can learn from this moment
 - Jacob had a difficult decision to make, one that impacted his entire family
 - And as he went about making that decision, he involved in his wives in a very sensitive, caring and God-centered way
- First, Jacob entered into a private discussion with his wives in a place and time and manner that was clearly intended to show he valued their opinions and respected their views
 - His patient efforts to include them in this decision and to seek their support communicated that their opinions mattered to Jacob
 - Obviously, Jacob couldn't leave Haran successfully without their support and agreement
- Secondly, Jacob presented a case, built on facts and intended to show that his thinking is grounded in concern for them and the family
 - He doesn't declare the plan in a "Because I said so..." manner
 - He explains his thinking and works to win them over
- Thirdly, and most importantly, He places God's actions and desires in the center of decision-making and conversation

- His explanation to the wives is centered on what he has learned from God
- And when it comes time to support his decision, he rests on the word of God
 - In this case that word was a statement God delivered in a dream
- Jacob is the head of the household and the husband, and by culture, law and according to God's plan for the family, Jacob could make this decision without his wives' consent
 - But that wouldn't have been the loving or smart thing to do
 - A loving husband values his wife's opinion and values his wife's insight
 - A loving husband gives time for deliberation and exploring options
 - A loving husband demonstrates his own willingness to listen to the Lord and following His word
 - And a loving husband is willing to do all these things as he leads his family in obeying the voice of the Lord
 - As husbands, we could do much worse than following Jacob's example here
 - Jacob is showing great progress in his character and his faith
 - And these twenty years have become an important part of how the Lord has is working to grow him
 - But Jacob's wives lag behind him, in part because of his own weaknesses as a husband'
 - And that becomes very evident as the family makes it's escape from Laban in the second part of chapter 31