

Series: "Back to The Beginnings Again"

Sermon: "Jacob: A Made Man"

Text: Genesis 30:25-43

RGGJR/FBCCS 4-16-23 UNEDITED

- When my dad was a Detroit cop, at one stage in his career, he worked as an undercover agent that fought organized crime. This was not the New York Mafia but it was tied to it. (I can tell you where I think *Jimmy Hoffa* is buried, if you like.)
- Organized crime worked as a crime "**family**." It was a "family" in the sense of being tied together to each other in loyalty.
- It was also a family based upon very clear understandings of levels of authority. That is why there was a "**crime BOSS!**" The biggest boss was the "*godfather*" of the family and he had power and authority of life and death over all the rest.
- A criminal who came from outside the actual physical family of the crime boss could become a mafia family member. If you did your job well and showed loyalty and promise of producing income, you might be invited become a family member.
- There was a ceremony. There were initiation rites. There were strict requirements. When an outsider came into the family, they became known as a "**MADE**" *man*. Other criminals that worked with and for the crime family but who were not part of it knew not to mess with any of their compatriots who had become "Made men."
- They knew this meant that the "**MADE** man" belonged to the boss of the family and fell under his authority, his assignments and his protection. They knew it was the boss who "**made**" this man who he now was so they had better treat him as one of the boss' family.
- ***The Patriarchs of the Nation of Israel, Gods' OT people, Abraham, Isaac and now Jacob are "MADE MEN!"***
- They are not part of a crime family even though Jacob sometimes acted as if he might have been. They are men who have been **MADE to be His men by the LORD God.**

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- Since this was so, they belonged to him, they had what they had because of him, they owed their lives to him. They were under his authority and his direction AND his protection.
- It was important for Moses to show the Israelites who would read the book of *Genesis* that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not SELF-MADE men but **MADE MEN by the LORD**.
- Israel needed to know that they were not a SELF MADE NATION but a **LORD MADE NATION**. Knowing and living in light of this truth changed everything about purpose, priorities, power, authority, accountability—everything that shapes a people depends on who they believe MADE them in the sense I am speaking.
- If you are not aware of, or maybe have forgotten, how critical a theme this is in *Genesis*, let me show you some high points again that make it clear.
- **First** with regard to Abraham, do you remember when it was made very clear that Abraham was to live as a "**MADE man**" **MADE by the LORD**? Look back at **Genesis 14** beginning at verse **17-24**. This is the description of what happened after Abraham has defeated the kings who had taken his nephew Lot and other residents of Sodom captive. It is the victory celebration. **READ GENESIS 14:18-24**
- Abraham will be known as a "MADE MAN." He will be known as one not made by his own power and skills and **not by the powers and wealth of the world** but rather a MADE MAN by the LORD God.
- Now look **at Genesis 24:34-38**. This is part of the story of Abraham's servant going to find a proper wife for the Son of Promise, Isaac. She had to be from a lineage other than the Canaanites—the worldly family that was marked by rebelling in autonomy against God.
- Isaac's whole story seems more moderate to me than his Father Abraham's story and his son "Jacob's. Isaac's is more often about

what *happened* to Isaac rather than what Isaac initiated. These verses are right along those lines.

- **READ GENESIS 24:34-38**

- The servant tells Laban that Abraham is a very wealthy man **MADE by the LORD**—a blessed man. Then at the end of **verse 36** he tells him that SON Isaac is now also a very wealthy man because Abraham has given to him what the LORD had provided in the first place.
- So, by legacy or inheritance, **Isaac is also a MADE MAN**—made by the wealth and by any power that brought with it, from the LORD
- In Jacob's case, the story we will read today is in keeping with the other stories of Jacob where he is always "***doing something!***"
- Because of this tendency to be a "do-fix and control guy," Jacob is never quite sure if it's "up to God" or "up to Jacob." Will God make the nice promises happen or will he trust in his own strength to get done what he thinks needs to be done? There is always a bit of a hidden nature to *God's presence* and absolute provision at this point in the man's life.
- The Jacob theme of "***Beth-El***" (House of God) and the thought that "*the Lord was here and I missed him*" will permeate Jacob's stories for a while longer.
- I'll cheat a bit this morning so you can see that this pattern of the patriarchs—the theology that they were all **MADE MEN** is real and it is important.
- It is not until the next section which we will not **reach** today—In **Genesis 31: in versse such as verse 5, 7, 9** and so one that later, when Jacob will bearguing his case with Laban's sons who feel *cheated* by the *cheater* Jacob, that Jacob says over and over "**God has done this...God has done this...God has done this.**"

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- Remember now , Jacob left much of the God-provided wealth he would have inherited from Isaac behind when he left town quickly to escape his cheated brother who was intent on killing him in revenge.
- Will Jacob, the eventual patriarch of God's OT people now become wealthy and powerful by his own skills and abilities? Will he become a *MADE man by the power of other men*? No, he too will be a **MADE Man by the blessing of the LORD God** even if he is a bit late in seeing and admitting it.
- Today's story from Jacob's life is not in the OT just in case we want to know *how to raise goats*. It is not there to give us an ancient recipe for *increasing goat fertility*.
- I looked at the most up-to-date discussion on whether or not the measures Jacob used to try to get the results he wanted have any basis in anything we call scientific.
- Over the years, the opinions have been divided. Some swear that *science* proves the natural measures Jacob took will indeed increase the reproductive activities and fertility of goats. Others insist that Jacob's methods are reported to remind us of what a do-fix-and control schemer he is and to remind us that he would claim personal success because of the *ex-post-facto* reasoning (*it happened after*) that all thoroughly **pragmatic** people of God use to bless their ideas.
- This time, I had a new resource. I was once again drawn to the "Great A.I." which responded that, "*such things can only be folklore and not ever scientific.*" That tells me there is likely still a bit of a bias in the A.I. programming.
- My point is we are not here to learn about goats. We are here to learn something the LORD knew was vital for his OT people Israel to know about **who He is** and **who they are**. If it turns out that this truth is still vital, even for us his NT people to know, then it will be

worth wading through the goat reproductive stories. **In Genesis 30:25-43.**

- The first half of **Genesis 30** tells the story of the competition between Jacob's wives Leah and Rachel to produce babies—to **make a family**. What a story it was! In the end, the point was that the **LORD MADE the family of the people of Israel.**
- The tribes were **MADE** by God. They belonged to God. They were God's people for God's purpose. They were under his authority, protection and promises.
- This is the same theme as today's text, only in terms of people. Who **MADE** the ***children of Israel*** as they were known? They were the children of Jacob. Who **MADE** the children of Jacob—it is absolutely certain, in spite of all the *shenanigans* of the sisters—***the LORD MADE them!*** The theme is not foreign to *Genesis*. Who **MADE** the Creation?
- **READ GENESIS 30:25-43** (with a few comments)
- Each time I come back to the ***goat and sheep farm*** story, the details of the deal can be a little confusing to me. I have to draw it out.
- Jacob gave Laban 14 years of work and decided it was time to return home to his *old* family with his *new* family. While working for Laban, God had blessed Jacob's efforts and these efforts had made *Uncle Laban* a wealthy man.
- Laban, an astute businessman, not wishing to lose the "***golden goat***," started negotiations to find out what it would take to get Jacob to stay.
- A key is to understand the emphasis of **verse 31** when Jacob says, "**Don't GIVE me anything Uncle Laban.**" When Jacob separates the spotted goats and sheep, it might seem he is getting these as a

payment but he is not. They are separated quite a distance—three days away—so none of them can be mistaken as belonging to Jacob.

- There is, by appearance at least, a genetically new start for Jacob's wealth here. He would continue to watch over Uncle Laban's white, unspotted flocks. Any new spotted animals born from these isolated unspotted ones would become Jacob's honest reward. Laban took that deal quickly because it appeared he would never lose much since unspotted animals would more likely produce unspotted animals. If you are a biologist, you can work out which is the dominant and which is the recessive trait.
- Jacob would keep all the future speckled beasts produced by this new, first generation of unspotted beasts. And, did they produce!
- As I said, some interpreters argue that the steps Jacob took with tree bark and limbs are provable *aphrodisiacs* and *fertility* inducers for herd animals. Others say they were merely the *folklore* of the day.
- If you forced me to pick this morning, I would say, *folklore*. I suspect Moses is showing us, along with some other clues, that Jacob was growing in faith but still had a *scheming streak* and couldn't yet quite trust God perfectly to provide the promises.
- The business with focusing on mating the stronger animals was a basic *selective breeding* program that can work. It is used all the time today to produce better beef, bigger turkeys and new dog breeds.
- However, as I said by skipping ahead to **chapter 31** earlier, the ultimate outcome is the LORD working to make Jacob a **MADE man**. Laban, and no one else could ever claim they ***made*** Jacob rich in children or goats. Jacob was God's **MADE man** just like his grandfather and father were God's **MADE men**.
- ***They owe who they are in this world to the LORD alone not to the wealth and powers of this world.***

- Ultimately, it is not even their own abilities, intellect, planning or power that makes God's plan happen. It all comes from God.
- **Israel needed to learn this truth. We also need to know this truth.**
BTW: This is not a requirement that we be passive, idiots who never reason or plan and never consider results. However when we are successful by some metric we have established there is a very thin line that is easy to cross. When we cross that line we end up taking the glory and feeling the success is ours rather than God's doing.
- Many people in ministry I have met through the years—people who are considered successful by one metric or another—cross this line unintentionally and find that can't seem to go back. They can't give up the feeling of SIGNIFICANCE being **self-made** can bring.
- Being a so-called **successful** leader for God is probably more dangerous than being a so-called **failed** leader. Ask Moses and King David and others, which is the easier life to keep from robbing God of his glory and taking it for yourself!
- Other than this sometimes-confusing deal that was negotiated and the questions about whether Jacob's actions were science or folklore, there may be another detail that caught your eye.
- It is mentioned 1st **in verse 28**. Laban uses something the NIV translates as "**divination**" to find out that Jacob's presence was the reason behind the LORD's blessing on his flocks.
- In **chapter 31** we will read that Jacob received the idea for the deal he offered to Laban from God in a **dream**. **How does God communicate?**
- Let's take "**divination**" today. What was it if the translators are correct in rendering the word that way? **Divination**, in Scripture is a supernatural way to connect with the "**spirit**" world to see beyond the *natural* world so that you uncover hidden knowledge to try to

find truth or to have an advantage. In ancient cultures it was very often the way real witches and fortunetellers made money.

Divination was REAL and could bring a powerful advantage.

- In the days of *Genesis*, even some of the people of God used different forms of divination to know things. Later, we will see that divination was probably common in Pharaoh's palace. Joseph speaks of a "*divining*" cup when he is testing his brothers. He may or may not have actually used this so-called divining cup to divine.
- Later, when the **Law** is given divination is ruled out for God's people. **WHY?** Because, there is such a possibility of humans being deceived by powerful spirits that God wants his people to stick with God's own perfect revelation. What God reveals is to be enough for His people. They should not crave more information for the sake of more power or control or success or personal SIGNIFICANCE!
- **But**, in *Genesis*, before the Law, people sought secrets from beyond this earthly realm. It was real but it was not a process they could trust and it could get a human in an evil mess.
- Of course, **in the NT**, Paul and Silas encounter the *servant girl* in *Philippi* who had the power of *divination* through a possessing *demon*. She made her masters a great deal of money because what she said was very often true. Divination worked! Paul eventually cast out that demon to the chagrin of those profiting from it.
- Divination was popular because it often gave information **that worked!** It was **pragmatic** and humans very easily fall for **pragmatism** when they are defining their own metrics of success. How much of Jesus' church today is considered successful because people have claimed visions that have, by their own metrics, "**worked!**" Human pragmatism can be dangerous and deceptive.

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- I'll say just a bit more next week, Lord willing when we get to Jacob's *revelatory dream* of how to make an uncle's goat farm thrive for God's glory and for financial success.
- The lesson Jacob was learning—the lesson Israel was to derive from the record in *Genesis* and the lesson we NT believers can take from goat farming for God is the one, same lesson.
- ***As we are living for God's glory in this fallen world, we are to rely on and magnify God's power alone as the source for any true success.***
- Like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we are to be **MADE** men and women. That is we are to be men and women who derive their life, their success, their authority their power—all of it from God **MAKING** them who they are.
- In a theoretical big-picture way, we would all probably agree with this. We would all say we want God to get all the glory for **MAKING** us who we are and take none of the glory for ourselves.
- However, in the details of life's decisions each day—big decisions and small ones—it takes a great proactive, thoughtful commitment to live this way in truth.
- Why would this matter so much? If **pragmatically** speaking, one way or another what God wants done gets done, isn't that all that really matters?
- We recognize something corrupt today called "***stolen valor.***" That is when a person poses as a heroic soldier or first responder when they are lying and are not. They do this for the accolades, the glory—the personal **significance** if feels as if it brings to an *insignificant* life.
- Of course, when we, as God's children—God's NT people, in any way take credit for being **self-MADE** men and women instead of men and

women **MADE by God** through trusting Him, there is no more significant a theft of valor—of glory than that theft.

- So, that is one reason why this matters—robbing God of the glory due **Him** alone is not a good thing for us to do.
- Then there is a second very practical reason this lesson mattered so much for the Patriarchs, for Israel and now matters for us.
- When we begin to act as if we **MAKE** ourselves what God wants us to be, we very easily begin to believe we CAN MAKE ourselves. WE are ABLE to make ourselves. This is when we become the center of our own universe over which we are god! That is a basic lie that always produces death, sin and more death.
- When we begin to believe that having enough respect or status from the world—enough education in our heads—enough money in the bank—enough planning on our part—enough POWER that all this brings in the world's system—when we begin to believe these are enough that we can **MAKE ourselves** by the standards of success we have chosen, ***we no longer need God.***
- ***When we can do it, we no longer need the power with which the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ emerged from the tomb—the power of new creation—the power of true LIFE—the power that triumphs over sin and death and all powers that oppose God—when we can do it we conclude we don't need to trust God to do it in and through us.***
- When we believe we can do it and we stop trusting God, we will then reduce our goals, our metrics for life ***and for Jesus' church*** to things we believe we can do and then call success.
- It may look like success and feel like success and pragmatism may tell us what does it matter how it is done if it is done?—BUT IT DOES MATTER!

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- When **we** can do it there is no need for faith and without faith, it is impossible to actually **please God**. We can still do moral and religious things that seem like they please God but they do not. **We are robbing God of his glory!** That is never good even if good seems to come from it!
- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were all **MADE MEN**. It was important that they knew this and ALSO that the watching world knew it.
- WE are to live as **MADE MEN and WOMEN** so the watching world knows who should get all the glory for our lives.
- The church called FBC is to be a **MADE church** or why bother because otherwise it will only be a fleeting monument to the little things self-made people can accomplish.
- In our own power we can make a church without ever needing to trust God for anything bigger that we can do on our own. It can look like a church (a building always helps with that)—do church things (meetings and programs are the evidence of that). BUT, what does God have for us that WE CAN'T DO? Something he must **make—not SELF-made?**
- *How can we help each other hold this truth tightly—a truth that was crucially important for all of God's people before us? All of us—leaders, followers, teachers, students, young old?? How can we do this as we are making the choices we are making now that are shaping the church today but for the future?*
- We want to be God-**MADE** people who are a God-**MADE** church!