

Series: "Back to The Beginnings Again"

Sermon: "Home Again...Home Again"

Text: Genesis 31; 2 Peter 1:3-4

RGGJR/FBCCS/4-23-23 UNEDITED

- I love visiting relatives. Still, I also love when after a visit away, I finally open up the door and walk inside a very familiar place—because I am home again.
- It is time for Jacob to pack up, leave Uncle Laban's place and to head to a very important "home." Remember, Jacob left this home years ago running away from broken relationships he had injured.
- Jacob is not going "home" because he just can't wait to sleep in his own bed again. Jacob is headed home because God told him it was time to return to "home"—to the Promised Land—the place the LORD covenanted he would give to Abraham and then likewise covenanted to Isaac. Will God's promise of the "**Promised Land**" hold for Jacob? AND, why does it matter anyway?
- We have much to read today, so let's get started. We will begin at **Genesis 31:1** and read through the end of the chapter.
- As has usually been the case so far with Jacob, everything is complicated. Very often, this is because of the unintended consequences of his own sins as the "heel-grabbing"—people tripping—deceptive trickster and sometimes by the sins of others.
- **READ Genesis 31**

31Jacob heard that Laban's sons were saying, "Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father." ² And Jacob noticed that Laban's attitude toward him was not what it had been.

- Rumors, grumbling, jealousy—it is easy to understand how all this built up to a boiling point. Jacob is most likely the richest man around in the *Padan Aram* area of *Mesopotamia*. Remember this was the likely the same area where Abraham's brother and the rest of the family settled after accompanying him of the first leg of his obedient journey to leave it all and go where God said go...

- Interestingly, this trip starts with a command from the LORD to "leave" as well. It also carries with it a promise for obeying the command. This command is not "go to a land" but "go back to a land."

³Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."

- Jacob is now not simply recognizing God's presence in his life after the fact. He is now hearing the commands of the LORD—the same LORD who commanded Abraham and Isaac before him.
- The critical question is **will he obey?** Listen to Jacob's speech to his wives...

⁴So Jacob sent word to Rachel and Leah to come out to the fields where his flocks were. ⁵He said to them, "I see that your father's attitude toward me is not what it was before, but the God of my father has been with me. ⁶You know that I've worked for your father with all my strength, ⁷yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has not allowed him to harm me. ⁸If he said, 'The speckled ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks gave birth to speckled young; and if he said, 'The streaked ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked young. ⁹So God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me.

- We can't miss the change in Jacob's thinking after being in the *life lesson and growth "school of Uncle Laban"* for so many years. Verse 5—"The God of my father has been with me." Verse 7—"God has not allowed him to harm me." Verse 9—"God is the one who portioned out all the livestock."
- Jacob has his own "**I have a Dream**" speech to give to his wives but it is not **his** "dream" in the sense of —his leadership vision—his manly ambition—his husbandly direction. It is a dream communicating God's vision coming directly from God.
- Let's ask the question now. Do we people dreams directly from God today? Does God still communicate through dreams?
- I am not a strict cessationist when it comes to so-called "spiritual gifts" and even when it comes to dreams from God.

Series: *"Back to The Beginnings Again"*

Sermon: *"Home Again...Home Again"*

Text: *Genesis 31; 2 Peter 1:3-4*

RGGJR/FBCCS/4-23-23 **UNEDITED**

- I think there is a good argument to be made that once we had Scripture, which Jacob of course did not have, telling us God's revealed will, dreams were not the most frequent way God communicated with his people.
- In fact, I would remind us that these narratives we are reading in *Genesis* are some of the selective high points of God's interaction with his chosen ones. It is not as if Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had dreams given from God everyday about where to buy gas for their camels.
- Does God work through dreams today? God can do whatever God chooses to do in keeping with his character which never contradicts what he has revealed about himself in his Word.
- I think there are cases I've heard of of dreams today that God used. Did they come from him? Maybe not in this same direct way that God speaks to Jacob here but God certainly used what a person dreamed for his purposes to see people saved.
- On the other hand, most of the dreams (and visions) I have heard from others today, seem to be validating what the dreamer wants by giving it God's authority.
- That is the inherent danger in claiming you speak for God with authority for all to obey because you have had a dream. Like it was with "divination" last week for a different reason, the idea of dreams from God so many claim today is wide open to mistake and even manipulation.
- Therefore, I believe that all dreams, like all sermons, ought to be subject to the discernment of Godly members of a community. And, if at first they disagree, if the dream is truly God's dream, it will not only align with Scripture but also align with the Holy Spirit changed hearts of wise and Godly discernment.
- Most all "dreams" I hear of today are baptized human dreams—human desires given God's authority. That is extremely dangerous!

Series: "Back to The Beginnings Again"

Sermon: "Home Again...Home Again"

Text: Genesis 31; 2 Peter 1:3-4

RGGJR/FBCCS/4-23-23 **UNEDITED**

- But what was the dream God clearly gave to Jacob? Back to v.10...

¹⁰ "In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted. ¹¹ The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob.' I answered, 'Here I am.' ¹² And he said, 'Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. ¹³ I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.'"

- "Here am I!"...always seems to be a good OT answer when God calls your name. Here in *Genesis*, not to long ago in the story unless you break it up each week, remember the response when God called the name of Adam? There was no "here am I!" Moses wants us to know Jacob is NOT hiding
- You remember the God you thought must have been at Beth-EL? Let me introduce myself personally.
- You mad a promise at Bet-El to obey if I would be with you. I will be with you so here is my command similar to the one I gave to Abraham your Grandfather, "*Leave and go to a land I have already shown you.*"
- The wives mull this over, processing aloud with their words as some of us do.

¹⁴ Then Rachel and Leah replied, "Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father's estate? ¹⁵ Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up what was paid for us. ¹⁶ Surely all the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to us and our children. So do whatever God has told you."

- "Daddy Laban has treated us like we are nothing to him—as if we are foreign strangers. Now he is angry because the money he got for us has all been blown.
- "So, if God did this as you say and God says "blow this pop stand" we are with you!"
- ¹⁷ Then Jacob put his children and his wives on camels, ¹⁸ and he drove all his livestock ahead of him, along with all the goods he had accumulated in Paddan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

- Home again...home again! The "land of Canaan." The Promised Land. Why is it so important even after all these years of schooling about life in a foreign land?
- There is a plot twist we didn't know was coming. It is in keeping with the character that Jacob probably taught his family by example through the years. It reveals what Rachel was like. She was very much like Jacob the deceiver.
- It reveals what Laban was like. He was certainly not a man devoted to the LORD alone. He believed that Yahweh existed but Yahweh was not his LORD.

¹⁹ When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father's household gods. ²⁰ Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was running away. ²¹ So he fled with all he had, and crossing the River, he headed for the hill country of Gilead.

- By the way, if you can put your "gods" in your pocket or in a box to take with you on a trip, Moses is suggesting they are just not very powerful "gods." In a moment, he is going to place these portable "gods" in a location that would have been a culturally defined desecration that was about as disrespectful as one could be toward a "god" in those days.
- He is using the same humor that Isaiah uses to speak of idols. You take a stick and you use half of it for making a fire to cook your dinner. Then out of the other half you carve a "god???"
- The plot now thickens as the chase is on...

²² On the third day Laban was told that Jacob had fled. ²³ Taking his relatives with him, he pursued Jacob for seven days and caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead. ²⁴ Then God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream at night and said to him, "Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad."

- This was not a high speed chase but it was a relentless chase.
- Don't feel too proud if you believe God speaks to you in authoritative dreams. He can speak that way to an idol-worshipping Laban.

- The *"don't say anything good or bad"* always throws me a bit. I suspect God was saying, *"Keep your mouth shut Laban. You have no authority whatsoever over Jacob—not to make him or to break him. He is my made man under my protection and authority not yours!"*
- So what happens when angry Laban and his boys show up?
²⁵ Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country of Gilead when Laban overtook him, and Laban and his relatives camped there too. ²⁶ Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You've deceived me, and you've carried off my daughters like captives in war. ²⁷ Why did you run off secretly and deceive me? Why didn't you tell me, so I could send you away with joy and singing to the music of tambourines and harps? ²⁸ You didn't even let me kiss my grandchildren and my daughters good-by. You have done a foolish thing. ²⁹ I have the power to harm you; but last night the God of your father said to me, 'Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.' ³⁰ Now you have gone off because you longed to return to your father's house. But why did you steal my gods?"
- I think Laban probably knows why Jacob left as he left under cover of darkness.
- The daughters know they really don't mean anything to their dad. They have already told us that.
- The whole idea of a big party with lots of loving goodbyes is a farce. Although later Laban has to save face by eating his words.
- *But, verse 29* is the killer. Laban blusters he has power over Jacob but he is being nice because Isaac's God said to be nice.
- Then the question... *"Why did you steal my gods?"* On its face, it is a joke. If you can steal a god, how much power could that god have?
- Rachel's action reminds me of Lot's wife. She can't quite let go. However, this business of the stolen gods adds to the reason for the leaving. Jacob you are to leave the land where there are many so-called gods and go to the land where I am to be the One true God and LORD of this people.
- Jacob defends himself and makes a harsh commitment that must have made Rachel sweat a bit!

³¹ Jacob answered Laban, "I was afraid, because I thought you would take your daughters away from me by force. ³² But if you find anyone who has your gods, he shall not live. In the presence of our relatives, see for yourself whether there is anything of yours here with me; and if so, take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods.

³³ So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two maidservants, but he found nothing. After he came out of Leah's tent, he entered Rachel's tent. ³⁴ Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them inside her camel's saddle and was sitting on them. Laban searched through everything in the tent but found nothing.

³⁵ Rachel said to her father, "Don't be angry, my lord, that I cannot stand up in your presence; I'm having my period." So he searched but could not find the household gods.

- Rachel uses that still powerful excuse that to this day can make men cringe and say "never mind." *"It's girl stuff, Dad!"*
- It's time for court! The language Jacob uses, and later Laban as well, is courtroom, legal language. It is language that suggests this matter will be arbitrated and dealt with in a just way.

³⁶ Jacob was angry and took Laban to task. "What is my crime?" he asked Laban. "What sin have I committed that you hunt me down? ³⁷ Now that you have searched through all my goods, what have you found that belongs to your household? Put it here in front of your relatives and mine, and let them judge between the two of us.

³⁸ "I have been with you for twenty years now. Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks. ³⁹ I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself. And you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night. ⁴⁰ This was my situation: The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes.

⁴¹ It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household. I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks, and you changed my wages ten times. ⁴² If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you."

- Laban has seemingly had the upper hand in the battle to be the world's best "deceiver." He has ***cheated*** Jacob the ***cheater*** repeatedly for twenty years. He has deceptively changed their "contract" ten times Jacob can remember.
- Jacob testifies what got him through all this mistreatment. The God of Abraham and Isaac has been with him. He has seen all the cheating. "That dream you had last night, dear Uncle, was this ***fearsome*** God telling you that you are a cheat!"
- The LORD God knows just where to send each of us to school and how long we need to be there in order to graduate. Jacob had to be choking on some of these truths he was speaking as his own sins of manipulating others had become painfully obvious looking at the mirror called Laban.
- "OK, let's finish this with me protected from you and your powerful non-pocket-sized God," says Laban
- Let's make a legal contract.

⁴³ Laban answered Jacob, "The women are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks. All you see is mine. Yet what can I do today about these daughters of mine, or about the children they have borne? ⁴⁴ Come now, let's make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us."

⁴⁵ So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. ⁴⁶ He said to his relatives, "Gather some stones." So they took stones and piled them in a heap, and they ate there by the heap. ⁴⁷ Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, and Jacob called it Galeed.

⁴⁸ Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." That is why it was called Galeed. ⁴⁹ It was also called Mizpah, because he said, "May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other. ⁵⁰ If you mistreat my daughters or if you take any wives besides my daughters, even though no one is with us, remember that God is a witness between you and me."

⁵¹ Laban also said to Jacob, "Here is this heap, and here is this pillar I have set up between you and me. ⁵² This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not go past this heap to your side to harm you and that you will not go past this heap and pillar to my side to harm me. ⁵³ May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us."

- Laban's words are hilariously hypocritical. He uses them to accuse Jacob of the very things he is doing and would do if he could.
- The languages chosen for naming mark one man as a man of the world and the other as a man of the Promised Land.
- The God who is called upon to witness is not a pocket-god but the only real God and both men know this. Laban even recalls this God was his Father's God—Nahor, Abraham's brother's God. This is the God powerful enough to make sure justice happens.
- And BTW: here we have one of the most hilarious contextual errors still in use today. Some words are ripped out of context and made to mean exactly the opposite of what they mean. WE even turn them into necklaces that are made like to separated pieces with this saying on the parts: ***"May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away form each other."***
- This is a prayer that God will keep them separated so one will not secretly plan to come back and attack and destroy the other. It is not a statement of loving connection while parted.
- And so the story concludes with an oath, a sacrifice to God, a party for everyone, kisses all around and an early morning departure for Jacob's true "home."

So Jacob took an oath in the name of the Fear of his father Isaac. ⁵⁴ He offered a sacrifice there in the hill country and invited his relatives to a meal. After they had eaten, they spent the night there.

⁵⁵ Early the next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then he left and returned home.

- Jacob, not Laban threw the party. He did it in connection with worshipping the God who had been with him all along. He shared that blessing even with semi-believers and unbelievers
- They were done. Jacob's family and thus people of Israel were schooled by Laban but not **MADE** by Laban.

Series: "Back to The Beginnings Again"

Sermon: "Home Again...Home Again"

Text: Genesis 31; 2 Peter 1:3-4

RGGJR/FBCCS/4-23-23 UNEDITED

- Home again...home again. Why is this place—this promised home so important through the narratives? In fact through the OT? In fact, as a good "Dispensationalist" might recognize, even through the NT?
- Back in *Genesis* 12, the LORD commands Abram to go to a **land** he will show him. It is a place—a geographical reality on a physical earth.
- In *Genesis* 15, the LORD cuts a flaming covenant with Abram, **"To you descendants I give this land..."** Then the LORD goes on to describe the actual physical geographical boundaries of this place on the actual earth.
- Two weeks ago from the first half of *Genesis* 30, we learned the LORD made Jacob's family—his people. Last week, in a discussion of goat husbandry, we learned the LORD made Jacob's wealth, this week we are reminded that the LORD made Jacob's Land—his home.
- Why does all this, including the land matter? We must go "back to the beginnings again--again" to see the bigger meaning.
- ***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...we*** certainly remember that. Then we recall that all this actual creating of actual geographic places and earthly plants and animals was all good. Finally, after creating man to live in this real earthly place, God looked at it all again and pronounced it, **"very good!"**
- Do you recall why it was all "very good?" It was because what God had made was all perfectly fit and perfectly equipped for God's perfect purpose.
- That perfect purpose was that this earth—starting in a garden but spreading to fill it all—would be the actual physical, geographical—if one can speak of a "geo-graphy" of the universe—place where human beings would live in a way that reflected the glory of God as his image bearers.
- Human beings messed that up—their job—their place—all that was very good with sin. *Genesis* tells us God is redeeming what was

messed-up. That is not just people going to heaven. No, that is redeeming an entire creation to its perfect purpose.

- Israel was chosen to exhibit that redemption. They were made a people. They were made a blessed people with all they needed to live. They were made a people with a LAND in which to live as the image bearers of God so the world would see his glory.
- The perfect **place**, a land flowing with milk and honey, a land promised by God had to be part of this segment of God's redemptive plan.
- Jacob may have gone to school out-of-state, but now graduated and ready to go to work in the redemptive plan of God he needs to be back in the perfect place for that.
- God had made everything necessary—provided all that was needed for Israel to fulfill its perfect purpose of being image bearers—of being light to the whole world.
- **So what about us?** Should we all move to Israel? I don't think God is done with that actual geographical perfect place for his purpose even now, but he doesn't ask his NT people to dwell in that actual geographical place.
- However, wherever we do dwell, he tells us all something very similar to what this would have told an Israelite who had ears to hear—that God has once again arranged things so that we have everything we need to be his image bearers.
- The Apostle Peter had learned that God had indeed used his divine power to make life for believers the perfect place to be image bearers in this world. Peter knew it was not a geographical or even nationality matter for the church.

He wrote **in 2 Peter 1:3-4** and following: ³ His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Series: "Back to The Beginnings Again"

Sermon: "Home Again...Home Again"

Text: Genesis 31; 2 Peter 1:3-4

RGGJR/FBCCS/4-23-23 UNEDITED

- As believers, we have been made and have been given everything made by God that is necessary to display "godliness"—that is to be his image bearers.
- As God made precious promises to Abraham, Isaac and now Jacob, he has made promises to us. He will make us who we are and make what we have and make where we are the exact who what and where that will set us up perfectly to live for his glory—to fulfill the purpose of being image bearers.
- Sometimes, we too must go to school out-of-state. Sometimes we must remain in school longer than we want to get the degree we think we need. Sometimes we grumble and complain—if God would just _____ (you can fill in the blank), then I could serve him as he has called me to serve.
- God has made us—made our stuff—and made our place perfectly fit to glorify him already—there is no "*if just...then*" correction needed.
- When it comes to a sort of ***promised perfect place*** to bear the image of God in a setting of perfect circumstances—with the perfect necessary resources for doing that—my friends we are there. We are already home again...home again...*now*—wherever we are.