Prayer Points Against The Spirit Of Laban

Last week I framed our message as this Battle Royale between two champion tricksters at the top of their games, Loki vs. Loki, Jacob vs. his father-in-law Laban. Laban had won Round 1 by tricking Jacob into marrying his two daughters for 14 years of work. Laban also won Round 2, the negotiations over Jacob’s wages. Yet Jacob stormed back in Round 3 converting Laban’s flocks into his own, increasing his own wealth at Laban’s expenses, and he also took Round 4, convincing his wives to leave their father and their home and return with Him to cannan. And so, with the score tied 2-2, here we are at the existing conclusion of Jacob (Israel) vs Laban

Before getting into the story, I think it is important to reflect on where Jacob is in his spiritual life at this point. Jacob, you remember was set apart for God from before he was born. He is a picture of God’s election. That before he is anything good or bad, God had chosen him to be the one through whom the promises that God made to Abraham would be passed down. God’s grace chose him. Yet you wouldn’t know it from the first few decades of his life. He came out of the womb clasping the heel of his twin brother, as if it was his nature to tear down others for his own advancement. His parents named him Jacob, the “heel-grabber”, and he lived up to that name. He manipulated his brother into selling him his rights as the firstborn son, and later deceived his father into blessing him instead of his brother. His deceit and manipulation drove his brother into such a rage, that Jacob had to flee with his life from his family. At his lowest point, sleeping exposed in the open with a rock as his pillow just outside of Beth-el, God met him in a dream.

I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. 14 Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 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.”

At this point, Jacob is aware of God’s gracious promise toward him. This is a life-changing moment. Jacob may have looked back at this moment as the moment that God saved him, that his faith began; however, practically, his life doesn’t really change all that much, at least from the outside. He engages in that 20-year long contest of deceit against Laban, entangled in the manipulations of the world, suffering defeat after defeat, until God speaks to him again and tells him to “Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you.”

And so we being our message today with Jacob on the run again fleeing from a family member, but this time he is fleeing not so much from the consequences of his own sin, but from this worldly exploitation back to God, back to God’s call, back to God’s land, back to God’s promise. So how would I describe Jacob’s spiritual life at this point? I’d say he’s a follower of God, who has some understanding of how God has blessed and protected him over the years, but who has sadly spent most of his life as a follower of God more captivated to the world’s values and conflicts than the life God offers and provides. Maybe many of you can identify with Jacob in that way. And so this is a message on how to break free.

This is what I’m most interested in this story of Jacob and Laban, for there are principles and a paradigm here that extends beyond a simple blow-by-blow account of these two men. God is doing something spiritually in Jacob’s life through these years, and God may similarly be doing something in your life, that you my find encouragement and hope and courage this morning. Courage to break free from the bondage to sin and to conflict that has robbed you these years.

The World, Flesh and Devil will do all that they can to continue to entrap the Christian

The first focus of the passage is on Laban’s persistent pursuit and his ongoing attempts to manipulate and control Jacob. Laban had been shearing his sheep in the field when Jacob snuck away and it was three days before Laban realized that he was gone. Yet when he realized Jacob had fled, Laban chased after him and overtook him. And when he catches him he uses every scheme he knows in order to gain control over Jacob again.

He Uses Shame: 26 And Laban said to Jacob, “What have you done, that you have tricked me and driven away my daughters like captives of the sword? You’re no better than a common criminal, a kidnapper, a human trafficker. You should be better than that Jacob – you should treat me and my daughters better than that.

He Uses Flattery: 27 Why did you flee secretly and trick me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre? Yeah, right. I ‘m sure that was Laban’s plan, to send Jacob off with song and dance.

He Uses Pity: 28 And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? Oh, Jacob, you didn’t even give me a chance to say goodbye.

He Uses Threats: Now you have done foolishly. 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 say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.’

He Uses Taunting: 30 And now you have gone away because you longed greatly for your father’s house. One commentator I read noted that there is biting sarcasm in Laban’s tone – you got homesick and couldn’t cut it like a man, so you’re running home to daddy.

The point in all of this is that Laban is trying to get under Jacob’s skin, and is not going to let Jacob get away easily. He’s trying to dig his talons ever deeper into Jacob, trying to get him to engage, and trying to regain control over him. You have to understand that this is how the evil one works. The world, flesh and devil will do all that they can to continue to entrap the Christian. You go on a diet, feeling convicted about gluttony, and someone brings in treats that day. You resolve to spend mornings in prayer and your boss changes your work schedule. I’m not saying that your boss or your coworkers are conspiring against you, yet we are engaged in a spiritual battle and the moment you try to move forward in your spiritual life and make a clean break from the past, you will immediately find that the road that once seemed so clear is suddenly littered with obstacles. [Bryan leaving Leadville story]

The Christian is ultimately protected by Christ

All of Laban’s manipulations and threats are just that, he cannot actually touch Jacob. For as we saw Laban refer to, before Laban caught up with Jacob, he had a dream in which, Gen 31:24 But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, “Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.” The idiom basically means, “Go easy on him; do him no harm”

It’s clear that Laban, setting out with all his men as he did, intended to do more to Jacob than to speak harshly to him, but God restrained him with a warning, setting the parameters of the amount of influence and damage Laban could cause. This passage should cause us to recall God’s restraining of Satan during the test for Job’s soul in Job 1:6: And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.”

It’s important to note that even though the devil may rage against us when we forsake the ways of the world and of the flesh, he himself is still under the sovereign authority of God and has no power to harm us, unless the Lord allows it. Jesus testified to Pilate that he would have no authority over his death at all unless it had been given to him from above. Remember that, even though Jacob at this point is still walking in all sorts of obedience and mess, he is still God’s chosen one, God’s elect, and therefore that Lord is mercifully protects him.

Now this doesn’t mean that we are protected from every attack and consequence, but that we are protected from Satan that he may not have ultimate victory over us. Jesus protects his sheep, he says: John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. 11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. And so we do not fear those who, yes, they may be able to kill the body, but they can never touch our soul. For the good shepherd knows who are his.

Here is the point, when you are trying to break from entangling sin, the world, flesh and devil may rage after you to the point at which you fear that they may conquer you, but if you are a true child of God, you can rest assured that Jesu your defender has set every parameter of your struggle and is woking with you in your suffering, and yeah though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you need not fear evil.

The Christian’s languishing in sin may lead to devastating, even deadly,consequences.

While there is much encouragement in this chapter, there is also a warning. And here it is: there is no victory in continuing in the ways of the world. Jacob has been blessed and protected by God in these twenty years he lived in Laban’s land, however, we will see that he is only fleeing as one out of the fire. I think that is the main lesson we’re supposed to take from this issue with Rachel stealing Laban’s gods. This game has been so captivating that Rachel has gotten caught up in it, and she steals Laban’s gods to gain some sort of upper hand over him.

30 Why did you steal my gods?” 31 Jacob answered and said to Laban, “Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force.32 Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live. In the presence of our kinsmen point out what I have that is yours, and take it.” Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them. Gen. 31:33 So Laban went into Jacob’s tent and into Leah’s tent and into the tent of the two female servants, but he did not find them. And he went out of Leah’s tent and entered Rachel’s.

Do you see how Moses, a master story teller is building the tension? What’s going to happen? Will Laban find the idols? Will Rachel be found out? Will Jacob’s rash vow come back upon his own wife?

My in-laws like to watch the show, America’s Got Talent. And this week there was an act in which an escape artist had to escape from a tank of water in which he was chained. Pretty normal day of work for an escape artist. But this guy, he added a wrinkle. While he was trying to escape his chains, his wife was being lowered down into a pit of poisonous snakes. I can tell you, that added to the tension – one of the judges actually got angry with him. And I was thinking of that show while I was reading this chapter and I think Moses is trying to warn us, look how close Jacob’s cheating games with Laban came to truly ending in devastating, even deadly, consequences. Jacob was blessed in spite of his sin on the basis of his calling. Jacob was protected in spite of his sin on the basis of his calling. Yet he suffered greatly for his languishing in the land of Laban, and it nearly cost him his wife. That is the game you play, Christian, when you live with one foot in the world. David lived with one foot in the world for a time and it cost him his reputation, his son, and his throne. You can’t know when you’re living in the land of Laban how it will affect you, how it will affect your family, but there will be devastating consequences.

The only power Satan has is the power we give him through fear

And as Laban approaches Rachel’s camp, the tension is growing, yet the story ends in the weirdest way. 34 Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel’s saddle and sat on them. Laban felt all about the tent, but did not find them. 35 And she said to her father, “Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me.” So he searched but did not find the household gods.

And so Rachel is saved by another lie, another cover-up. And this bothered me for a while, as I considered it an unsatisfactory ending. However, I was encouraged to read this story through the eyes of the Jewish people reading this. The idea is this: for how intimidating Laban seems to be, how much control he’s had over Jacob’s life these last twenty years, ho intimidated Jacob was of him so that he had to flee away, his gods are really weak and pathetic. Think back to even the question Laban threw at Jacob, “Why have you stolen my gods!” What a silly thing to say? What kind of gods can be stolen? What kind of gods could be stuffed in a camel bag? Be sat on my a menstruating woman? We see how ridiculous these gods are, and therefore how ridiculous the threat of Laban actually is over Jacob. Jacob is backed by the God of the universe, the creator of heaven and earth, meanwhile Laban’s gods sit helpless in a camel sack under Rachel’s rump.

Yet Jacob had been so afraid of Laban. Why are we afraid? Why are we afraid of the world? Why are we scared of the devil? If God is for us, who can stand against us?

And though this world, with devils filled,  
Should threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear, for God hath willed  
His truth to triumph through us:  
The Prince of Darkness grim,  
We tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure,  
For lo, his doom is sure,  
One little word shall fell him.

Listen, you have nothing to fear from the world, flesh or devil when making a clean break from them – they are but little trinkets of wood in a camel sack under Rachel’s rump. Whatever you lose, you gain infinitely more in Christ. Yeah, you may lose friends, but you gain a family. You may lose a position, but you gain a purpose.

Now you might be saying, “How is it fair that Rachel gets away with stealing her fathers gods? Yet aren’t you glad that God doesn’t always treat us as our sins deserve? He treats none of us as our sins deserve. The good news is that Jesus took on the punishment we deserve, so that we can break free from the world.

Be separate from the world: Get Behind me, Laban!!!

And so finally, Jacob has had enough. Laban has found nothing and Jacob finally sees him for the pathetic, miserable old man that he is. He no longer trembles before Laban. He’s no longer afraid. And he tears into him – and we’re running short on time, so I’ll paraphrase – “Get behind me Laban! I’ve had enough!” and Laban knows he’s defeated. The two men set up stones as a marker and as a witness that they are to have nothing more to do with one another. And in doing so, we see that Jacob seems to have learned something through this entire episode. Laban is happy to swear by any and every god in his book; the gods of Abraham’s ancestors, sure, why not, the gods of his own ancestors, obviously. Yet Jacob has come to know that the God he serves is not some trinket like these other Gods, he is a God to be feared, to be served in holy reverence, and he calls him a new name, accordingly, the fear of Isaac. This is the God who says, come out of the world and be separated unto me. Who says, “be holy, for I am holy!” And Jacob has learned that he can no longer have one foot in the world and serve this holy God. It has cost him 20 years of his life.

Renounce sin.  
Set up a pillar.  
Walk in the path God has set

Don’t let it cost you 20 years of your life. Be separate from the world: Get Behind me, Laban!!! Today, set up a pillar, take a stone, write a note in your bible. Today I say to my addiction – get behind me, Laban! I don’t need you anymore. I have Jesus! Today I say to my tendency to seek affirmation and acclaim from others – get behind me, Laban! I don’t need you anymore. I have Jesus! Today I say to pornography – get behind me. I come against the spirit of laban ! I don’t need you anymore. I have Jesus! Today I say to my un forgiveness and bitterness – get behind me, Laban! I have Jesus! I don’t need you anymore. Today I say to my critical spirit – get behind me, Laban! I don’t need you anymore. I have Jesus! Today I say to gossip – get behind me, Laban! I don’t need you anymore. I have Jesus! Today I say to my lying heart. – get behind me, Laban! I don’t need you anymore. I have Jesus! Today I say to those friendships who tempt me and distract me from Christ – get behind me, Laban! I don’t need you anymore. I have [Jesus](http://jesuschrist.lds.org/SonOfGod?lang=eng&_r=1)! Today I say to envy and materialism – get behind me, Laban! I don’t need you anymore. I have Jesus!