

Genesis 31:1-55

"The Great Escape"

Understand that there's a marked difference between God "*saving*" us & God "*subduing*" us... The result being that we're *converted*, but we're still *carnal*. We allow our flesh to control us even though we're born-again believers.

As we catch up to the context, that's where Jacob seems to be at this point in his life. He's certainly saved; he had an encounter w/the Living God some 20 yrs earlier that blew his mind! God made Himself real to Jacob in a radical way & he hasn't been the same since. So he's converted, but his carnal nature still seems to have control of him.

Jesus acknowledged this kind of reality when He said, "*But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?'"*¹ It's just not a strong/healthy place to be in spiritually. You may be born-again personally, but the reality is that you're driven/controlled by your flesh rather than led by the Spirit of God.

When Paul was writing to the Corinthians, he said (in essence), "I wanted to speak to you as spiritual people, but I couldn't, I had to speak to you as carnal, as babes rather than mature men & women in Christ." They'd been saved, but not subdued, they hadn't learned what it meant to truly submit their lives to Christ & be led by the Spirit of God. Now that doesn't mean that we walk around w/some mystical mindset that's not grounded in reality. But that we've submitted our lives *to* God, we desire to lead lives obedient to the Word *of* God & above all we want to *glorify* God in all that we do.

Very soon in Jacob's journey God will touch his life & he will learn not only what it means to be *saved* by God, but *subdued* by God as well.

As we enter into Ch 31 Jacob has been away from home for 20 yrs; & he's about to be reminded that he needs to return to his roots. Both his father Isaac & his brother Esau are still alive & he's got some "unfinished business" to tend to (not to mention this little vow that he made to God at Bethel that he's yet to fulfill).

Vs 1-3

Now let's get something straight right out of the gate & that is this: Jacob didn't "take" *anything* that was their fathers. You remember the deal don't you? Jacob asked Laban to cut him loose 6 yrs ago. But Laban was all, "Hey, I've learned that God has been blessing me since you've been here. So name your price, what kind of raise will it take to get you to stay?" Jacob was like, "I don't want you to give me anything."

¹ The New King James Version. (1982). (Lk 6:46). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² The New King James Version. (1982). (1 Cor 3:23). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

He said, "I'll just work for you for another stretch & we'll just leave it God's hands (my righteousness will answer for me in time to come)." He said, "Let's just separate the flocks, take all the spotted, speckled & streaked ones away. I'll breed only from what's left & at the end of it all I'll only take the spotted, speckled & streaked w/me." In other words, "Stack the deck against me & we'll let God decide how this fares."

Laban said, "That sounds awesome." Well, over the course of time the flocks began to produce strong offspring that were spotted/speckled & streaked, & of those that weren't spotted or streaked in some way, they were weak & growing thinner in #.

Quick side note; we might highlight Jacob's approach to becoming wealthy. #1 Becoming rich wasn't his chief goal; he'd worked for Laban for 14 yrs & was content to be cut loose & make his own way from there (it was Laban that wanted to keep him around). The chief aim of our lives shouldn't be to gain wealth, but to glorify God. #2 Don't be afraid to work hard for your employer increasing *their* wealth before or as you seek to increase your own. We'll see that Jacob worked hard for Laban even though Laban was hard to work for. But he was dedicated to seeing his employer succeed. #3 (Most importantly) Trust God. Godliness w/contentment is great gain. Jacob said, "I don't want to start this deal w/any conceivable advantage, that way we'll recognize the sovereign, providential hand of God in *whatever* happens."

Well, what happened is that Jacob's portfolio began to grow (exponentially) & Laban's stocks/flocks began to diminish. Things were good as long as Laban was rich & Jacob was poor & at his disposal, but not that Jacob is wealthy & Laban's net worth isn't what it once was... there's a problem.

Now Laban's sons are accusing him unjustly, Laban himself is looking at him all suspiciously/devously. Let's get to the root of it, shall we?

The problem here isn't that Jacob is prospering, it's that Laban's sons are filled w/envy. You guys beware of *envy*; it's cancer to your soul. It creates division/contention. Because they *envied* Jacob they began to talk all this trash *about* Jacob, the result being that they poisoned Laban's heart *against* Jacob. Suddenly he wasn't smiling anymore when Jacob was around, he was looking at him funny, making Jacob uneasy.

I was talking to you about Paul's letter to the Corinthians; it's found in Ch 3. After rebuking them for being carnal he says, "For where there are *envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?*"²

² The New King James Version, (1982), (1 Co 3:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

In other words, these are the attributes you expect to run up against in the world, not in the body of Christ! James said, *“For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.”*³ So when envy enters the equation, it brings along w/it things like strife, division, confusion & contention.

On the other side of that coin is love. Now what does the bible say about love? **1 Cor 13:4**, *“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy;”* If envy is an issue in your life, don’t down play it, ask God to deal w/it. Repent from it, turn from it & ask God to purge it from your life. It’s the sin that put Jesus on the cross (oh He died for the sins of the world, yes, however *envy* was the root of what turned the religious leaders against Him). In Matt 27 (Vs 18) we’re told plainly that Pilot knew that they had handed Jesus over because of *envy*.

Ok; it was time for Jacob to leave. Question, how do you know when it’s time to make a move in your life (be it geographically, perhaps vocationally etc.)? Well, I’m not sure that it’s ever easy but as we look at Jacob’s life it seems that we have a few guidelines that can perhaps help us discern.

There were 3 things that caused Jacob to realize it was time to go. #1 There was an inner witness in his heart, #2 it was the outward circumstances of his life & #3 there was the revelation of God’s Word.

He had an initial desire 6 yrs earlier (30:25). It was in his heart to move & that desire never left him. Now we can’t say that every longing of the human heart is necessary the voice of God. The bible is clear that our heart can be deceitful, write it down, look it up Jer 17:9. Yet equally true is the fact that often times God *begins* in this way, by placing an unction/ desire in our heart. Perhaps you recall these words, *“...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”*⁴

So it can begin w/a desire *in* you, but along w/that God can direct through the circumstances *around* you. Toward the end of those 6 yrs Jacob noticed that his in-laws were beginning to look at him like an outlaw & what used to be sweet (on good terms w/them) is suddenly turning sour. Again we can’t say that circumstances are always the finger of God moving us. But it’s not uncommon for God to make us uncomfortable when He’s trying to get us “out of the nest”. He’ll stir things up, because He knows human nature is to stay put when/where things are good.

But most importantly God will speak to us from His word. God told Jacob (Vs 3)...

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jas 3:16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Php 2:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

“Return to the land of your fathers & to your family, & I will be /you.” In the 23rd psalm we read that God *leads us* in paths of righteousness. & Again, **“Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.”**⁵ A desire *in* you, the circumstances *around* you & the word of God *to* you; if all these things align, the odds are good, it’s time to go.

But I want to say this; Jacob’s primary reason for leaving wasn’t personal, it was spiritual. From a career perspective he was doing great. Often times we’re the opposite, we leave because a career opportunity opens up, but we don’t give any real consideration to the spiritual consequences of the move.

Jacob *needed* to go, he was in an ungodly environment & now he had children who would be pivotal in shaping world history on a spiritual level & God wanted to get them out from under the influence of ungodliness & idolatry that was present w/Laban & that area. Now Jacob was doing ok, but what about his kids? He needed to re-establish his roots spiritually.

That was one of the lessons of Lot’s life, remember? He did ok in Sodom (not good, but “ok”). But his family was destroyed. I see this happen from time to time; people find a great place to live geographically, they’ve been given a wonderful career opportunity; but it costs them & they have to suffer spiritually. Now perhaps you can survive in that environment, but what about your family? Is it worth it to wind up w/kids who don’t know Christ personally because you can’t/won’t tend to them spiritually? We spoke Wednesday evening of the fact that the world points to the immediate gratification, God wants us to consider the ultimate devastation. What is the end in view?

The most important words in Jacob’s heart were the words of God, “& I will be w/you.” He was moving in a direction that would benefit him & his family spiritually, it wasn’t just a move that would benefit him materially or temporarily. He could move forward confidently regardless of difficulty because God was leading... bearing witness by His word.

Vs 4-13

Here’s another thing you might tuck away in your seeking whether or not to move. He consulted in those closest to him. He shared what was in his heart w/Rachel & Leah. Yes, God’s Word is our primary source of wisdom when it comes to making decisions. But it’s also good to consult w/others, especially those closest to us whom we know will have our best interest at heart.

⁵ The New King James Version. (1982). (Ps 119:105). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Jacob calls Rachel & Leah out to the field (so that they're not overheard back home) & tells them what's brewing in his heart. He says, "I'm not sure that you've noticed, but things are changing around here. You know my track record of integrity, that I've served your father diligently *even though* he's sought to *deceive me* & he's altered the details of our original agreement some 10 times! But God did not allow him to hurt me." I love that. The psalmist said that like this, "*The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*"⁶ God was showing Jacob that He was his strong tower, his shield & his fortress, greater & able to overcome whatever may come against him.

He says, "I have no control over the offspring of the flock, God is the one who is blessing me." & He tells them the details of a dream that he had, how that God showed him that He was the one who was blessing his life. It wasn't the striped sticks (Ch 30:37-38), it was the Lord.

But here's something I want you to see (Vs 11), when God called; Jacob answered. Listen, if you want the dream that God has placed in your heart to come to pass; you've got to answer the call & let God have his way in your life. If God is speaking to your heart, the question is: are you answering the call or ignoring the call?

God said, "Lift up your eyes now & see, I'm at work *in* your & I'm going to do a great work *through* your life." I love in Vs 12 where God says, "I have seen all." So many times we feel like we've got to take matters into our hands. That guy ripped me off & it's time to even the score. But God says, "I've seen everything that's gone on, that's going on & I'll take care of it My way, in My time." In the NT we'd read that like this, "*Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord.*"⁷ Don't worry about retribution, leave that to God, you just return to your roots. "What do you mean?"

That's what He says there in Vs 13. Notice He calls Himself, "The God of Bethel." You see, God is calling Jacob back, He's bringing to his mind remembrance of that 1st encounter that he'd had w/the Lord in a personal way... You guys, sometimes we can get caught up, get the motor going, get out there & we're doing life, we're believers, we're workin & years go by. & Somewhere along the way even though we're still busy about *ministry* or we're coming to church *regularly* we've forgotten to cultivate that 1st love relationship w/Jesus *personally*.

⁶ The New King James Version. (1982). (Ps 118:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ The New King James Version. (1982). (Ro 12:19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

God says, "It's time to come home. I'm still the same God who blew your mind back then, who put a pep in your step & set your heart on fire for Me. Come back to that place."

It's found in Rev Ch 2. Jesus speaking to His own. He says, "Listen, I know that you can't stand evil, that you're working & laboring for me, you're patient w/people, you've persevered & haven't become weary in doing good." He says, "*Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works,*"⁸ Remember, repent, & repeat. Get back to that place of being fresh in love w/J.C. The God who was blessing you & blowing you away back then, hasn't changed, He's still there, it's time to come home.

Vs 14-16

"If God has called you, than we support you." Gals I can't tell you how critical that is for your husband. If God is calling him, he needs you to stand w/him & support him.

These gals recognize who their dad is, he's used up their dowry, he's not really interested in their well-being. They're ready to do whatever they need to do. Jacob is led by the unction *w/in* him, the circumstances *around* him, the word of God *to* Him & it bears witness (he finds confirmation) in those *closest* to him.

Vs 17-21

This is where Jacob seems to fall short. God already told him that as he honored Him, He would be w/him. He didn't need to be all stealth about it & take off & not tell him. He should've confronted him & just been honest w/him. So even though it's a move of obedience, it's not really a move of faith (make sense). *If he were truly trusting God in this moment he wouldn't have rolled up camp & took off unannounced (after living there for 20 yrs). Remember (we said a few weeks ago) it's not only about doing the right thing, it's about doing the thing right. We want to glorify God in what we do & the way we do it.*

Now remember a bit ago I told you that Jacob's kids were being raised in an ungodly environment. Ol' uncle Laban was an idolater & Rachel (when they left) stole his little gods. The question comes up, why would she do this?

The bible doesn't say. Some think it's because (& there's legitimacy to the thought process) that whoever had possession of the household gods was entitled to the property & having spent her dowry she was kind of getting even by being the potential heir of the estate.

Others think maybe she didn't want Laban using them to find out where they'd gone (in Vs 27 of Ch 30 when he speaks of learning by experience that God blessed him because of Jacob's presence, the reference is to divination, Laban didn't serve the God of Jacob, he was an idolater straight-up). She could've been just getting even w/him (taking what was important to him) or seeking to keep him from idolatry. We just don't know. But in heading for the Mts of Gilead, he's on a 300 mile journey right now.

Vs 22-29

God had told Jacob that He would be w/him & He's keeping His word (He always does). God came to Laban in a dream & said, "You better not speak to Jacob either good or bad". Or another way to understand that? "Don't try to entice him to come back to you & don't even think about threatening him."

But perspective is a funny thing isn't it? Laban acts all offended wanting to know why Jacob ran off & deceived him... He'd just spent the last 20 yrs deceiving Jacob!

Not to mention he's lying to him now, "I would've had a big party, sent you off right!" Uh... Liar! He tries to make Jacob feel guilty, then he tells him that he could really hurt him, but God let him know that he's to steer clear from seeking to persuade him in any way.

Vs 30-35

Is it just me or does something not ring out right w/the words, "Why did you steal my gods?" 😊

Now Jacob didn't know that Rachel had stolen them & so he said, "Hey, no one took your stuff & should you find your "gods" w/anyone here, they can be put to death on the spot!" These guys didn't trust each other any farther than they could spit.

But here's what I want to say about this. Jacob was sure that he knew that no one had those little idols. But was he right? No. Even so there will be times (probably more than not) that we think we know everything there is to know about a situation therefore we feel vindicated concerning our judgment. But we don't always know what we think we know, we don't have perfect understanding about anything. God sees clearly, us... not so much.

Vs 36-42

Laban goes through all his stuff, certain that Rachel wouldn't defile his "gods" (which she did) & Jacob is getting more angry by the minute & now he goes off. "I've worked for you for 20 yrs, 14 yrs for your daughters, 6 yrs for these flocks, you've changed my wages 10xs, I've paid for any loss out of my own pocket & if it weren't for God keeping you in check you'd have ripped me off *today* & left me w/nothing!"

According to the custom if a beast tore into one of the flock, the shepherd could bring the carcass to the owner & the shepherd would be excused from the expense. Jacob never exercised that right, he just bore the loss & replaced it from his own herd. He worked hard for his employer, sought to enrich his estate, served him honestly & God honored his integrity.

Vs 43-50

Laban said, “Wrong, it’s not yours, it’s mine, but what can I do now. You have my daughters, my grandsons... just take it.” Then he says, “Let’s end this, let’s make a covenant.” So they made this stack of stones to serve as a witness between them & they came to an agreement. “You don’t come any closer than this to me, & I won’t come any closer than this to you. If either of us void the contract we’re taking our lives into our own hands.” Beyond that “Mizpah”, “God is watching you & if you seek to do wrong by me He will deal w/you.”

Vs 51-55

Now this is an extreme case, but there is some wisdom in having a little separation from your in-laws. “For this reason a man shall leave his father & mother & be joined to his wife.”

But listen, I called this study, “The great escape”. Here’s what I want you to see. Laban is a picture (in a very real respect) of the world. Given over to false gods, pursuing material gain at any expense, totally self serving; & that’s the bondage Jacob was under. In breaking away from Laban & getting back to the Promised Land he was really cutting ties w/the world. In getting away from Laban he was escaping the clutches of the world. Let me encourage you, break free from the bondage of this world through faith in J.C.

Don’t be only *saved* by God; be *subdued* by Him, return to your 1st love. Remember from where you’ve fallen, repent of sin in your life & repeat the 1st works. God is w/you, He will never fail you... come home.

Prayer Points:

God Your faithfulness is overwhelming. You see us right where we are, yet you love us. You are for us & not against us. & Even when we’re out beyond where You’d have us to be, You’re so gracious to call us back. Give us ears to hear you. God when You call, we want to answer the call & be obedient to Your voice.

It could be that the call God is giving to you is one to simply come to Him. He’s calling out to your heart, pleading w/you that you might believe on the Lord J.C. & be saved. Jesus shed His blood & laid down His life upon the cross for you. He will forgive you of all your sin & make you new. Turn from your sin, trust in Him today.