



The Sermon

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Genesis 31:17-55

"God's Protection of His People"

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TRANSCRIPT

If you are visiting with us, we are going to the book of Genesis verse by verse, chapter by chapter. Like I just mentioned, we're in chapter 31; and if you remember, Jacob, his wives, his children, and all his possessions are in Haran with Laban his father-in-law. And in the verses that Michael Staton preached on last week, the angel of God appeared to him in a dream, and in verse 12 He said, "I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you." Laban, if you remember and familiar with the story, has been, to say it lightly, taking advantage of Jacob. He's been trying to cheat him out of his wages. And then in verse 13, the angel of God went on to say, "I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, leave, go out from this land and return to the land of your birth."

The Lord is telling Jacob to return to the land that He had given his father Isaac, the land that He had given his grandfather Abraham, Canaan, the Promised Land. And there's two things that become apparent to Jacob immediately in this dream where the Lord appears to him. The angel of the Lord is God Himself. This is a theophany. God is visibly appearing to Jacob. This is the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ speaking to him in the dream.

The second thing is is that the Lord is reminding Jacob that He's never left him. If you remember in Genesis 28:15, the Lord had told Jacob as he was escaping Esau his brother, as he was escaping to Haran He said, "And behold, I am with you, and I will keep you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done all what I have promised you." And in the last verse from last week, Jacob

talks to his two wives, Rachel and Leah, and they agree to go with him back to the land of Canaan. They said, "Surely all the wealth which God has taken away from our father belongs to us and our children. Now, do whatever God has said for you to do."

And so that brings us to verse 17. I'm excited about this passage for the reason that I believe that in this narrative all of humanity is in this story, now and for all times. I believe that the entire human race is represented in these verses. I think that all of humanity can identify with one of the characters in this narrative, all are represented here. And the question that I have for you today as we begin is simply this: "Who represents you in this passage? At the end of the age when you stand before God, who will you identify in these verses?" The question for me is, "Who will I be identified with in these verses?"

There's a second theme that is very apparent in these verses. This is a story of a pilgrimage. It's the pilgrimage of a believer, it's what life is like for the one who believes in the Lord. This is Jacob's pilgrimage. I think the author to the Hebrews gives us a great insight into this in Hebrews 11, verses 13 and 16. He writes, "All these." He's talking about the hall of faith. He's talking about Abel, he's talking about Enoch, he's talking about Noah, he's talking about Abraham, he's talking about Sarah. He says, "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and welcoming them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." That's the believer. Verse 16: "But as it is, they desired a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them." That's the mindset of Jacob; that's the mindset of the believer.

So turn with me as we read, starting in verse 17 of Genesis 31. Verse 17: "Then Jacob arose and put his children and his wives upon camels; and he drove away all his livestock and all his property which he had gathered, his acquired livestock which he had gathered in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac. When Laban had gone to shear his flock, then Rachel stole the household idols" - the ESV calls this "the household gods" - "that were her father's. Verse 20: "And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he was fleeing. So he fled with all he had; and he arose and crossed the Euphrates River, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead.

"When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, then he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him a distance of seven days' journey, and overtook him in the hill country of Gilead. God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream of the night and said to him, 'Be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad.'

"Laban caught up with Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen camped in the hill country of Gilead. Then Laban said to Jacob, 'What have you done by deceiving me?' - stolen my heart - 'What have you done by deceiving me and carrying away my daughters like captives of the sword? Why did you flee secretly and deceive me, and did not tell me so that I might have sent you away with joy and with songs, with timbrel and with lyre; and you did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters? You have done foolishly. 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 speak either good or bad to Jacob." Now you have indeed gone away because you longed greatly for your father's house; but why did you steal my gods?' Then Jacob replied to Laban, 'Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force. The one with whom you find your gods shall not live; in the presence of our kinsmen point out what is yours among my belongings and take it for yourself.' For Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.

"So Laban went into Jacob's tent and to Leah's tent and the tent of the two maids, but he did not find them. Then he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's tent. Now Rachel had taken the household idols and put them in the camel's saddle, and she sat on them. And Laban felt through all the tent but did not find them. She said to her father, 'Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the manner of women is upon me.' So he searched but did not find the household idols.

"Then Jacob became angry and contended with Laban; and Jacob said to Laban, 'What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me? Though you have felt through all my goods, what have you found of all your household goods? Set it here before my kinsmen and your kinsmen, that they may decide between us two. These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten the rams of your flocks. That which was torn of beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it myself. You required it of my hand whether stolen by day or stolen by night. Thus I was: by day the heat consumed me and the frost by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. These twenty years I have been in your house; I served you fourteen years for your

two daughters and six years for your flock, and you changed my wages ten times. If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had not been for me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the toil of my hands, so He rendered judgment last night.' Then Laban replied to Jacob, 'The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne? So now come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me.'

"Then Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. Jacob said to his kinsmen, 'Gather stones.' So they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. Now Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. Laban said, 'This heap is a witness between you and me this day.' Therefore it was named Galeed, and Mizpah, for he said, 'May the Lord watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other. If you mistreat my daughters, or you take wives besides my daughters, although no man is with us, see, God is witness between you and me.' Laban said to Jacob, 'Behold this heap and behold the pillar which I have set between you and me. This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass by this heap to you for harm, and you will not pass by this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.' So Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his kinsmen to the meal; and they ate the meal and spent the night on the mountain. Early in the morning Laban arose, kissed his sons and his daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his own place." Let's pray that the Lord would help us this morning.

[Prayer] Dear heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Word. Lord, we thank You for what Your Word teaches us about You and what it teaches us about us. Lord, Your faithfulness to Your people, Your love and Your protection for Your people, Your provision for Your people; Lord, that is what You have opened our eyes to in Your Son the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray, Lord, that as we consider these verses this morning, that You would pour Your Spirit out upon us, that You would give us a greater understanding, that You would take us deeper, that You would take these words and apply it to our minds, our hearts, and our hands and feet, Lord. Lord, we desire to live in a way that is worthy of the calling with which You have called us.

Lord, I pray that if there's someone here this morning who does not know Christ, that You would open their eyes, that they would see their desperate need and the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ who Jacob was looking forward to is the only answer; He's the only mediator between God and men. Bless us this morning. Bless those that are traveling. Bless those, Lord, that are in need. You know the need; meet it according to Your will. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. [End]

Well, there is a lot going on here, and so I have divided this passage into six sections. The first is verses 17-21: "Jacob's flight and his deception." I said earlier that all of humanity is summed up or seen in these verses. And what we see from the very beginning is the state, or the nature, of Jacob's faith. To be sure, he wants to be obedient to the Lord, he wants to follow His command to go back to the land of Canaan. And as his own words reveal, he knows that the Lord has protected him against Laban's schemes. But his actions, even though he trusts in the Lord, shows that he still has a fear of man, and he has a fear of Laban. That's what verse 20 tells us. It says, "Jacob deceived." The ESV says "tricked." The alternate definition is "stole the heart of." "Jacob deceived, or tricked, Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he was fleeing." Why? Because he was afraid.

The fear of man, and specifically, in Jacob's case, the fear of Laban dictate Jacob's method for leaving. This flight to Canaan is in stealth, it's in secret. It's not above board, it's not appropriate. He's leaving at the Lord's direction, but his fear is dictating the way that he leaves. Verse 31 reveals Jacob's heart when he responds to Laban. He says, "Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force."

Fear is a strong motivator. It's a strong motivator as we see for Jacob, and it's also a strong motivator for us in the way that we live our lives. Lest you think that I'm being too critical of Jacob, he comes by it honestly, he comes by it in the pattern of his family. If you remember, his grandfather Abraham twice called his wife Sarah, in Genesis 12 and in Genesis 20, he called Sarah his sister. Why? Because he was afraid. His father Isaac did the same thing in Genesis 26; he called Rebekah his wife his sister. And one of the most encouraging things about the Scripture is that it reveals men as they truly are. And men are men are sinners in the need of grace, just like you and I. Michael Staton said it last week. He said, "Sometimes when you're reading the Bible, the good guys don't always act good, and the bad guys don't always act bad."

When we look around, when we really consider what the fact is, that men are sinners in need of grace, the question is, when we look to the left and when we look to the right and when we look at ourselves, the real question is, "Who's truly good?" You know the words, you know the response that the Lord Jesus gave the rich young ruler after he called Him "good teacher" in Luke 18. He said, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone."

There's two major points of application here that I don't want us to miss. The faith of the believer is very much like that of Jacob's. And what do I mean by that? I hope that when you're here this morning that you believe in the Lord. I hope that the Lord Jesus Christ died for your sins. But I also know that you probably have feared men at some point in your Christian life. You're probably not going around calling your wife your sister. But how many times have you wilted in your testimony concerning Christ before other men? Why have you done that? It's because of fear. You're afraid of what someone might think of you. I'm afraid of what someone might think of me. You're afraid of what someone might do to you. And I'm talking to myself more than I'm talking to you.

We trust in the Lord; but practically, as we live our lives, often we still fear man. And that's what Jacob's doing. And if we're honest with ourselves, that's something that's in our life. You know the verse, Matthew 10:28, "Do not fear those who can kill the body but are unable to kill the soul." That's man. Who are we to fear? "But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

One of the things the doctrines that we continually preach here is the sovereignty of God. If He is for you, if He is for me, if He is sovereign, why should we fear? Why would we ever melt or wilt before men? Isn't God in total control of all things? Isn't He leading us to glory?

Here's the second application. We have Abraham, we have Isaac, and we have Jacob in this narrative. God is the hero of the Bible, if you would allow me to say it that way. The Lord is the hero of history. It's not Abraham, it's not Isaac, it's not Jacob, it's the Lord. If you're a believer, ask yourself the question, "Where would I be without the Lord?" It's almost unthinkable. The Lord is my Savior, the Lord is the hero of my story. He is the one that will never leave me or forsake me.

As a side note, there's one other interesting point about Jacob fleeing, and that is that Rachel has stolen the household idols. The ESV calls it "the household god." They're teraphim, they're little figurines; they're made by hand most likely. They were made out of precious materials. They are Laban's gods, little "g." They're his household idols. Why? We're not told. But as the narrative reveals, Rachel is like us. She's capable of her own scheming, she's capable of stealing, she's capable of lying; and Jacob is totally unaware of what she's done.

Second section, "Jacob pursued," verses 22-25. When Laban finally figures out what Jacob has done, that he has fled, he pursues Jacob with the intent of harming him. He wants to get even, he wants to take his stuff back. He doesn't pursue Jacob alone, he takes his kinsmen. He's got a small force. Laban has the upper hand physically with these kinsmen; and when he confronts Jacob, he knows that Jacob will not be able to defend himself, his wives, his children, his property.

Verse 29, Laban shares his heart. When he's talking to Jacob he said, "It is in my power to do you harm." This is what Jacob feared, this is why he deceived Laban when he was leaving. Just as everything seems to hang in the balance for Jacob, when he sees the situation, when he knows he can't defend what he has, when he knows that Laban has him dead to right, the Lord intervenes for Jacob. It's hard to imagine specifically the pressure in the angst that is in Jacob's mind as Laban is there, because in Jacob's mind there's no possible way out; he knows what Laban is like.

More than 400 years later, Jacob's offspring, the nation of Israel, would be in the same exact situation. They're up against the Red Sea. Pharaoh is in pursuit, his heart has been hardened again, and there's no imaginable way out. They're defenseless; and the Lord intervenes and parts the Red Sea. It's Psalm 124. It's a psalm of David. It's a song that they sang as they ascended.

Psalm 124 reads this: "Had it not been the Lord who was on our side, let Israel say now, 'Had it not been the Lord who was on our side when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive, when their anger was kindled against us; then the waters would have engulfed us, the stream would have swept over our soul; then the raging waters would have swept over our soul. Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us to be torn by their teeth. Our soul has escaped as a bird out of the snare of the trapper;

the snare is broken and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth." That's the exact position that Jacob's in. And quite honestly, if we understand the psalm and how it applies to all good people, all of God's people, that's the psalm of our life, that's the psalm of what the Lord does for us.

If you're familiar with John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, there's a parallel between Christian's pilgrimage and that of Jacob's pilgrimage to Canaan; they run parallel. The journey is never easy. For Jacob today, it's Laban; tomorrow it's going to be Esau and the 400 men that are coming toward him. He is going to be not only in fear today, but he's going to be in fear tomorrow. And *Pilgrim's Progress* in the ninth stage, Christian and Hopeful are traveling along the narrow way to the celestial city, and they encounter Flatterer. Flatterer is a false prophet disguised as an angel of light.

Soon after, Christian and Hopeful begin to follow Flatterer. They are entangled in a net and they can't get out, and they begin to cry out of desperation because of their plight. Finally they are set free from the net by a shining one, which is a ministering angel sent from God, who helps both Christian and Hopeful. This is a messenger sent from God to take Christian and Hopeful and put them on the narrow path back to the celestial city. That's what the Lord does for His people. He protects and He leads His people, He sets them straight when they sin. The Lord preserves His people, He indwells them with His Spirit.

Verse 24, "The Lord came to Laban the Aramean in the night and said, 'Be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad.'" The Lord warns Laban not to act on the anger that is in his heart toward Jacob. "Be careful." Laban obliges. At this point in this dream Laban is now fully aware that the Lord has put a hedge of protection around Jacob. Jacob is the Lord's and the Lord is going to protect him.

Verses 26-29, the third section, "Jacob's protection revealed." When Laban and Jacob meet, Laban goes after Jacob aggressively in the conversation. We see Laban's perspective: it's self-centered, it's selfish, it's all about him. He says, "You deceived me. You ripped out my heart. You've taken away my daughters as if they were prisoners. If you would have told me that you were leaving, I would have thrown you a party, we would have celebrated." And that's a bold-faced lie. Back in Genesis 30, Jacob had tried to leave. He said, "Send me away." But Laban wanted to continue to exploit Jacob.



He went on to say, "You didn't even let me tell my daughters and my grandchildren goodbye." And then he says in the height of his self-deception in verse 29, "It is in my power to harm you." Now here's what's interesting. If Laban has any power to do anything it's from God, because all power comes from God. If you and I ever have the power to do something, it's because God has given us the power.

Now Laban reveals to Jacob something that Jacob didn't know. He now reveals that he knows that the Lord is protecting Jacob. He said, "The God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful not to speak either good or bad to Jacob.'" Did you notice the pronouns? They're so telling in Laban's speech on his point of view and what is important to him. Verse 26, "my daughters"; verse 28, "my sons and my daughters"; verse 29, "my power." But at the end of verse 29, the pronoun changes. He said, "The God of your father," not, "my God," but, "the God of your father." The Lord is not his God. Not only is the Lord not his God, he has accused Jacob of stealing "his gods," little "g."

Fourth section, "Jacob accused," verses 30-35. The focus in the narrative now shifts to Laban's gods. There's a huge contrast between the Lord God and Jacob's gods. The Lord God is the one who protects Jacob, and Laban can't find his little gods.

One of the joys of teaching at – I guess, one of the joys of this church that really sort of caught me by surprise was the ability to teach the 1689 Confession of Faith in Sunday School, and to be able to teach the doctrines of sovereign grace. I think Matt would probably say the same. And when you teach the doctrines of sovereign grace, eventually you're going to get to God's electing love, and you're going to get to how someone comes to be in Christ, how someone comes to believe; you're going to break down what saving faith is. And inevitably there's an objection that arises and it's about indigenous tribes in Africa up some river that I can't pronounce, and the objection goes something like this: "What about them? What if they have never heard of the Lord Jesus Christ, will God still hold them accountable?"

Well, Paul tells us the answer in Romans 1:19, "because that which is known about God is evident within them; for He made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power, His divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood through

what has been made, so they are without excuse." The light of creation reveals that there is a God, and He is to be worshiped. That's a different sermon.

But that's not Laban. That's what's so striking in the story is the Lord has revealed Himself to Laban for years. Let's consider Laban's life for just a second. Let's consider the light of God that Laban has received. He's Rebekah's brother. He was there when Abraham's servant providentially met her and told the story of how he had been sent, and he was there with all the treasures that Abraham provided and when Rebekah was taken to Isaac. Over the last 20 years that Jacob had been with Laban he would have heard of Isaac's blessing, he would have heard of the birthright, he would have heard how the Lord told her while she was pregnant she had twins, and this struggle that was going on inside of her was that the older would serve the younger. Laban has witnessed firsthand that everything that Jacob has done the Lord has blessed. The sheep and the goats were all striped, speckled and spotted. And now the Lord has appeared to him in a dream, and he says, "Be careful." Laban knows who the God of Jacob's father is. Laban knows the God of Jacob, he's seen the light of God.

This is the most important question before us in the entire text: "So why does Jacob believe in the Lord, why does Jacob seek to be obedient to God, and why is Laban reduced to groping through Jacob's stuff for his little figurines, for his gods that can be stolen and not found?" That's the question that the text screams to us. You know who Laban is? Laban is the person who has sat in church their entire life, heard the gospel, heard the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ and never believed. There is so much light there; that's Laban.

Now when you look at both of them, let's be clear, Jacob and Laban were both well-acquainted with deception. Jacob's life is not a life that you always would want to pattern yourself after. At the age of 40 he has an identity crisis. "Are you Esau?" "Yep, I'm Esau." "Are you sure you're Esau?" "Yep, I'm Esau."

So what's the difference? Why is one of them looking to God in heaven and the other fumbling around for his lost trinkets? What is the difference between Jacob and Laban? Paul gives us the answer in Romans 13. He quotes Malachi 1:2. Malachi 1:2 says, "I have loved you," says the Lord.

But you say, "How have You loved us?" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declared the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob."

That is the difference between Jacob and Laban, that is the division in our world. There are Jacobs and there are Labans, and all of humanity can be divided in these two camps. There are those on their pilgrimage on the way to heaven, and there are those that are clinging to the trinkets of this world, and the difference between the two of them is the Lord. It's the Lord Himself and His love for His people, and it's all summed up when He says, "Jacob I loved."

"OK, I see that in the Scriptures, I can connect those dots." But you might be asking, "What about me? How do I know if God has loved me like Jacob? How do I know that the Lord has loved me like this?" Well, I think the answer is obvious, and the answer is seen in Jacob's response to God's love. Did Jacob believe in the Lord? Yes. Did Jacob seek to be obedient to the Lord? Yes. At the end of his life, Jacob, now called Israel, blessing his children says to Joseph in Genesis 48:15, "God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day."

Do you believe in the Lord? Do you have a desire to be obedient to Him? Is He your shepherd like He was Jacob's? Only those whom the Lord loves can answer those questions with a yes. What do the elect of God do? They do what only they can do: they believe. Do you believe? Are you associated with Laban or are you associated with Jacob?

Look at the contrast in Laban, look at his gods. His gods cannot be found, verse 30: "But why did you steal my gods?" Verse 33, "He went into Jacob's tent, he went into Leah's tent and the tent of the maids, but he did not find them," his gods. Verse 34, "Jacob felt through all the tent but he did not find them." There's a chorus going on here. Verse 35, "So he searched and he did not find the household idols." The Lord is crying out in Isaiah 55:6, "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near."

Fifth section, "Jacob's defense, verses 36-42. At this point, the conversations have been one-sided, and Jacob's had enough. He's had enough of Laban's accusations, he gets angry, and as the ESV says, "He berates Laban." He's ready to let him have it. He says, "What of your stuff have I taken from you? You have searched through everything; what have

you found? Show us all, set it before us. What have I stolen from you?" He says, "Let's review the history for a minute. I have served you for twenty years, I've never cheated you out of a dime. I've bore all the responsibility of what happened in the field, not you. I was the one that was exposed to the weather, the heat and the cold; I was the one who couldn't sleep. How dare you! And all you have done is changed my wages ten times. All you've done is try to cheat me out of what you owe me. You don't care about me, you don't care about your daughters, you don't care about your grandchildren; it's all about you, Laban."

And verse 42, Jacob knows, shows us that Jacob knows that it's all been the Lord that has done this. He says, "If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, the fear of Isaac," - it's translated "the dread of Isaac," the fear and dread; the term is used because that is what is caused by the Lord - "if the fear of Isaac and the God of Abraham had not been for me, surely by now you would have sent me away empty-handed." Jacob says, "God has been a witness between me and you, and last night He has judged." Look what he says. He says, "God has seen my affliction and the toil of my hands, so He rendered judgment last night." I love the way the ESV translates this. He says, "He" - God - "has rebuked you" - Laban - "last night. The Lord knows what you have done."

Jacob's defense is the Lord. "Laban, you're not the one that's in control, the Lord is. The Lord is, and He has been my shepherd." It's so beautiful that the Lord has protected Jacob. And the Lord has protected Jacob just like He protects His people, because He loves them. And the most beautiful thing for the believer is this: you're like Jacob. You don't deserve the love of God, I don't deserve the love of God; but he has set His love upon a people. It's so undeserved, it's so sweet. You and I in this life have the protection of the Lord. We will not gain everything in this life, we may die in want and need; but you do know we're going to have everything in the next life, that it's going to be joy beyond comprehension. That's the pilgrimage we're on.

Last section, "Jacob's covenant," verses 43-55. Laban is lost. Jacob has said his piece. But what's so interesting is nothing has changed for him. With all this light, he's not seeking the Lord. He's not asking for forgiveness, he's not saying, "Hey, can I go along with you?" His heart remains unchanged. Look at verse 43: "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day to my daughters?" He sounds like a four-year-old in a sound box

that has never been taught to share: "My, my, my. Mine." I mean, his heart is unchanged.

So he settles for the best that he can get today; he's always negotiating. He settles for a covenant with Jacob; it's going to be symbolized by a pillar, or a heap of rocks. and really it's a covenant of non-aggression. He says, "I know the Lord is with you. What I want from you now is a promise that you're never going to come back and hurt me." Verse 48, "This heap is a witness between you and me this day." Verse 49, "May the Lord watch between you and me when we are absent from one another. If you mistreat my daughters," - which he had been doing - "if you take wives besides my daughters, although no man is with us, see, God as a witness between you and me."

Laban says to Jacob, verse 51, "Behold this heap in this pillar which I have set up between you and me. This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass by the heap to harm you, nor will you pass by this heap and this pillar to me for harm." The division between Laban and Jacob is seen one more time, it's verse 53. It's seen in how this covenant is ratified between the two of them. Laban says, "The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor and the God of their fathers judge between us."

It's so interesting that Laban is willing to make a covenant in the name of God as God is the witness, but he doesn't have a relationship with God. And not only does he not have a relationship with God, he doesn't really fully understand what he's just said. The God of Abraham is not the God of Nahor. Nahor never crossed the Euphrates River when Abram was called in Genesis 12. And from Joshua 24:2, we figure because his father, he probably worshiped the moon god in Ur of the Chaldeans. The way that Laban describes Him is not the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

Look at what Jacob does. He doesn't swear by the same God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, he swore by the God of his father, the fear or the dread of Isaac. It's just like the world today. The world will use God wherever it thinks He can be used for their advantage; and as soon as God is not an advantage, we throw Him out the door.

What's also interesting about this covenant is the site of this covenant. They are at Mizpah either on the edge or in the Promised Land. Laban has made a seven-day journey as fast as he can all the way from Haran to the Promised Land, and he gets to the edge of it, or he gets inside of it, and he turns back. Verse 55, "He arose, he kissed his sons, he kissed his daughters, he blessed them, he departed and he returned to his place." As the scene closes Laban gets so close to the Promised Land, but yet he's so far.

Back to *Pilgrim's Progress* is Christian is on his way to the celestial city. He encounters people along the journey that start out on this narrow way with him. Many find the journey too difficult and they turn back. They never make it to the celestial city, they never make it to heaven. This is Laban: so close, but yet so far. That's the way that man goes without God.

I close with this: there's a great divide in this world, and the divide is between the believer and God and the one who lives in unbelief. Make no mistake about it: the Lord knows those who are His. The gospel is the good news that the Lord Jesus Christ died in the place of sinners. He died for all the sins of all His people. But not only did He die on the cross for all the sins of all His people, but He lived a perfectly righteous life before the Father. And at the moment of faith, His righteousness is given to the one who believes, so that when we stand before the Father, we have the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's a foreign righteousness, it's an alien righteousness.

And so if you are not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the charge to you today is, "Believe. Believe in Him. Put your faith in Him." And I pray that God would give you the ability to do that. I pray that the Lord would circumcise your heart, that He would show you your desperate need. I pray that He would give you eyes to see and ears to hear that Jesus is the Christ.

If you're a believer here, what does this passage teach us? The Christian life after the moment of justification, after the moment of belief, we call that sanctification till we go to glory. This is the Lord conforming us into the image of His Son. And so much of the Christian life can be summed up in the struggle that we have, and it's simply this: the Lord is calling out to us in His Word, "Trust Me. Don't trust yourself, don't trust in your resources, don't trust in your intellect; trust Me. Don't fear man, trust Me." And that's the journey that Jacob is on, and that's the journey that you and I are on. And I pray that the Lord would help us in that journey. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Dear heavenly Father, there is a great divide in this world. And Lord, as a recipient of faith, as a recipient of the Lord Jesus Christ and His righteousness, all I can humbly say is thank You. Lord, I will spend, we will spend our days thanking You and praising You for what You have done for Your people. Bless us for Your glory. Lord, protect us on our pilgrimage. We are looking for a home that's not made with human hands. We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.