

Jacob 6 - The Most the World Can Offer

1. The tale of two manipulators

As we move through the life of Jacob, we encounter him dealing with his kinsman, Laban, who has shown evidence of being a match for the wits of Jacob as a manipulator. Jacob had manipulated Isaac and Esau, and he was going to reap what he had sown. Laban will prove to be unsuccessful in the end, but it won't be without him being a thorn in the side of Jacob. Remember the principle of sowing and reaping:

Gal 6:7,8 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

8For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

Laban had passed off his first daughter to Jacob when he expected to get Rachel. That could have had a familiar ring to it. Jacob had pushed himself as the younger ahead of his older brother, Esau. Now, he was getting burnt by Laban's deception putting the *older* daughter, ahead of Rachel, the *younger* daughter he desired. Also, Jacob had put skins on to disguise himself before Jacob. Similarly, Laban had presented Leah with a veil and was disguised from being known by Jacob.

Do you remember how Jacob had unscrupulously bought his brother's birthright? When Jacob later argued with Laban about departing, Laban's unfair business dealings were revealed by Jacob's complaint about changing his wages ten times:

Gen 31:38-41 This twenty years *have* I *been* with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten.

39That which was torn *of* *beasts*

I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, *whether* stolen by day, or stolen by night.

40*Thus* I was; in the day the drouht consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes.

41Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times.

Jacob had cheated Esau out of his blessing, or inheritance. He reaped when Laban did the same thing to him by way of his daughters. When Jacob called on them to leave with him, Laban's daughters were happy to do so:

Gen 31:14-16 And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, *Is there* yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house?

15Are we not counted of him strangers? for he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money.

16For all the riches which God hath taken from our father, that *is* ours, and our children's: now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do.

Although God had directed Jacob to go back to Canaan, there is no indication that God approved of him, personally. God warned Laban about how to speak to Jacob, but Jacob read a little bit extra into that warning.

Gen 31:24,42 And God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said unto him, Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad...

42[**And Jacob later pointed out to him**] Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me

away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked *thee* yesternight.

God told Laban to speak carefully, but Jacob took that to mean that God was rebuking Laban for mistreating him.

These two manipulators had achieved a stalemate. Jacob couldn't stay and Laban couldn't let them go. They didn't trust each other so they had to come to terms. As manipulators, they each tried to have power over the other. At the heart of this lies a major issue of ethics. How do you determine which one is right? What is the basis for claiming to be morally right? Jacob and Laban make a covenant, but by what authority can they morally hold each other to it? Let's look at the covenant.

Gen 31:44-53 Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee.

45And Jacob took a stone, and set it up *for* a pillar.

46And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made an heap: and they did eat there upon the heap.

47And Laban called it Jegarsahadutha: but Jacob called it Galeed. **[both mean "a heap"]**

48And Laban said, This heap *is* a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed;

49And Mizpah; for he said, The LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.

50If thou shalt afflict my daughters, or if thou shalt take *other* wives beside my daughters, no man *is* with us; see, God *is* witness betwixt me and thee.

51And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold *this* pillar, which I have cast betwixt me and thee;

52 This heap *be* witness, and *this* pillar *be* witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm.

53 The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob sware by the fear of his father Isaac.

What seems fairly reasonable and innocuous in their agreement has been taken out of context to create for today what has been called the *Mizpah blessing*, based on vs. 49. Here is how one blogger described the problem:

A common piece of Christian jewelry is the Mizpah pendant...It is usually circular and broken into two pieces. Inscribed on it is the verse from Gen. 31:49 which reads: "The LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another." The descriptions you read of them say the pendant is a token of friendship. This is a classic example of a verse taken out of its context and because of its placement in another context takes on an entirely different meaning. In this case the verse is presented as a sentiment expressed between two close friends, siblings, couples who will be separated and use this as a prayer for God to watch over them. But as John Walton points out in his commentary on Genesis this is the complete opposite from what it means in the Bible.

"Finally, a word must be said about the 'Mizpah benediction' in 31:49. It is not unusual today to hear this intoned by a minister as the benediction to the congregation at the end of a service or even to find it inscribed on wedding rings. In using it this way, we show our

misunderstanding of the words. Here in Genesis they express *suspicion*. Laban does not trust Jacob, and Jacob does not trust Laban. They both agree that they will have no means to keep an eye on one another and prevent mischief-making, so they commend one another to the watchful eye of deity. A paraphrase is, "I don't trust you out of my sight, but since I can no longer personally hold you accountable, may God do so." It is hardly the sentiment that one would want on a wedding ring, and although a minister may feel that way about a congregation, it is not in good taste to express it so unequivocally."

—
<https://bbhchurchconnection.wordpress.com/2010/02/23/the-mizpah-benediction-keeping-it-in-context/>

There is one aspect of the covenant that makes it *truly* moral and righteous: the recognition that all morality is based on the nature and authority of God. This is contained in vs. 53 where they agree that the God that they both recognize will be the judge of whether they keep the covenant while they are away from each other and not able to enforce it themselves.

Here is where things get a little tricky. It might seem like they have a handle on understanding of how God provides the grounding of true morality, but there is not much reason to make that assumption. They have each abundantly proven that, when things are not to their advantage, they are not beyond cheating. The morality of this covenant, as far as Jacob and Laban are concerned, is based on *mutual suspicion* of each other. The covenant is not intended as a means to wish each other well until they get to meet again. It is designed to hold each other accountable. Morality in their hands is only a tool to hold the other one to his commitments in order to manipulate him. This covenant, then, brings out a great teaching on the very nature of morality. For something to be

truly moral it must be based on *God's* righteousness, not man's convenience. The moral problem is the difference between the moral reality for Jacob and Laban vs. the moral reality from God's point of view. They might have *appeared* to be yielding to God, but they were only trying to *use* God.

2. The most the world can offer

Jacob and Laban had called upon God as witness, but what they were really doing in their hearts was calling a truce. That is the most you can hope for in this world. All of our negotiations are merely an agreement to stop haggling back and forth. This is similar to when someone gets sued and the parties might offer and accept a settlement. In a settlement, no one admits to any actual guilt or wrong doing. The offended party merely calls a truce and agrees to not press any further because their concerns have been satisfied.

Jacob had manipulated his breeding of the flocks and Laban had changed his business terms ten times to get the advantage over Jacob. They were businessmen, each looking to maximize their profits. They might have said, "There is nothing personal intended, it's just business." Better business *is* personal, but you have to wonder at the sincerity of the business world. One of the effects of the pandemic fear mongering has been a great loss to business as businesses moved to do what was *barely necessary* to *stay* in business. All kinds of limitations were placed on the customer experience. The human element was restricted in our interactions. Ultimately, a business only mentality reveals a foundational problem in ethics. Are people's commitments only as strong as how advantageous they are to them?

Jacob and Laban gave lip service to God. They only achieved the most that this world has to offer, which is the attitude that every man is for himself. What Jacob and Laban resorted to was an agreement that was mutually beneficiary, but that is all it was. What they arrived at

might seem like a model solution, but we will find that it comes up short. People refer to the Mizpah blessing, but it really is the Mizpah curse. There was to be a curse on the other if he tried to get away with anything. Their intention was to use God as a weapon to keep the other in line.

The sentiment of both mutual benefit and mutual suspicion captures the character of worldly ethics. People *seem* ethical largely because they need each other. This comes up short in that when someone is no longer useful and competition gets bad enough, people will turn to lying, stealing, and even murder. There is nothing that *forces* them to do this, they just do, as witnessed by crime statistics and the history of war. According to worldly ethics, most ethical statements such as "That is wrong," can be restated, "I don't like that," or, "That is not useful to me."

Some try to strengthen their moral claim by creating law. However, you can't depend on the force of law to determine what is right. Laws that are made by a majority vote have led to the deaths of inconvenient children, whether they are born or not. Majority votes have deprived teens of mental health services while promoting perversity. Majority votes have led to civil rights abuses.

Some try to add another layer to strengthen their moral claim by setting up judges and courts. You can't just leave matters of law in the hands of the courts because, as good as they might be, there are plenty of judgments that have been ungodly also.

Without God as the ground of morality, people are only living by ever changing standards depending on what is convenient to meet their desire.

Prov 20:6 Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find? **[faithful: a man of integrity who doesn't change depending on what is convenient]**

Prov 20:14 *It is naught, it is*

naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.

Isa 5:20-21 Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

21 Woe unto *them that are* wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

Eccl 8:11 Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

3. What God offers

- Resolution, not just a truce

When our morality and ethics are grounded in God's righteousness, there is an opportunity for *true* resolution, not just calling a truce.

Prov 26:12 Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? *there is* more hope of a fool than of him.

Prov 21:2 Every way of a man *is* right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts.

Prov 16:2 All the ways of a man *are* clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits.

Prov 16:11 A just weight and balance *are* the LORD'S: all the weights of the bag *are* his work.

What the world offers is *amorality*. The prefix *a* means without. When something is *amoral* it is neither moral nor immoral, it is indifferent toward right or wrong. When a lion kills another lion, there is no lion court where the lion is judged. Lions are amoral. When something *is* morally wrong, then there is *cause* to seek justice and resolution.

- Redemption

Ps 19:7-14 The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple.

8The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes.

9The fear of the LORD *is* clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD *are* true *and* righteous altogether.

10More to be desired *are they* than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

11Moreover by them is thy servant warned: *and* in keeping of them *there is* great reward.

12Who can understand *his* errors? cleanse thou me from secret *faults*.

13Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous *sins*; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

14Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

What God offers is *true* righteousness and a standard by which we can judge ourselves. After declaring the absolute righteousness of God, notice in vs. 14 that David closed the entire Psalm with referring to God as his Redeemer. This is where true righteousness comes from. It doesn't come from man declaring the righteousness of his selfish cause. It comes from being born again when *God's* justice is satisfied. This is the foundation of the simple plan of salvation.

Rom 3:10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:

Rom 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

1John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

Rom 10:13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Rom 4:5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

- Unity, not union

Jacob and Laban lived, like us, in a dog-eat-dog world. There was no true peace between them, only the semblance of peace as long as they steered clear of each other.

Jas 3:13-18 Who *is* a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

14But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts [**that was Jacob and Laban**], glory not, and lie not against the truth.

15This wisdom descendeth not from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, devilish.

16For where envying and strife *is*, there *is* confusion and every evil work. [**Jacob and Laban lived by suspicion and envy**]

17But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, *and* easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy [**the wisdom from above is without**

partiality and hypocrisy because God's justice and righteousness is the standard, not man's changing convenience].

18And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace. **[We have peace with God and offer that true peace to others through the Gospel]**

Jacob and Laban had union, but no unity. They were joined together by their circumstances, but they had no unity of purpose. Their ethic was an ethic of convenience. When we belong to God, we have unity. This is one of the great themes of Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Ps 133:1 Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!

Phil 1:27 1:27 Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

Phil 2:1-3 2:1 If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,

Phil2:2 Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind.

Phil2:3 *Let* nothing *be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

Phil 3:15-16 3:15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

Phil3:16 Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

Jacob and Laban lived for their own individual and personal kingdoms. God offers us the opportunity to live for the kingdom of God. We have to ask ourselves, "Whose kingdom am I living for?" We have petty decisions throughout each day that we are tempted to cheat on to make life easier. Life itself is filled with enough stress that we can end up becoming focused on relaxation and entertainment. The more we give in to temptations, distractions, and diversions, the more we are training ourselves to feel comfortable resisting knowing and serving God. We need to not deceive ourselves into a false sense of peace, merely keeping the world at bay. True peace comes from being saved and going through life with God and our brethren and serving in the kingdom.

1. The tale of two manipulators - Gal 6:7,8, Gen 31
2. The most the world can offer - Prov 20:6,14 , Isa 5:20-21, Eccl 8:11
3. What God offers - Prov 26:12, 21:2, 16:2,11, Ps 19:7-14, Rom 3:10,23, 6:23, 1John 4:10, Rom 10:13, 4:5, Jas 3:13-18, Ps 133:1, Phil 1:27, 2:1-3, 3:15-16