

Genesis 31: 43-55; "The Fear of Isaac", Sermon # 89 in series -
"Beginnings", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 10th, 2006,
in the Morning Worship Service.

When we left this passage last time we saw that Jacob had to "steal away" from Laban because he was such a covetous and grasping man that he never would have let Jacob go back to Canaan if he had approached him to talk to him about it. Laban, we saw, was a picture of the worldly person who thinks that they are a Christian, but who uses their religion to serve their own personal interests. We live in a day when this philosophy of Laban's is rampant in the churches of our land. Many persons who profess to be Christians would like to use worldly wisdom to live their lives rather than the wisdom of the Bible. They do not want to deny themselves and pick up their cross and follow Christ and learn the way of humility and holiness. They want to live their lives to their own greatest advantage. It reminds me of that verse in Philippians 1: 20 and 21, where Paul is contrasting the faithfulness of Timothy with others who were worldly, "For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state." "For all seek their own, not the things of Christ Jesus." When Jacob first came to Laban he was really quite a bit like Laban; he was tricky. He was converted on the way to Haran, but the world tried to hold him through Laban's false philosophy of life. But now, when we see Jacob leaving Canaan, we find him acting quite wisely toward Laban. He has learned to overcome the world by the grace of God given to him in the promise of Christ. He had learned to respond to Laban in a holy, God-honoring way. This is what every true Christian has to learn to do to please God after he is converted. He must live by faith, realizing that to be holy and to follow God is not going to be the popular way, or the way to find favor with selfish relatives who claim to be Christians, who will not live by the truths of the Word of God. You and I need very much this morning to have the same kind of holy fear that Jacob had in his dealings with Laban, because we are going to feel the same pull to succumb to compromising and worldly ways of thinking to get what we want out of life and to get what we want from other people. But our great God will teach us a better way. He is the giver of every good and perfect gift.

Having a holy fear of God; making God the one who he truly feared more than all men or their false gods, was that which enabled Jacob to act toward Laban in a way that showed forth the reality of Christ's grace at work in his life. This is what helped him and it will help us as well, to glorify God in the midst of many provoking and disquieting situations that we will come into with worldly and selfish people. So as we open this truth up this morning, we want to ask the question, "What were the provoking and disquieting things which Laban said to Jacob, at this time of their last meeting, which Jacob responded to in holy fear. I think that we can find 3 things that Laban did; I will show them to you, and then show how Jacob responded to them in holy fear.

1st- There was Laban's selfish view of what belonged to him, and his asking Jacob to enter into covenant with him. (Verses 43-47)

After Jacob's vehement speech defending his own integrity and the reasons that he left without telling Laban that he was going, Laban still does not want to see the truth about himself; that he has for twenty years been stingy, unkind, and self-serving in the way that he treated both Jacob and his own daughters. He continues to think that he is

has been justified in the way that treated Jacob because he says here, "These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and this flock is my flock; all that you see is mine." This is really is pretty incredible. Laban has never been taught or received the principle of leaving and cleaving in relation to his daughters being married to Jacob. Jacob has actually worked for the purchase of those daughters for 14 years and Laban still believes that they are his. This does not speak of a spirit of generosity in Laban at all. He is more of what we would call an "Indian giver." He acts in this situation as though Jacob has stolen from him, when in reality, he had been ungenerous toward Jacob the whole time of Jacob's being under his employ. There are many people in the world that are like this, but we suspect that there are even some people who are like this, in churches of Jesus Christ as well. This should not be. Let it be said once and for all; that Christians are by their new nature generous people. They may be, and ought to be, frugal and wise in their use of what God has given them, but they are not stingy. God has lavished His grace upon them and they themselves want to become like He is; generous. What they receive in this life, both in material things and in grace, is something that they hold with light hand. They are not hoarders or misers. They give and they lend, expecting nothing in return in order that they may be children of their heavenly Father. They are not those who give gifts to others and then want them back again later when things are not working to their personal advantage. They understand that when their daughter gets married to a man that that daughter no longer is theirs in the sense of the family from whence she came. "Who gives this woman to be married to this man," is the question asked at the wedding ceremony. The answer is not, "I do; but if I want her back at any time, I will come and get her." Jacob owed no more to Laban than what he had given to him; his faithful service and respect.

I hope that you understand that many, if not all of us, will at one time or another have to rub shoulders with a Laban. It may be in our family, it may be in our job, it may be in a friendship or acquaintance, but sooner or later it will come. What will we do? Not only does Laban have the wrong conception of what he should be like in terms of his generosity to his own children and son-in-law, but he thinks that on the basis of his wrong thinking that Jacob should make a covenant with him over it. This is really adding insult to injury. But I want you to notice how mildly Jacob takes all this. It looks like Jacob is going to compromise with Laban over these things, but it is not so at all. Laban says, "Now therefore, come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me." The reason that Jacob acquiesces to this covenant is because he has a holy fear of God. A person who has a holy fear of God, who has made God his Fear, relates all of his own personal fears, all of his own personal concerns back to how God has dealt with him in grace. Jacob's response to Laban's request to make a covenant is to "take a stone and set it up as a pillar." Now where have we seen him do this before? It is the morning after he was converted. It was when he was so amazed that God had come to him in grace and mercy when he was so undeserving, when he was so fearful, when he was fleeing from Esau and when he was unsure about whether God would make a way for him in Haran. But God had saved him, and God had led him, and God had taught Him the lessons of grace that he had needed to learn to get through the last 20 years. He could now bear with Laban's fears. "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved, how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed." Jacob remembered that night at Bethel so long ago when he was shown mercy, how the next day "he took the stone that he had put at his head and set it up as a

pillar." He remembered the vow that he had made to God saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God." That stone became God's house that day, the place where Jacob first worshipped God.

Now, on this day, Jacob felt that he could covenant with Laban. He could think about how things were from Laban's perspective rather than his own. He could sympathize and pity Laban at this point without ever pointing it out to him. He could help him by making this covenant with him, and make it with him in such a way that all the relatives and the men that were with Laban would recognize that God was with him. I wonder if this is the way that you are in similar situations. Are you gracious to those who you feel have not treated you right, those who have not thought of your interests? Or are you interested in fighting it out with them? If grace is at work in your heart, you are more interested in how you can work things out with them to show them that you are concerned about them in a godly way. This is making God your fear. You are not afraid of what men can do to you, so much as you are concerned with what would honor God and show the other person that you do love them and have their highest welfare in mind. That is what Jacob did. So Jacob says in verse 46, "Gather stones." "And they took the stones and made a heap, and they ate there on the heap." He would have a meal and some good-will earthly fellowship with him to show that he really did care for him even though he had been treated so badly. Jacob did not reject Laban, or hold a grudge against him, even though there were things that Laban had done to him that ought not to have been done in the past. Now ask yourself this morning, "Is this what I do?" Because this is the way of Christ; to be always seeking the highest good of the other person, even if they have not done what you would like them to have done in relation to you. Laban called the heap of witness by the Syrian name Jegar Sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. They were both calling this physical sign of their covenanting by the same name, but in two different languages. Laban will covenant in the language of his own worldly interests. Jacob would covenant in the language of God's interests, because God was his Fear. The Christian speaks the language of Canaan. His mind is on heavenly things. He speaks the language of God's country and the heavenly inheritance. But the worldly man speaks of his earthly inheritance.

Then, there was a 2nd thing that was provoking and disquieting about Laban, which Jacob responded to in holy fear: This was Laban's unwarranted suspicions of what Jacob might do to his daughters or to him when they were separated from each other. (Verses 48-52)

verse 48 Laban says, "This heap is a witness between you and me this day." This heap was also called Mizpah, because Laban said, "May the Lord watch between you and me when we are absent one from another." This would be very wonderful language, and it would at first glance seem to indicate Laban's tender concern for Jacob, except for what follows. He says, "If you afflict my daughters, or if you take other wives besides my daughters, although no man is with us--see, God is witness between you and me!" It is very hard to believe that God is Laban's Fear when he says such things. Jacob has faithfully served him and loved and cared for his wives, even though Laban had tricked him into marrying Leah as well as Rachel; and yet, here Laban is, treating Jacob's intentions in leaving and in taking his wives away, with a suspicion that does not at all fit the case. It is the sign of a bad heart in him, just as it was the sign of a bad heart in

Saul when he eyed faithful David with suspicion from the day the women sang, "Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten-thousands." Was there any reason for this kind of suspicion; of his even using these words? They speak of Laban's mistrust of David, when for 20 years he had been very faithful. He goes on to say in verse 52, "This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm." If Jacob had intended to harm Laban, it would have been long before this. But Jacob had been patient and had born with Laban's selfishness and unconcern for years. How would he react to these provoking statements of Laban's now?

I believe that the principle that was working in Jacob's heart was the same one that is given to us in Isaiah 8: 6-13. Turn with me to that place. The children of Israel would not trust in the Lord, nor turn back from their sin of unbelief and their failure to take heed to the words of the prophets and repent, and come to a sincere obedience. They were like Laban, except on a grander scale of unbelief and disobedience. And so the Lord says to them in verse 6: "Inasmuch as these people refused the waters of Shiloah that flow softly, and rejoice in Rezin and in Remaliah's son; now therefore, behold, the Lord brings up over them the waters of the River, strong and mighty--the king of Assyria and all his glory; he will go up over all his channels and go over all his banks. He will pass through Judah, He will overflow and pass over, and the stretching out of his wings will fill the breadth of Your land, O Immanuel." "Be shattered, O you peoples, and be broken in pieces!" "Give ear all you from far countries." "Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces; Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces." "Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing." "Speak the word, but it will not stand, for God is with us." That is what the word Immanuel means, "God with us." This is what Jacob had. This is why he was not suspicious, and why he did not have to argue with Laban about his foolish observations. He was going on to Immanuel's land. He was going there according to the will of God. He was a man living by faith. "Glory, Glory, dwelleth in Immanuel's land." He was not a man given to suspicion and conspiracy theories, which develop in the minds of worldly men trying to hold on to everything that they have in this world with all of their might. We now know that Immanuel is the Lord Jesus Christ. "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, 'God with us.'" Jesus is our Immanuel and he is the one who helps us to turn our backs on the world and to live godly lives. Do not refuse to believe in Him or to follow him, for He is the Fear of Isaac and your fear. Listen to what it says further in this passage in Isaiah 8. Verse 11 says, "For thus the Lord spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying: 'Do not say, 'A conspiracy,' concerning all that this people call a conspiracy, nor be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.'" "The Lord of Hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread." This is what Jacob had that Laban did not. And this is what you and I should have today as well, when we trust in Immanuel. "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts," it says in 1 Peter 3: 15, "and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and holy fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed." This is how Jacob acted with Laban.

And then the 3rd provoking and disquieting thing which Laban did which Jacob responded to in holy fear, was Laban's making himself out to look

like the one who was spiritual and loving, and making Jacob out to be the guilty one for leaving." (Verses 53-55)

As they come to the place where they covenanted together, we find Laban using very spiritual language. He says, "The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us." He is appealing to the God of Abraham and the God of his own father Nahor and to the God of Terah, their father. It sounds like he is appealing to the One and only, True and Living God, that He would judge between them in this whole matter of Jacob's leaving. But Laban is really trying to place before everyone in their hearing, the justness of his own selfish cause. But if you will remember the words of Joshua 24: 2 and 3 you will understand that Laban was mingling together all the gods that he worshipped including the God of Abraham. This is not pleasing to God. Listen to what it says in Joshua 24. "And Joshua said to all the people, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods.' "Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac." You can see from this that Terah and Nahor were men who served other gods. It was only the sovereign grace and mercy of God that Abraham was called out of that false and idolatrous service. Although it may have been true that Nahor came to know the God of Abraham, having renounced his former idolatry, it is very apparent that Laban had not. Perhaps Nahor, having come over to Haran from Ur of the Chaldees after Abraham left, and settling on that side of the River Euphrates means that he never really left off the worship of many gods. But one cannot be a worshipper of many gods and really know the true and living God.

What was Jacob's response to this spiritual language of Laban? Did he acknowledge that it does not matter what gods that you worship just so you also include the name of the true God? No, it says, "Jacob swore to the words of Laban by the Fear of his father Isaac." You understand that Isaac was the only patriarch left out of the "spiritual list of names" given by Laban. But Jacob knew that Isaac was the essential name because it would be through Isaac that the promised Seed would come, the Son of God, Immanuel. He feared the God of Isaac more than the approval of Laban and this whole company of people looking on. There would be no mixing and mingling of gods this day. You see that it was Jacob who "offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread." He did not renounce or denounce his relatives, but steered them in the right direction at the critical time. It is a good example for us as well as we approach the Christmas season. There will be relatives that believe in many earthly gods and perhaps try to have us join with them in their homage to the world's gods. We must demonstrate a holy fear and worship God through Jesus Christ alone.

Sometimes the god of people around us is their love of the earthly well-being of their relatives. That is their religion. If God blesses those whom they love, that is all that they care about. They are not so much concerned about God's glory, His holiness or His justice being satisfied. If the people that they love come into adversity or suffering, they may question the love of God. They do not believe in God's sending anyone to hell, but they are willing to believe that Christ died so that every single person goes to heaven, even if they do worship other gods. This I declare to you on the authority of the Word of God will never be. Laban covenanted with Jacob, but his only real concern, if that was real, was in seeing his relatives one more time. In verse 55 it says, "And early in the

morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them." "Then Laban departed and returned to his place." His place was beyond the river where he would continue to worship many gods and live for this world. This is not eternal life. The world is passing away and the lusts of it. It is only faith in the promise that God Himself gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that Jesus Christ would come and be born of a virgin and live the perfect life of holiness in the sight of His Father, and Who died on the cross for our sins that will bring to you, the believer, eternal life. Will you not believe this today, perhaps for the first time, and God will come to your soul Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit. He will come to change your heart, and Christ will save you from your sins and give you a relationship with God that is more than human love and more than religion. It will be a holy fear of God that you will have if you believe in Jesus. That is the Fear of Jacob's father Isaac.