

**Genesis 31: 13-43; "And Jacob stole away", Sermon # 89 in the series -
"Beginnings", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on November 26th, 2006
in the Morning Worship Service.**

Jacob had received a command from God; "I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me," He says in verse 13. "Now arise get out of this land, and return to the land of your family." God had purposes that were greater for Jacob than simply remaining under bondage to Laban in shepherding sheep. God had taught Jacob that being tricky was not the way of righteousness. He had done that through a man who was more clever than he, but only in a worldly sense. He had then reversed the tables on Laban and made Jacob rich and prosperous through Jacob's being diligent and resourceful in his job. God says in 1 Corinthians 1: 19, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside."(NAS) He had caused Jacob's righteousness to answer for him. But unfortunately, Laban was not changed in his nature by seeing this mighty working of God in Jacob. This is often how it is with men of the world who claim to be Christians but who may not really be. Like Laban, they can see the blessing of the Lord upon others, and even seek to benefit by it in an earthly sense, but they love the world too much to give up their own selfish and sinful perspectives. They seek to bring true Christians to their own position of selfishness. That is what Laban attempts to do in this chapter. He would hold Jacob there indefinitely if he could. He uses spiritual terminology in his speech, but he is covetous and worldly in his heart. It is a deadly combination, that we must study to avoid. Many people that call themselves Christians in our day are trying to have the world and Jesus too. But God will show them the vanity of this, just as he showed Laban. Jesus says that you cannot serve two masters; for either you will hate the one and love the other, or else you will be loyal to the one and despise the other." "You cannot serve God and mammon." Here in this chapter, the subject is about leaving; what the text calls, Jacob's "stealing away." This is what he had to do to avoid being held captive by Laban in his employ, and being used by him until he had no future and nothing to actually give to his family. Jacob had been faithful and he had learned the lessons that God had wanted him to learn; he has become a rich and resourceful man, and now it is God's purpose to let him escape from this worldly man Laban. I wonder if there is anyone here that needs to escape from the clutches of someone who is worldly this morning? Is there anyone who will "steal away" in this holy sense?

Jacob's leaving Laban is a good picture of the experience of the believer in Jesus Christ who desires to escape the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and to elude the schemes of worldly men who would persuade him to stay in a place of bondage where he should not be. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. The true believer must learn what it means to "steal away" in a holy sense from these worldly ways of thinking which are personified by Laban. What, then, did Jacob and his wives consider when they made their decision to steal away from Laban? How does this apply to all Christians when they think about what it means to move away from worldliness and not be in bondage to the thinking of worldly men? I think that Jacob and his wives considered 3 things in their leaving.

1st- They considered that the only lasting inheritance that they would have, would come to them from God and not Laban. (Verses 13-18)

Verse 14 says, "Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to Jacob, 'Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house?'" "Are we not considered strangers by him?" "For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money." "For all of these riches which God has taken from our father are really ours and our children's; now then, whatever God has said to you, do it." You can see from this that Laban had not only treated Jacob in a selfish and unloving way; but also his own daughters. He had used for himself all the money that he should have given to Jacob in the form of a dowry to go with his daughters in the marriages. He should have been blessing Jacob and his daughters with many gifts and benefits because he loved them and sought for their well-being and encouragement, but instead he only thought of himself. Rachel and Leah feel like chattel that he has sold to make money with. They agree with Jacob's analysis that God had righteously taken away the livestock of their father; that it really belonged to them and their children. They agree that they should leave and steal away.

We need to understand that the Christian life is like this as well. There is no lasting inheritance for us here upon the earth. This is not an easy lesson for the Christian to learn. The only things of beauty and goodness that we have known have been given to us by God. But they have been mediated to us, most often, by our parents. We look to our parents to give us what is good and what will provide for our needs until we marry, or until we are old enough to take care of ourselves. But, often when we are young, the truth that the world is passing away and the lusts of it, does not enter our minds to make a deep and abiding impression. We remember our parents in the days of our youth, but we do not remember God so much so. The only way that this will ever change is when this truth that I am preaching to you this morning penetrates your heart by the power of the grace of Jesus Christ. This means, very practically, that as we grow up and marry and begin households of our own that we have to begin to think of everything good coming to us from God Himself, and really believe that everything that is lasting only comes from Him. We must be born again to inherit the everlasting kingdom of God. No person, no matter how much we love them, no matter how much we are presently dependent upon them, will be able to take the place of God in our lives. Oh how we need to see this clearly in our heart and in our mind. Listen to 1 Peter 1: 3-5. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

We need to see our earthly life in relation to God and our eternal inheritance. Many young people and children often think of their salvation in relation to their parents rather than God Himself. If they are raised in a liberal church context or a Roman Catholic context, they will often think of knowing God in terms of going to church and participation in the activities and the ceremonies of the church. They may be, as I was, a person who sang in all the choirs, one who went through confirmation, one who took the sacraments and was baptized as an infant. But I did not know God. I thought of myself as a Christian in a general sense. My parents raised me to know what was right and wrong, and a good general sense of morality prevailed in our household, but I had no conception until I was 15 or 16 years old that I needed to come to know God personally.

It was the church that my parents took me to, and its activities and sacraments that made me think that being a Christian was no more than those things. I did what my parents did and went to church where they went, but I was not hearing the gospel. I was tied to a Christianity that had its focus on the earth and this life. The gospel that was preached was that I should be a basically good person. But I did not know how great a sinner I was. I "stole away" from that view when I left home for college. I was not converted then, but my father "stole away" from First Presbyterian Church in Davenport, having been converted by reading Spurgeon sermons. If he had not, I would not have had any lasting inheritance. Some people would have us to be Christians without conversion and without being born again. But it cannot be, for we cannot be justified without conversion, because the gospel truth is that Christ died for sinners, sinners who need to be saved. There is no eternal inheritance without conversion, because "unless we are born again we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. We must "steal away" to this new life that only He can bring. None of our relatives can ever do this for us. I believe that God decided that Jacob had to leave Laban primarily because Laban was not a spiritually minded man. He had to steal away.

2ndly- Jacob and his wives came to consider the truth, that in order to be free that they could not take Laban's idols with them. (Verses 19-35)

Now I know that the text says in verse 19 that "Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father's." And we are not told explicitly what Rachel's motive was for doing so. But whatever it was, her actions were wrong. It was not Jacob's intention that these idols should be taken, and in fact Jacob says later that whoever these idols were found with, should be put to death. That was a rash statement as well. But the truth of the matter is, that this was one of the main reasons that Laban was so upset when he caught up with them later. Verse 30 says, "And now you have surely gone because you greatly long for your father's house, but why did you steal my gods?" Verse 32 says that, "Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them." It needs to be understood that these household idols, these teraphim, were common among the idolatrous peoples of Chaldea where Laban's father had previously resided. Heathen men consulted these smaller wooden or stone images as oracles, that would supposedly bring them success in all their worldly endeavors. But why did Laban have them, and what were they used for? Laban, it appears, was a compromising man when it came to his religion. He could worship the true and living God when it was convenient and profitable, and he felt that he could still use these little idols in connection with divining matters of earthly importance to him. He could use them to show his supposed wisdom to people that he wanted to impress, just like people in our day that have memberships in Masonic lodges, hold secret meetings, and have secret oaths that they take. There are secret ceremonies that they observe, all the while some of them professing to be good Christians at the same time. This is what I suspect that Laban did. He evidently was quite serious about his ability to worship other gods and the Lord God almighty at the same time. But Laban only proves himself to be one of those kind of men that we as Christians are warned against in 2 Timothy 3, verses 4 and following. They are "headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power." "And from such people turn away!" That is exactly what Jacob was doing; he was "stealing away" from such a man. The Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 1: 8 and following say, "For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonian and Achaia, but also in every place." "Your faith toward God has gone out,

so that we do not need to say anything." For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." Jacob and his wives were going out in faith, away from Laban the idolater.

But what about Rachel taking her father's gods with her? She is a picture to us of what some young Christians do when they are starting out to live the Christian life. They try to hold on to idols from the past. They feel that they still have to have somewhat of the heathen religion of the world to make them feel safe and comfortable and happy as they travel through this world, when it really isn't the case. They even feel that in compromising with the world in this way that they will win others to Christ. I think about the Super Bowl Sunday parties of some that call themselves Christians will have, and will even bring their televisions into the "worship" services of the church so that people can be "won to Christ" while they watch the teams compete." But they are not being won to Christ at all. They are being shown that a Christian can hold on to his idols and supposedly still be a Christian. Sports has become the household idol of choice to many Americans. They even think it good to watch Sunday Night Football instead of honoring the Lord by "remembering the Sabbath Day to keep it holy." But the Lord will know how to deal with such people. At the day of Judgment He will calmly relate to them how many games that they watched and how much time was wasted and then wait to see if they can give a defense of themselves. I do not believe that they shall be able to do so. In Ephesians 5: 15 it says, "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Is this the mindset of the world, to redeem the time? Hardly! What is the mindset of the Christian? Is it not found in Galatians 6: 14? "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

Is watching football on TV wrong? No, not unless you are willing to compromise your devotion to Christ for it. But that is what is being done by some who call themselves Christians. This same thing can be done with all the pleasures of earthly and worldly sense that God has given, if they are abused. The last verse of 1 John says, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols." Remember that it was in the Coliseum that many Christians were made sport of and put to death for their faith. Christianity is not meant to be a spectator sport of Christians. But Christianity when it is strong becomes the spectator sport of the worldly. You should by the grace of Christ steal away from those worldly people and forsake those worldly idols that will cause unbelievers to pursue you and try to bring you back to the vain things that you used to worship. Remember the words of the apostle Peter in his first epistle, verse 17 and following. "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your father, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." Rachel had not learned this truth well enough yet to keep her from stealing the idols of her father. She did not realize that her compromise with idolatry was compromising Jacob's testimony before Laban. So too, secret sins of idolatry, covetousness especially, can undermine the forward progress of the gospel and hinder the pilgrimage of other Christians on the way to the holy city. Some Christians have not learned this truth well enough to keep them from trying to pursue the vain things that their fathers and mothers pursued before they were

converted. Just because your parents did these things in the past does not mean that you must do them too. They are better left behind. Steal away from the idols of the past.

3rdly- Jacob and his wives, in leaving, considered the reality that only God could truly free them from the bondage that Laban had them in.

(Verses 36-43)

When Laban searched and did not find his gods among Jacob's baggage, Jacob had finally had enough of Laban and his unloving, covetous ways. In words of passionate self-defense he defends his conduct in Laban's service for the past 20 years and how Laban had taken advantage of him in the way that he paid him and treated him. Laban had related to him earlier in verse 29 that "It was in his power to do him harm," he said, "but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.'" Now Jacob answers Laban in relation to that statement by saying, "Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed." "God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night." Jacob and his wives are realizing something of very great importance in this conversation that you and I need to take notice of this morning. It is only God that can give true and lasting freedom from the tyranny of men and the bondage that they bring us into by their false and sinful reasonings about what is important in life. Sometimes God will allow us to be brought into their net for a time so that we can learn the lessons of what really makes us free. Psalm 66: 8-12 says, "Oh, bless our God, you peoples!" "And make the voice of His praise to be heard, Who keeps our soul among the living, and does not allow our feet to be moved." "For You, O God, have tested us; you have refined us as silver is refined." "You brought us into the net; You laid affliction on our backs." "You have caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; but You brought us out to rich fulfillment." It was God who brought them into the net, but it was also and only God who brought them out to rich fulfillment.

How do people really become free? It is through the truth and grace that comes through Jesus Christ. "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free, and you shall be free indeed." Listen to Paul in 1 Corinthians 7: 20 and following. "Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called." "Were you called while a slave?" "Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it." "For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman." "Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave." "You were bought with a price; do not become the slaves of men." Christ has died so that we could be freed from our slavery to sin. Once freed, we should not become the servants or slaves of men. In Galatians 5: 1 Paul says, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty or the freedom by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again in a yoke of bondage." Jacob was freed because of what God did for him in rebuking Laban and commanding him to go out free from his service. But the only reason that God could do this for Jacob was because Jesus Christ would die for Jacob who is one of God's Elect children. Jesus went to the cross and died, and Jacob went free. Even so, when we believe in Jesus, we are redeemed, we are purchased by His blood and we are set free. Will you not come to Jesus Christ and find freedom? Do not let the world steal your heart; rather, steal away to Jesus and find true and lasting freedom.