

Scripture Reading: Genesis 31:43-55

“43 And Laban answered and said to Jacob, “These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and this flock is my flock; 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? 44 Now therefore, come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me.” 45 So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. 46 Then Jacob said to his brethren, “Gather stones.” And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there on the heap. 47 Laban called it Jegar Sa-ha-du-tha, but Jacob called it Galeed. 48 And Laban said, “This heap is a witness between you and me this day.” Therefore its name was called Galeed, 49 also Mizpah, because he said, “May Jehovah watch between you and me when we are absent one from another. 50 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!” 51 Then Laban said to Jacob, “Here is this heap and here is this pillar, which I have placed between you and me. 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. 53 The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us.” And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. 54 Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread. And they ate bread and stayed all night on the mountain. 55 And early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place.”

“God as Their Witness”

This morning we are back in the Book of Beginnings and will bring to an end Jacob’s twenty-year encounter with his Uncle Laban. God has intervened to prevent Laban from angrily attacking Jacob and even protected Rachael from her own foolishness with idols and now Laban is ready to sue for peace if you will.

- **What we have at the center of our text this morning is the making of a covenant!**

It will give us the opportunity to discuss what a covenant is, some of the covenants that impact our lives and why they should be important to us...

- **And of course it reminds us of the Great Covenant that the Father has made with His Son Jesus!**

We could begin by simply asking what is a covenant? Perhaps this is a more important question than we think.... Example of Covenant Church’s focus groups.

Looking to the old Webster’s 1828 dictionary we see covenant defined as:

“A mutual consent or agreement of two or more persons, to do or to forbear some act or thing; a contract; stipulation. A covenant is created by deed in writing, sealed and executed; or it may be implied in the contract.”

What we have before us this morning is such a human covenant but we also know that God has made covenants with us as well...

- **And those have rightly been called a bond in blood sovereignly administered by God Himself.**

So when passages like the one we have before us this morning remind us of covenants, we should remember two things:

- **First there must be more than one party involved!**
- **Second some covenants obligate both parties and others obligate only one of the parties.**

Also in the Scriptures we see three types or levels of covenants...

There are covenants made among the Persons of the Godhead, like the creation of Adam where God said, 'let us make man' or the destruction of Sodom in Abraham's day where God asks if He should share with Abraham what He has decided to do. And of course we have the covenant made among the Persons of the Godhead before the foundation of the world for the Son to have a Bride which we will consider in a bit.

Next there are covenants made between God and men: We find an example of this in the Garden when God says they may eat of all the trees except the Tree of the Knowledge of God and evil. In such covenants there are responsibilities on both sides, like in the day you eat you shall surely die or the many sanctions or warnings that we find later in the Covenants with Moses or David. But thankfully there are some covenants where God carries out the details of the covenant and is fully responsible for the outcome... This is certainly what we see in the Covenant of Redemption or Grace that was established before the foundation of the world and first announced in the Garden after the fall of man:

God does not say someday the Seed of the Women will crush the seed of the serpent IF, mankind does this or that...

- But rather God simply says that **THIS** is what will happen!

And that is something we should be very thankful for based on what we know of human history!

This was dramatically shown when the promise was repeated and expanded to Abraham where we saw God pass through the pieces of the divided animals by Himself.

And finally there are covenants made between men which brings us to our text for this morning.

- So let us take a moment to consider this covenant and see how it teaches us some important lessons and how it relates to the other covenants we encounter in our lives.

“43 And Laban answered and said to Jacob, “These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and this flock is my flock; 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?”

Now this bit of pride that we see here is not unexpected from what we know of Laban and yet again we see that God's visit the night before has had its impact: Laban was not to harm or even interfere with Jacob. Thus as we often do, Laban puts the best light that he can on his situation!

- And this leads to a covenant that is at the center of our text and of course should be what reminds us of the great work of Jesus!

44 “Now therefore, come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me.”

- Now of course from a human standpoint Jacob is happy to not have Laban attacking him or causing him any more trouble and so he accepts the offer and begins the process...

45 “So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. 46 Then Jacob said to his brethren, “Gather stones.” And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there on the heap.”

We have seen stones and altars here in Genesis from the very beginning when Abel and Cain brought their sacrifice and offering. In fact, we have a similar situation here with Jacob doing things in a way pleasing to God and the Laban coming up short.

One man will be carried forward until the end of Genesis and the other is never mentioned again.

- And of course as we often point out, there is food present...
It is everywhere in the Bible!

This should of course remind us of the importance of hospitality which we see commanded in the New Testament...

- **But it also reminds us of the practical realities as well!**

When we moved the Avantos a few weeks ago it was proper to provide food, not only to keep the workers going, but to provide the opportunity like one seen here among those who gathered stones...

- **To enjoy the company of others even in the midst of hard work.**

While food is important in the Bible we know that names are as well and thus we see the naming of this place next:

47 “Laban called it J[ah]-gar Sa-ha-du-tha, but Jacob called it Galeed. 48 And Laban said, “This heap is a witness between you & me this day.”

Here we begin to see the division between these men when it comes to faith as Laban uses a Chaldean name and Jacob uses a Hebrew name: Both meaning a heap of witness, and thus Laban continues:

“Therefore its name was called Galeed, 49 also Mizpah, because he said,

“May Jehovah watch between you and me when we are absent one from another. 50 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 interesting to note that Laban is laying out the terms of the covenant and doing so rightly out of concern for the care & well-being of his daughters.

- **Of course there is a bit of irony here with Laban rightly warning Jacob to not take any more wives when it was he who first set up this mess in the first place!**

But Laban continues...

51 “Then Laban said to Jacob, “Here is this heap and here is this pillar, which I have placed between you & me.”

So, Laban has no problem taking all the credit here for building the pillar & heap, but the text seems to show Jacob starting and building the heap!

- **But Laban does get the major purpose right...**

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.”

This covenant can be seen as similar to a modern peace treaty with each side of a dispute agreeing that they would not attack or harm the other.

- **Travel was not forbidden, only travel with the wrong motives!**

And finally we see that this is a covenant made with God as their witness and here we clearly see the contrast between Laban and Jacob:

Laban goes on to say, 53 “The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us.” And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac.”

- **Laban continues to be a polytheist like his father and their father before them which was the idolatry God had called Abraham out of!**

Yes, Laban includes this God that Abraham went off to serve, but also brings in the other gods of the Chaldeans...

- **Jacob on the other hand swears in a way that can leave no confusion...**

Unlike Abraham who left the gods of Ur of the Chaldeans to serve Jehovah in the Land of Promise, Jacob's father Isaac had only known the one True God: Abraham for all his faults raised his son in the fear and admonition of the Lord!

- Thus Jacob could swear by the one whom his father feared!

And having properly sworn, Jacob then rightly brings a sacrifice and a meal... There is that food again!

54 "Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread. And they ate bread and stayed all night on the mountain. 55 And early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them.

Then Laban departed and returned to his place."'''

They share another meal together, fellowshiping long into the night and then they part ways peaceably in the morning with Laban bidding his daughters and grandchildren farewell. Now this presents us with a touching scene and a good example of a covenant, but I think it is appropriate to ask just how important is this to the ongoing story of salvation since that is what the Bible is presenting.

- The story of the Bible is that Jesus came to save His people from their sin!

When Zacharias is finally able to speak after the birth of John the Baptist, he takes people right back to this time period of God's story with Jacob's grandfather Abraham...

Luke 1: "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited & redeemed His people, 69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David, 70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began, 71 That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, 72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, 73 The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: 74 To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life."

And the writer of Hebrews shows us that the Covenant of Salvation goes further back than Abraham:

13: "20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

And of course this is exactly what the Apostle Paul presents in that glorious first chapter of his epistle to the

Ephesians 1: "3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. 13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory."

- Here we see the outworking of the great covenant of salvation made before the foundation of the world among the Persons of Trinity.

God the Father choosing out a people for His Son, who would come to save them from their sins after which they are sealed and kept by the Holy Spirit! This is something that we rejoice in each and every week and it should come to mind ANYTIME we see a covenant in the Bible, because all the covenants of history and in our lives flow from the Truth of this one great everlasting covenant!

The Apostle Paul goes on in chapter two to teach us that as those in Christ, ‘we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.’

- **And here is the other place that we learn important lessons from this covenant found in our text.**
- **As we live out our lives faithfully it will involve many covenants.**

Having trusted Christ we are part of the everlasting covenant and there we rejoice that God is the one who provided all the blessings and keeps all the promises: Like not losing any who are His!

- **But we also are involved in very important earthly covenants as well, many of which we swear to with God as our witness.**

We recently witnessed Job and Katlyn enter such a covenant with their marriage and at the time I encouraged all of us who are married to remember the vows that we have taken.

- **And yes, how faithfully we keep those vows is a major part of our witness to a watching world.**

As members of Church of the King we have signed a membership covenant which obligates us to be a part of this local congregation in certain ways.

Keeping or breaking those vows will not get us into or keep us out of heaven, but our faithfulness to them provides the rich fellowship that we enjoy together.

Parents who bring their covenant children to the Church for baptism are also entering a covenant to be a faithful parent that raises that child in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

Of course there are many financial covenants and employment covenants that we can be involved with as well.

- **With all of them we should be aware of the obligations that we are entering into and to be faithful to them in the sight of God.**

Of course none of these earthly covenants can approach the majesty or importance of the eternal covenant of salvation, but we need to learn to take all of them seriously for the sake of the Kingdom.

Now of course, our church covenant or marriage vows are much more important than an agreement to pay a child \$3 to mow the lawn...

- **But we should remember that Jesus clearly taught that it will be those who are faithful with little who will be trusted with much.**

So as that agreement to get the lawn mowed is negotiated it can become a teachable moment where you relate it to one of these covenants that we studied this morning in our text!

- **And of course we should take every opportunity to help them see the Great Covenant that is the solid rock foundation for all of our lives.**

We should be thankful at each and every meal that God has been faithful to His covenant to provide for His people.

We should rejoice in the names and places that mark important parts of our journey as families or as a church.

- **I think of the progress over the years on the Fisher property as we go there each year for a Memorial Day celebration!**

Or I think of the hours that our children and grandchildren spend looking through the photo albums that Linda has prepared to mark the events of our lives and the journey that God has us all on!

From before the foundation of the world God has known where history would be going, and yet as His grand story was unfolding, He left us clear markers or events for us to remember where it was going with all those altars and sacrifices, with all those genealogies and histories.

- **Even since the completed work of Jesus we have had creeds and church councils and confessions and catechisms that have reminded us about the journey.**

And if we do believe that our story is a part of that grand story then we too should be confident about where it is going and marking and remembering God's blessings along the way.

Remember as this portion of Genesis has drawn to a close that it ends about twenty years of strife and turmoil in Jacob's life, after much trouble at home.

- **Again I am sure that Jacob had his down days & perhaps wondered at times if God was still paying attention to him and his family!**

But in the end he has been blessed with a family and he is now returning to the Promised Land where he was called to serve.

And now we can see how God has kept a precious promise that we find for God's people in Proverbs 16:7

**“When a man's ways please the Lord,
He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.”**

Thus, Jacob and Laban part in peace!

Communion Meditation: Genesis 31

“And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac.

54 Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread.

And they ate bread and stayed all night on the mountain. 55 And early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them.”