

# A Surprising Reconciliation

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're looking this evening at Genesis chapter 31, starting at verse 22. And we'll be reading through to verse 42. It's on page 34 in the Bibles and the seats.

So starting at verse 22. On the third day, Laban was told that Jacob had fled. Taking his relatives with him, he pursued Jacob for seven days and caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead. Then God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream at night and said to him, Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad. Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country of Gilead when Laban overtook him, and Laban and his relatives camped there too.

Then Laban said to Jacob, What have you done? You've deceived me, and you've carried off my daughters like captives in war. Why did you run off secretly and deceive me?

Why didn't you tell me, so that I could send you away with joy and singing to the music of tambourines and harps? You didn't even let me kiss my grandchildren and my daughters goodbye.

[ 1 : 14 ] You have done a foolish thing. I have the power to harm you, but last night the God of your father said to me, Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.

Now you have gone off because you longed to return to your father's household, but why did you steal my gods? Jacob answered Laban, I was afraid because I thought you would take your daughters away from me by force.

But if you find anyone who has your gods, that person shall not live. In the presence of our relatives, see for yourself whether there is anything of yours here with me, and if so, take it.

Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods. So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two female servants, but found nothing.

After he came out of Leah's tent, he entered Rachel's tent. Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them inside her camel saddle and was sitting on them. Laban searched through everything in the tent, but found nothing.

[ 2 : 17 ] Rachel said to her father, Don't be angry, my lord, that I cannot stand up in your presence. I am having my period. So he searched, but could not find the household gods. Jacob was angry and took Laban to task.

What is my crime? he asked Laban. How have I wronged you that you hunt me down? Now that you have searched through all my goods, what have you found that belongs to your household? Put it here in front of your relatives and mine, and let them judge between the two of us.

I have been with you for twenty years now. Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks. I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts.

I bore the loss myself. And you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night. This was my situation. The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night.

And sheep fled from my eyes. It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household. I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flocks.

[ 3 : 22 ] 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 with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed.

But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you. This is the word of the Lord. Well, good evening, and welcome to St. Silas.

My name's Robin. I'm a member of the congregation here. And we've got a great passage to look at tonight in Genesis as we continue our series, looking at Jacob.

As Martin pointed out, we're going to look at the whole of Genesis 31. So I think it just starts on the page before, so you might want to sort of keep your finger there. It'll be a big help.

So let me pray, and then we'll look at it together. Living God, we thank you so much that you gather us here tonight. And we thank you for your word, the Bible.

[ 4 : 27 ] We thank you that you teach us through it. We thank you that you correct and rebuke us, and that you train us in righteousness. We pray that you would do that to us tonight, and that we'd be equipped for every good work.

And so bless us, we pray. Have mercy upon us. Help us to focus, and help us to listen. And pray that you would transform us all to live and work for your praise and glory. We ask for this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Now, I don't know if you've seen the film. It was released a few years ago now called Yes Man. It starred Jim Carrey as the lead character, Carl Allen.

And the premise of the film is about this guy who decides he's going to say yes to every opportunity, every request, and every invitation that comes his way.

And as you can imagine, I won't spoil it for you, but he experiences ups and downs, does things he'd never imagined. He renews unexpected old friendships.

[ 5 : 35 ] He attends a bridal shower. He learns Korean, all because he says yes to everything. But eventually, what happens is saying yes to everything catches up with him, and things start to clash with one of us.

Some things that he says yes to that he shouldn't, things he regrets, and things go a little bit pear-shaped. It's a silly, sort of light-hearted comedy. But I think as you watch it, you realize that that's what people are like a little bit.

And actually, that's maybe what we're a little bit like ourselves. What I mean by that is that we don't like really saying no to people. And I think that can be for a whole host of reasons.

We don't want to disappoint people, do we? Sometimes it's because we fear that if we say no, maybe we might not get asked again. And maybe we don't like it when people say no to us, and so we're reluctant to do that to others.

But I think there is more to it than just in those types of situations what's going on. The big thing is what's going on in our hearts, isn't it? It's the same heart response when it comes to giving bad news or telling people things we know they don't want to hear, even if it's the right things to do.

[ 6 : 57 ] That's what's going on in our hearts. What's going on in our hearts in those situations is that we fear the reaction to what we say. We fear the reaction to what we say and the consequences of that.

In this bit of Genesis that we're looking at today, it's exactly what we see with Jacob. He has to tell Laban, his father-in-law, that he's leaving with all his family, and he fears his father-in-law's response.

He fears confronting him. And so this evening, we're going to dig into how that plays out for Jacob, what that means, and what that might mean for us.

But before we jump into it, I think we just need to reorientate ourselves with where we're at in the Jacob story. In the previous chapter that we looked at last week, Jacob had told Laban, his father-in-law, that he wanted to take his family back to his home country.

Laban doesn't want him to go, and so they make this deal that Jacob will only stay if he gets to keep all the speckled and spotted goats. I know it sounds like a strange plan to us, but Jacob, he's a tricky as always.

[ 8 : 16 ] He works things, has a system that when the goats mate, all the strong goats end up speckled and spotted and belonging to him, and Laban ends up with all the weak animals. And it's into that setting, it's almost like a to-be-continued, that we sort of come into today's passage in Genesis 31.

And the first thing we're going to look at tonight is the deceitful departure. The deceitful departure. And it hasn't gone unnoticed that all the strong animals now belong to Jacob, and so his stock with Laban and his family, it's at an all-time low.

They're not happy seeing Jacob gain whilst their father loses out. When God tells Jacob to leave, Jacob knows what they think of him, and so out of fear, he takes it into his own hands to sort things out with how he's going to leave.

He needs to get his family to come with him, but rather than being upfront about everything, he uses every trick in the book to convince them to come.

Firstly, he tries to turn, well, he successfully turns his wives against their father. Just look with me from verse 5. Verse 5.

[ 9 : 38 ] He said to them, He boasts about how the Lord is with him, but not their father.

Then he repeats the story to his wives about this thing with the goats, about how they've all become his. But this time, the story is told a little bit differently.

Just look with me in verse 10 at what he says. He said, He said, The dream that we read about from verse 10 is never mentioned at the time in the previous chapter.

And there is some debate among scholars whether this dream happened or not, because it's not mentioned at the time before. I think it, as far as I can see, I think it probably did happen, largely because Jacob says, Here I am, which is how Abraham, Isaac, his father, Moses, and Isaiah respond when God talks to them.

But it is not worthy that Jacob chooses to bring it up now, and not before when he's convincing his wives to leave. And in verse 13, what we see is Jacob actually changes what the Lord said to him.

[ 11 : 35 ] He brings in a sense of immediacy, which was never there in the first place. That's not what the Lord said in verse 3.

He just says, Jacob wants God's plan to happen, but in his way. He tries to force it with a human solution.

His eyes are not on the Lord. When Rachel steals her father's gods to take with her, in verse 19, what we see is she's just acting like a husband.

Her eyes are not on the Lord. She's looking to pieces of metal when the living God is taking them to the promised land. It's ridiculous. And if we're in any doubt about what's going on here, we get the narrator's comment that confirms it all in verse 20.

Jacob deceived Laban, the Aramean, by not telling him he was running away. Jacob listens to God's plan, but wants to do it in his own way, using mischief, trickery, and deceit.

[ 12 : 51 ] Human solutions to sort of bend the truth, if you like. He doesn't want to confront Laban, and so he runs. It is a deceitful departure, and it's all because he's afraid.

He has the end goal in sight, but fear takes over. Fear takes over. And I think what we see is, it's actually very human, isn't it?

It's a worldly way of going about things, where we might have the end goal in mind, but out of fear, we go the wrong way about it.

The end does not justify the means. I wonder if we can identify with that type of thinking, where we know maybe the right thing to do, we know what the Lord tells us how to live, we know the end goal, but we go about it wrongly, that we think that the end justifies the means.

But God doesn't just care about results. How we accomplish those things is just as important. He wants us to live holy lives on the way, because that demonstrates that we belong to him.

[ 14 : 04 ] We need to keep our eyes on the Lord, on Jesus, when we're called to do difficult, hard things. It isn't hard to guess what's going to happen when Laban finds out that Jacob's had off, is it?

And Laban doesn't disappoint. He goes ballistic and sets off after Jacob. As we move into our second point, an awkward confrontation.

An awkward confrontation. And I suppose at this point, we're left thinking, what is he going to do when he catches up with him? Are they going to have a set too?

And if it wasn't for God visiting and warning Laban in a dream, verse 24, we read that God visits Laban in a stream and says, be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.

If that didn't happen, I'm sure it would have been a lot worse. Despite Jacob doing things his own way, God still has his back. But the scene which follows, when you look at it, the way it's told, there is something a little bit comedy about it.

[ 15 : 11 ] It reminds me of something, I don't know why, it reminds me of something out of EastEnders. I don't know about you, I imagine them having this out in the middle of Albert Square. First, Laban gets his say, verse 26, what have you done?

You deceived me, you've carried off my daughters like captives in war. Why did you run off secretly and deceive me? And that's not the only thing. His gods are missing, and he's miffed about that and all in verse 30.

The whole thing becomes a bit of a farce. Laban goes looking for his gods, these useless pieces of metal. He's looking for them around the campsite.

What's bizarre is the living God, the Lord God, spoke to him the night before in a dream. And their uselessness is, it's further demonstrated, when he can't find them, Rachel is sat on them.

And she won't stand, because she's having her period. But not only that, it just shows us how Rachel, she's just like her father and her husband, trying to deceive and cheat.

[16:16] And the family feud continues. Jacob then loses it with Laban, and tells him what for, after all these years of deceit and trickery done to him. Verse 41, I've worked for you 14 years for your two daughters, and six years for your flocks, and you changed my wages 10 times.

Look at what he says at the end of verse 42. God has seen my hardship, and the toil of my hands, and last night rebuked you. Everything is out in the open.

Laban has had his say, Jacob has had his. Rachel's got involved as well. It's just one big almighty row. Now, it could have been avoided.

It could have been handled better. But I think the thing that we've got to see is that the confrontation was inevitable. The confrontation was inevitable. At some point, Jacob had to confront Laban to tell him he was leaving.

70 people plus, with all the animals and herds, don't just disappear without anybody saying anything about it. Confrontation was inevitable.

[17:31] But it was necessary. Laban had been a swine to Jacob. Perhaps Jacob should have said something sooner. And although we see this sort of like comedy family feud, there is a serious point to all this.

There are times when hard things do need to be said. When confrontation does need to happen. Either we need to confront others or we need to be confronted ourselves.

If you ever get food on your face when you're eating, you want somebody to point it out, don't you? You don't want to let, you don't want somebody to let you walk around all day looking like a plonker. Sometimes people can see things about us we can't or know things about us that we don't.

Sometimes we can see things in other people.

And so, confrontation done in the right way is a good thing. Now, for sure, we can't be sure how the person's going to react. They might be mad at first, embarrassed, they might react badly.

[18:52] Jacob's eyes are on Laban's reaction instead of the Lord. And he tries to sort it out by running away on the sly. But in doing so, he just makes the confrontation worse.

Because it's amplified when it does actually happen. I wonder if we can relate to that when maybe we've avoided conflict, but in the end, we've had to face it anyway.

Every one of us, at some point, will need to be confronted. Like Laban needed to be if we've wronged someone. We need to be told. But likewise, we at some point will inevitably have to say something hard to someone.

Jacob feared Laban. If we fear people's response, we'll do the same. To confront someone about their behaviour is hard, about their sin is hard.

To tell them bad news when you know they're not going to react well, it's hard. And to be confronted ourselves by things, it is hard, but it's godly. If done in the right way, it's loving.

[20:06] Now we look at this and of course, we don't want to do that out of anger like Jacob ends up doing. We want to do it godly and lovingly so that we use those opportunities to point people back to Jesus.

The integrity required to live like this, it's not easy. And we need the Holy Spirit to help us to confront people like this and to be able to receive a rebuke or a confrontation.

It doesn't come naturally. And so what follows in the last point of our sermon is actually a great surprise as we move on to our third point, a surprise reconciliation.

A surprise reconciliation. Laban hears the rebuke from Jacob and he gives in. It's very surprising.

So often in the Old Testament, we see leaders too proud to do that and huge battles take place but Laban backs down. Verse 43, The women are my daughters, the children are my children and the flocks are my flocks.

[21:19] All you see is mine. Yet what can I do today about these daughters of mine or about the children they have born? Come now, let's make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us.

He said, let bygones be bygones. Your family's my family. This has all got way too heated. And he wants to sort it out properly.

It's his idea to make a covenant, an agreement, build a pillar and a heap of stones to remind them of this new agreement. It is a witness, they say, in verse 48, between you and me today.

What's really surprising about all this is it's Laban who's the one pointing Jacob back to the Lord. Laban. Laban calls for the covenant. And it's Laban who talks about the Lord using his covenant name.

[ 22 : 20 ] That's where we see Lord written in capital letters, meaning that God is the faithful promise-keeping God. Verse 49, it's Laban saying, may the Lord keep watch between you and me when we're away from each other.

Verse 53, may the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us. That's the living God. That's the God who visited and spoke to Laban in the dream.

It is Laban who reminds Jacob of the Lord, and yet, the Lord is using this to bless Jacob. It's Jacob and his family that are headed to the promised land.

It is a surprising reconciliation on so many levels. It's not often on EastEnders that disagreements end like this.

And maybe that's true if we've experienced sort of fallouts in our own families, or we've observed that. Reconciliation can be the last thing on people's minds.

[ 23 : 30 ] There can be bad blood for years. Here we don't see that. Here we see that reconciliation happens because of the confrontation. Without the confrontation, the reconciliation couldn't have happened.

But it is Laban who brings Jacob's attention to the Lord, his God. And I suppose it's worth us thinking about this because maybe if for us, maybe if we know people that we're at loggerheads with, it could be someone close to us, maybe even someone in the church or in your own family, we see that it is better to communicate and talk it through.

It is better to confront those situations. But we see it takes humility. It takes Laban to realise that he's been an idiot for years.

as long as there is distance between them, there can be no reconciliation. In very real ways, we might need to be the one to move towards someone to reconcile with them.

Laban does what Jacob should have done. And if that's true about earthly relationships, how much more true is that about our relationships between ourselves and the living God?

[ 25 : 07 ] When our sin is confronted by God, and it is, the words of the Bible confront us, sometimes we can feel that that's a bad thing, but that's not a bad thing.

It's a good thing, because it means God wants to be reconciled with you. We need to humbly admit that. If we stay at a distance from God, we're just prolonging the inevitable confrontation that will happen, but it will be amplified when it does.

Rather, let your sin be confronted now, and be reconciled through the Lord Jesus Christ. And actually, how much we really get that and understand it, that will be seen in the way we handle our relationships with others.

A refusal to reconcile or confront might be because we don't really understand or fully appreciate that we've been reconciled back to God through Jesus Christ.

And so, we thought a lot about confrontation today and what stops us from doing it. And it is hard.

[ 26 : 21 ] It was hard for Jacob, but because he feared Laban, he lost sight of God, he tried to sort things out himself. We must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, especially when it comes to doing the hard things.

The end does not justify the means. When we the church have conflict with one another, it is different to the way the world does conflict.

It should be. It's different because we do it with the hope of the gospel. We do it with the hope of reconciliation. And it's what should motivate us not to get one over on someone, but out of love.

Out of love. If we know that, it will also help us if someone confronts us that they're not your enemy. there. But the final thing I want to say is there is a hidden story going on here that is wonderful.

The real model for us is not Jacob, but Laban. The hidden story that is all about his redemption. At the beginning of the passage you see the positive side of things is that God is with Jacob, but the negative side of things is that God is leaving Laban.

[ 27 : 41 ] Laban still thinks highly of useless pieces of metal. He thinks they're gods. He even values them after God speaks to him in a dream. But when he can't find them, and when he's confronted with his sin from Jacob, those useless pieces of metal, they never get mentioned again.

they never get mentioned again. He makes a covenant with God's man, Jacob, and refers to God as the Lord, the promise keeping God.

What we see here is the redemption of Laban. May the Lord keep watch between you and me, he says. It is wonderful.

It is wonderful. And we've said that Jesus confronts our sin, the Bible confronts us, out of love, that we would turn, like Laban, from false gods that are useless.

And just like Laban makes a covenant with God's man, Jacob, Jesus, the God man, makes a covenant with us. The covenant that is made in his blood, so that we can know forgiveness so that we can know forgiveness of sins, so that we can be reconciled back to the living God.

[ 29 : 07 ] Let me pray. Father God, we thank you so much for your word to us today. And we praise you for what you've done in our lives, Lord.

We thank you that you've made a way for us to be reconciled to the living God through Jesus Christ. And I pray that you'd help us to appreciate the fullness of that and what that means for our lives.

Help us to fixate our eyes upon Christ. You know there's many times when there's difficult things that we have to do. Sometimes we have to confront people and sometimes we're confronted ourselves.

I pray that you'd give us humility that means that we respond in the right way. I pray that you'd help us to do that so that we can demonstrate that we're your people.

And so we pray that you'd bless us. Have mercy upon us. Help us to thirst for you more each and every day. And that when confrontation happens we realise that without confrontation there can be no reconciliation.

[ 30 : 18 ] And so have mercy upon us we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.