

# God's Kingdon - Scoundrels and Bandits Welcome

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Preacher: Martin Ayers

[ 0 : 00 ] Starting at verse 25 and reading to the end of the chapter. Page 33 on the church Bibles. Genesis 30 starting at verse 25.

After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, Send me on my way so that I can go back to my homeland. Give me my wives and children for whom I have served you, and I will be on my way.

You know how much work I have done for you. But Laban said to him, If I have found favour in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you.

He added, Name your wages and I will pay them. Jacob said to him, You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I have been.

But now, when may I do something for my own household? What shall I give you? he asked. Don't give me anything, Jacob replied. But if you will do this one thing for me, I will go on tending your flocks and watching over them.

[ 1 : 10 ] Let me go through all your flocks today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-coloured lamb, and every spotted or speckled goat. They will be my wages. And my honesty will testify for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me.

Any goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted, or any lamb that is not dark-coloured, will be considered stolen. Agreed, said Laban. Let it be as you have said.

That same day he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted, and all the speckled or spotted female goats, all that had white on them, and all the dark-coloured lambs, and he placed them in the care of his sons.

Then he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban's flocks. Jacob, however, took fresh-cut branches from poplar, almond, and plain trees, and made white stripes on them by peeling the bark and exposing the white inner wood of the branches.

Then he placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs, so that they would be directly in front of the flocks when they came to drink. When the flocks were in heat and came to drink, they mated in front of the branches, and they bore young that were streaked or speckled or spotted.

[ 2 : 26 ] Jacob set apart the young of the flock by themselves, but made the rest face the streaked and dark-coloured animals that belonged to Laban. Thus he made separate flocks for himself, and did not put them with Laban's animals.

Whenever the stronger females were in heat, Jacob would place the branches in the troughs in front of the animals, so that they would mate near the branches. But if the animals were weak, he would not place them there.

So the weak animals went to Laban, and the strong ones to Jacob. In this way, the man grew exceedingly prosperous, and came to own large flocks, and female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Good evening, St. Silas.

As Darren said, my name is Martin Ayers. I'm the senior minister here. And if you could keep your Bibles open at Genesis chapter 30, that would be a great help to meet. It's page 33 in the church Bibles.

[ 3 : 31 ] And if you'd find it helpful, there's an outline inside the notice sheet to see where we're going with this. It's quite a strange passage, isn't it? And it reminds us, you know, we're not cherry-picking the bits of the Bible we think we like the best.

We're committed to the promise in the Bible. 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16 says that all Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the people of God might be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

And so we're working through the Bible and coming to bits like this where we're assured that there is something useful here for us.

But let's pray and ask that God would reveal that to us. Heavenly Father, we praise you for your word, that your word is light in the darkness, that your word is wisdom when we don't know how to live, that your word tells us who you are and therefore who we are.

And without it, we don't know who we are. So, Father, where we find the Bible hard, we pray for humility and patience, so that we won't turn away from you and be stubborn-hearted, but instead we'll turn towards you and seek you and grow in wisdom and righteousness.

[ 4 : 50 ] We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. So there's some things that are best kept in private in life. I don't know whether you saw in the news this week, in China, the city of Suzhou in China, it wants to win an award.

There's some competition in China for best city or something. And the council's getting annoyed because people are going out in their pajamas and it's undermining their attempts to win this competition.

So with cameras everywhere, big surveillance going on in China, controversial, they've started naming and shaming people on social media if they see you out in your pajamas.

And they've had to apologize for that. Now, maybe we'd agree with the general idea that there are some clothes it's better to keep in the house or the flat. But there are then other times in life when we hide things away in private simply because we feel ashamed and we shouldn't do.

Not about clothes. But I was talking to someone recently who was disillusioned about church. And they said to me, I feel as though when I talk to people at church, I have to put up a front and I have to hide what's really going on.

[ 6 : 02 ] And I'm sick of doing that. I don't feel I can do it anymore. Now, that won't be true for everyone. But it will be something very strongly felt by perhaps a good number of us here.

That we might feel that in our Christian life, we have to live a little bit of a double life. There's the public Christian self that we bring out at church or with our Christian friends.

And with that public self, we give the impression that we're sorted. That we're sorted as Christians. We're secure in our faith. We've not got doubts.

We're joyfully serving sacrificially. We're basking in the presence of God day by day. And we want people to think about the rest of our lives, really, that we're effortlessly successful.

Then there's the inner Christian self that we hide away, where we might feel that actually our life is quite chaotic. That we look at other people and think, well, we don't seem to be able to keep on top of things that other people seem to be able to keep on top of.

[ 7 : 11 ] Or that we just don't know where we're going in life. We don't really know who we are. We might feel we're trapped in besetting sins, issues of addiction of some kind, of gambling, of pornography, of alcohol.

That we get angry. Maybe we feel like we're just a bit of a failure. And we hide that away when we're at church. For some of us, that double life can happen within a marriage.

And we look at other marriages around us and think every other Christian marriage must be healthy and happy. They certainly look that way. And so I won't show anyone that my marriage is unhappy, or that I feel misunderstood, or I feel lonely.

It can happen with children. If you're married and you've got kids, if you have kids, you can sometimes walk into church giving the impression you're a family that's continually rejoicing in the Lord, kind to each other all day.

But then at home, there's bitterness and rivalry. So when we feel like that, and when we do that, when we feel the need to do that, have the outer Christian self, what does it model?

[ 8 : 28 ] It looks as though what we believe about God is that in God's community, everyone has to be respectable. So if I'm not respectable, if I'm chaotic, if I'm broken, I have to hide that broken stuff away because the Christians that I know don't seem to have those problems.

We could call it the doctrine of justification by respectability. The idea that God will approve of me if I am respectable. And so that's how I will appear.

So what does God say? We're in this series looking at the God of Jacob, God's dealings with Jacob and his family. Just zooming out for a moment, what's going on is we're in this book, Genesis, first book of the Bible, the origins of the world as God made it and people as God made them. But then it explains to us how sin entered the world as the first human beings turned away from God and suffering came into the world because of that sin. And that sets the scene for the rest of the Bible because it leaves us asking ourselves, how is God ever going to solve the problem of sin? This problem seems to spoil everything. It's a really deep problem and people can't solve it. How is God going to deal with that? And then you get Genesis chapter 12 and God promises to Abraham, I will build my kingdom through your descendants.

[ 9 : 59 ] So the answer to God's, well God's solution to the problem of sin is the promise to Abraham and the whole unfolding history of the human race ever since has been God keeping that promise.

So we get to Jacob. Jacob is Abraham's grandson and he gets his name renamed in a couple of chapters time later in his life to Israel.

When God's people of the Old Testament Israel thought about Jacob, they really thought about he's the big guy, he's the father. And so a good question to ask when you're reading this section of Genesis is what would it have communicated to God's people, Israel, that the father of their entire nation behaves like this?

We pick up the story and our first point is Jacob gets stitched up by Laban. In verse 25, Jacob says, I want to go home. Verse 25, send me on my way so that I can go back to my homeland.

Give me my wives and children for whom I've served you and I will be on my way. You know how much work I've done for you. Jacob arrived in Haran where he's been now for 20 years.

[ 11 : 15 ] He arrived as a single man. He was on the run from his brother. 14 years rather have gone by. He's there 20 in the end. 14 years later, he's got two wives. That is wrong, but he does have them.

And he's got their sisters, Rachel and Leah. And he's got 12 kids. So a lot's happened to Jacob in 12 years. But he's far from home because he's still living with the consequences of his own sin. He cheated his brother Esau out of his father's blessing by deceiving his dad with his mum's help. And Esau, his brother, wanted to kill him. So he fled.

And that's how he's ended up in this place with Laban. And he's decided now is the time to move on. But Laban is his uncle and he's the father of Rachel and Leah, his wives.

And Jacob has been working for him for 14 years, slaving away. And Laban wants him to stay around a bit longer. So this bargaining goes on. Why does Laban want Jacob to stick around?

[ 12 : 22 ] Not because he wants to know Jacob's God, but because when Jacob's around, because God's blessing Jacob, good things are happening to Laban. So he says, verse 27, if I've found favor in your eyes, please stay.

I've learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you. So they make a deal.

Laban has got sheep and goats. And I think, when you read it, that the sheep are generally white and the goats are generally black.

Jacob proposes this deal. He says, I'll look after your flocks of sheep and goats. And in return, you have to give me any sheep that's a black sheep or a sheep whose wool is speckled or spotted with black.

So it's a bit black. And likewise, with the goats, you have to give me any of your goats that are black and white instead of just black. So do you get what's going on?

I've got a picture. See the picture? This is what Jacob needs. He needs sheep looking like this. And do you know what that breed of sheep is called? It's actually called a Jacob sheep.

[ 13 : 30 ] Isn't that amazing? I found that out on Wikipedia today. Some of you already know it. You shouted out the answer. Perfect. Anyway, back in the story, Laban agrees to the plan.

But he is a scoundrel. You see what he does next? Verse 34. Agreed, said Laban. Let it be as you've said. That same day, he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted and all the speckled or spotted female goats, all that had white on them and all the dark colored lambs and he placed them in the care of his sons.

Then he put a three day journey between himself and Jacob while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban's flocks. It's a complete stitch up. Jacob gets up the next morning and suddenly all the flocks of sheep are completely white and all the goats are completely black.

He doesn't own any of them. This is Laban who's already conned Jacob once. He deceived him into marrying his daughter Leah when he wanted to marry Rachel and now he strikes again.

So, while we think about Laban, there could just be a challenge here for us when we think about Laban. It's that he knows that God has blessed Jacob.

[ 14 : 46 ] He can see that Jacob's life is better for knowing God and he wants to be around Jacob because it means he might get benefits from being around someone blessed by knowing God.

But he never really shows any sign of really wanting Jacob's God. And there is a bit of that in so many of us in our hearts that we want the Garden of Eden as long as God isn't there.

We love the life that God promises of blessing for his people. The joy, the hope, something to live for, purpose, meaning, no shame, no guilt.

We want the blessings from God but we don't want God himself. There was an advert years and years ago for McCain Oven Chips and there were two sisters on the way home from school and one said to the other on the school bus, Sophie, which do you like best, Daddy or Chips?

And the girl all the way home is thinking to herself, Daddy or Chips? Daddy, Daddy or Chips? Chips. And then eventually she decides at the end of the advert, it's Chips.

[ 15 : 56 ] And there is something of that in each one of us when it comes to God that we want the stuff but not him. And maybe there's just a challenge there for us as we look at Laban and that's really what we see in him.

Maybe if you're someone who's coming along to St. Silas and you can see the blessing of Christian community that it's a really great group of people who have deep friendship with each other and maybe you can see in a Christian friend of yours the blessings that they enjoy from being a Christian that they have security, joy, forgiveness, friendship, support.

Maybe if you're someone who grew up with Christian parents and although you've not made a decision yourself to follow Christ you can see how much that has benefited you that actually you look at you think of what things could have been like if your parents hadn't been followers of Jesus and you think there was a real benefit there but you haven't made that decision.

Well could you be different to Laban? Could you look at him and think no well I'm not going to be like that rather than just spending my life looking for the kind of blessings that God would give me from other places or even from being around God's people rather than that could you look to know the God who gives those blessings to ask him if you could know him.

Laban instead is just up to his old tricks trying to con Jacob. So what does Jacob do about it? That's our second point. Jacob hatches a plan to get even. He takes some white trees and by peeling off the bark and showing the white he then puts them in the watering troughs so that the flocks see them when they come to drink especially when they're going to breed.

[ 17 : 43 ] What's going on? I don't know. Jacob seems to think that this is going to increase the chances of goats being born with white on them and lambs being born with dark on them.

It's some sort of white magic. My suspicion is it's just complete madness. It's worth saying it's not unusual in the ancient world for people to think like that.

Jacob is probably just a man of his times. The main thing is what happens incredibly it actually works. So the key verse is in verse 43. In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks.

And then he can use those flocks to trade so we get the rest of the verse that from the flocks he ends up with female and male servants and camels and donkeys. What's going on here when we look at Jacob in this chapter as well as in other events in his life right through this series it's a thread running right through this story.

In his behavior Jacob is a scoundrel. He's a cheat he's superstitious and he's a grasper just as he's grasping here. The way he treats the dilemma he's got with Laban here is quite typical of Jacob.

[ 18 : 58 ] He knows he needs God's help somehow but he thinks God can't help me unless I really grasp it at myself as well. I need to push things on a bit with some paganism or some weird genetic selective breeding manipulation technique whatever he's quite doing.

He's trying to push things on instead of just trust God. And so we see that in his working life he's superstitious he's a mess we think about his family he's married two sisters that's bad they were in competition to give him kids the family is a disgrace he loved one of the sisters more than the other he has children to four different women and he loves the kids that Rachel bears him more than he loves the other kids which is going to be a problem when he gives Joseph a special coat.

He is very very messy but Jacob has one thing going for him it's that he's a man of faith. amidst all that mess he trusts that God keeps his promises and that's why he wants to go home. He doesn't want to go home because he wants to be with his family necessarily he wants to go home because it's his way of saying that he still trusts that his father's God keeps his promises the God of Abraham.

In chapter 28 Jacob had this incredible encounter with God in a dream he saw a stairway to heaven and angels going up and down on this stairway and God said these words to him they're on the screen I am the Lord the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac I will give you and your descendants the land on which you're lying your descendants will be like the dust of the earth and you will spread out to the west and to the east to the north and to the south all peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go and I will bring you back to this land I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you and Jacob trusts the promise the key to seeing that in this section is actually the start of the next chapter whatever he was doing with the white trees look in verse 9 of the next chapter how he explains what happens he says in verse 9 of chapter 31 God has taken away your father's livestock [ 21 : 18 ] Laban's livestock and has given them to me just up from there in verse 5 the God of my father has been with me and in verse 7 your father has cheated me however God has not allowed him to harm me he is a man of faith he sees that it's God who's done it and he wants to go home because he believes God keeps his promises Hebrews 11 tells us that Jacob even though he wants to go home it's not for that land and what he'll get there it's that he's looking forward to heaven ultimately he trusts God and when you trust God he counts that as righteousness he gives you the gift of righteousness even if you're a scoundrel and he saves you so in chapter 29 we saw Jacob in complete mess being blessed with children and in this chapter we see Jacob again in the mess being blessed with property and the big idea the big truth for us to grasp is this it's God's promises are too big to let sinners go

God's promises are too big to let sinners go if you trust him he won't let go of you despite our sin we see how committed he is to them in the person of Jesus Jacob because of his sin is sent away and exiled but he is blessed but God keeps his promises to us because Jesus was exiled because of our sin and instead of being blessed when he was exiled and rejected he took our curse on him so that we could be blessed and as we see God's grace in Jacob's life it's a subversive message for God's people for Israel everything about their situation as they entered the promised land would have made them think there must be something pretty special about us because God chose us and he rescued us and they get reminded when they see Jacob and his flaws it was never that you were better than other people that God chose you no God loves you because he loves you because he loves you because he loves you it's all by his grace but incredibly if you just continue in your faith if you trust God's promises he will bless you and he will take you to be with him forever so let's just think of implications of that that we're saved by God's grace alone through faith alone one thing to say is don't leave your church because you get shocked by the sin of other Christians if God's got room in his kingdom for Jacob he's got room in it for some pretty badly behaved people and C.S. Lewis wrote this book

The Screwtape Letters decades ago great book it's a book written for Christians and the way that C.S. Lewis tees it up is it's about a senior demon writing to a junior demon trying to give him the tips on how he might persuade a new Christian to turn away from his faith and one thing quite early on that he says to Screwtape in the letters is get him to have a look at the Christians around him in church and just notice the faults of the people around him that'll put him off completely you might think that he'd be discerning enough to realise that he's got faults as well but don't worry they don't think like that well that's a big point from Genesis chapter 30 and in a church like St. Silas there are just too many people I can think of who have given up on church because they were offended by what somebody did or what somebody said to them church is just full of hypocrites you're quite right come and join us you'll fit right in another implication is don't ever feel that you are too bad to be here in God's new community don't feel that you have to hide behind a thin veneer of respectability to be in church just come as you are just be honest look at what Jacob was like the more you get to know people around here the more you'll realise that we are pretty messed up on the other side of things don't start to believe that you're saved by your respectability don't be a self-righteous person and let's make sure in our culture that we don't create a church that wouldn't welcome a Jacob don't buy a second-hand car off him but welcome him into

your church family and people like him all sorts of people let's pray let's pray together heavenly father we praise you that you are a holy God a good God and a God of wonderful grace we praise you that you stand ready to pour out your blessings on everyone who trusts in you help us to trust you thank you that your salvation is all a work of your grace from first to last we're sorry for the times when we've implied to others and to ourselves that your grace doesn't extend to us when we're not respectable as we see your patience with Jacob and his family father please help us at St Silas to be a community marked by our authenticity our humility our willingness not to condemn people when we admit our sin and our struggles help us to welcome all sinners we ask in the name of Jesus friend of sinners friend of ours amen be good to talk about that before we sing again just a couple of minutes so there's some questions in your sheets just to take with you to discuss and reflect on but a couple of them are on the screen so why not just turn to maybe in threes maybe twos and threes just pick one of them read it chat about it and in a few minutes Darren will come back up and lead us on