



Sermon – 07/23/2023  
Dr. Phillip Bethancourt

**Verses Covered**

*Genesis 30:25 - 43*

*Genesis 31:1 - 55*

Well as you grab a seat let me invite you to open your Bibles with me to Genesis chapter 30. Genesis 30. And as you're doing that, if you're a guest with us for the first time, welcome home. We'd love to get some information from you in the Connect Card and the seat back in front of you. But also, I'd love a chance to meet you if you want to come by here at the front after the service so that I can introduce myself to you.

Now, some of you that were here last week know that last week, we went to the tables during the response song after the message and grabbed these encouragement cards for our student ministry. And I want to challenge you to take one more step to do that this week. Last week, we had over 300 of you fill those out and go walk through our A Wing and drop them off with the prayer request or a Bible verse or a word of encouragement for our students. And I'd love for us to do that one more time so that as they step back in to a new school year that the Lord will work in their hearts through these. So, for example, I just saw one on the pile. And one of you wrote and said, "Don't let the world define how you see yourself. Let God define you. Jesus is better than anything this world has to offer. So, keep seeking Him." So, again, at the end of this of the sermon, we will have that opportunity for you to make your way to the tables, grab those cards. And even now, just be thinking about how you might be used of the Lord to encourage and strengthen these students as they get ready for a new school year.

Now, we turn our attention to Genesis 30, and let's remember where we've come from. Last week, we saw that even in the middle of our mess, God continues to move His mission forward. But as the the text plays out and the story advances, what we're going to find is that often the biggest mess in our life is not the mess around us but the mess within us, in our hearts. And for the very first time in the Bible, we're going to see an example of idolatry. A circumstance where we read about household Gods and the way that Rachel steals them from her father and clutches them to herself. And in this first instance of idolatry, we see a pattern that shapes the entire story line of Scripture. And the way that this text confronts the subject of idolatry back then is going to give us a road map about how to face the idols that you and I still encounter even today. So, with that in mind,

let's turn our attention to the text. We're going to start in Genesis 30 down in verse 25 where the text says this,

<sup>25</sup>As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country. <sup>26</sup>Give me wives and my children for whom I have served you, that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you." <sup>27</sup>But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your sight, I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you. <sup>28</sup>Name your wages, and I will give it." <sup>29</sup>Jacob said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you, and how your livestock has fared with me. <sup>30</sup>For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. But now when shall I provide for my own household also?" <sup>31</sup>He said, "What shall I give you?" And Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, I will again pasture your flock and keep it: <sup>32</sup>let me pass through all your flock today, removing from it speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats, and they shall be my wages. <sup>33</sup>So my honesty will answer for me later, when you look at my wages with you. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen." <sup>34</sup>Laban said, "Good! Let it be as you have said." <sup>35</sup>But that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white on it, and every lamb that was black, and put them in the charge of his sons. <sup>36</sup>And he set a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob pastured the rest of Laban's flock. <sup>37</sup>Then Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the sticks. <sup>38</sup>He set the sticks that he had peeled in front of the flocks in the troughs, that is, the watering places, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, <sup>39</sup>the flocks bred in front of the sticks and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. <sup>40</sup>And Jacob separated the lambs and set the faces of the flocks toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban. He put his own droves apart and did not put them with Laban's flock. <sup>41</sup>Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding, Jacob would lay the sticks in the troughs before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the sticks, <sup>42</sup>but for the feebler of the flock he would not lay them there. So the feebler would be Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's. <sup>43</sup>Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

Now, have any of you ever been driving down to Houston before? You're heading down Highway 6 and you meet that intersection at 290 and there's a massive store on the left called Frasier's. You ever seen that before? It's like the concrete capital of the world. Anything you want to find in concrete form, they make it there for your home or a lawn decoration. You might have buffaloes and I've even seen dinosaurs out there. I'm still waiting for them to design a Bucee's beaver and then I might be in the market for a purchase. And as I pass by there, there's just all of these carved images on display. And I would remember years ago traveling in a country in Southeast Asia, a small island nation that is primarily Hindu. And if you're not familiar with the Hindu religion, they worship many gods and those gods are represented by many carved images and idols. And I'll never forget driving down the road and passing marketplace after marketplace. A place to find food and then another one with clothing. And then lo and behold on the side of the road, there was a place just like Frasier's but for the idols of the Hindu gods. It was an idol factory where they

made those idols in order to sell them and to distribute them to those who wanted to worship the gods that they believed in and put their hope in. And it can feel in this day and age when we come to idolatry that unless we travel to a far country like that or unless we go back in time into biblical periods, idolatry isn't really around us in American culture. But the reality we're going to come face to face with this morning is that Genesis 30 and 31 is showing us that we don't have to travel halfway around the world to find an idol factory. Instead, there's an idol factory in every one of our hearts constantly pulling us away from the worship and pursuit of God. And what we're going to find this morning is we need to think through what idolatry is. One definition I've heard is that idolatry is loving anything more than Jesus. It's loving anything more than Jesus. Or another way I've heard idolatry described is it's, idolatry is when you take a good thing and you turn it into a God thing in your life in such a way that it becomes a bad thing. We take a good thing and turn it into a God thing. And as we look at that truth, as we come face to face in that reality, we are going to see that the same idols that the people in Genesis faced then are the same ones we're still facing today.

So, as we work our way through this text, we're going to find three different idols and three different ways we need to confront it. And what we're going to find this morning in Genesis 30 and 31 is that idolatry leads to infidelity. But faith can lead to freedom. So, let's look at the first idol that we find here back in the part of the text that we've already read. It's the idol of success and the idea that needs to go along with that idol is that we need to recognize our idols. We need to recognize our idols, even the idol of success. So, here we are after the birth of Joseph takes place. Jacob is ready to return to his homeland. He's like a Texan living outside of the great state who's finally drawn back by the three B's. Barbecue, bluebell, and Bucees saying, "I've gotta get back home." And he's ready to make the move. He's come there with no family, no possessions, no belongings. It seems as if the covenant promise of God has failed. But now is he set to return, we see him as a new people heading back to a new place full of new possessions in order to live out the new promise that God has given him. And in that midst, we see the rivalry between him and Laban explode. It comes to a breaking point and what's happening is the rivalry is a result of the desire in both of them for success, for achievement. It's an idol for the two of them. They put that in front of their lives in a way that says, if I can just attain enough, then I'll finally have what I'm looking for. And as we see this idol of success play out in them, think about how it still shows up today with you. You'll notice to begin with back starting in verse 27. We first see that Laban recognizes that Jacob is the reason for his success. So, notice what it says there in verse 27 when Jacob tells Laban, he wants to go back to the promised land.

<sup>27</sup>But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your sight, I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you. <sup>28</sup>Name your wages, and I will give it."

So, in other words, Laban is seeing this announcement from Jacob that he's planning to depart through the lens of his own success. He recognizes that his blessing, his success is the result of Jacob's presence. And he knows that if Jacob is to go, then his success is in jeopardy. So, he turns to divination to recognize that. But you'll notice down in verse 35 that we see a deception from Laban one more time here as he transfers, they work out this deal. And Jacob says, here's what I'm going to do. If you give me the spotted and speckled livestock, the black of the goats, then what's going to happen is that will help us know whose is whose? I'll raise both but I'll keep ones that match that description, you get all the rest. No confusion. So, as Laban is saying yes to him, he protects himself. He protects his success by pulling out some of those livestock that should

have gone to Jacob. He sends them off with his sons. He deceives Jacob one more time. But notice the way the text goes on. Down beginning in verse 37 we also see how Laban doesn't recognize that Jacob then robs him of his success. So Jacob is the reason for his success but now he's going to rob him of success. Because what we see in this text is something really unusual. So, the livestock show up at the feeding troughs and the water troughs to feed and that's where they breed. And when the strong ones show up, Jacob makes a quick run to Hobby Lobby and he picks up some white markers, he shaves off these sticks and he places those white sticks out in front of the livestock. And when they breed in the presence of those, somehow in a way that we won't fully understand, they come out spotted and speckled like the ones he is hoping to possess. And when the weaker ones come to breed, he removes those things and they breed in a way that plays to Laban's success. And what happens as a result of this? Look down in verse 43 when it says,

<sup>43</sup>Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

So, what we find here is Jacob has the success that Laban covets. The idol that has driven his life during the 20 years Jacob has been with him is now in jeopardy. Jacob receives the blessing that Laban has longed for. And as we look at this, it should remind us of the same way that longing for success is tempting to show up in our own lives as well. And then, if we're going to come face to face with an idol like success, we need to recognize it for what it is. So, how many of you in the past have ever gone to a haunted house before around Halloween time? Anybody ever been out there to one? I think I might have gone to one back in the day. Well, when we were living in Nashville, there was a haunted house that made national news because it was claimed to be so scary that you had to sign a waiver just to go into it. I'm like, I'm out on that one. I've got enough anxiety-inducing things in my life. I don't need to pay people for more. Okay? But I remember a friend telling me about a time he had gone to a haunted house just like that and it was scaring him out of his mind. And he was rounding a corner and he took a wrong turn. And instead of following it to the next part of the haunted house, he actually went behind the curtain to where some of the actors were on a break. So, I'm just imagining the guy playing Jason with his mask up on a smoke break and the guy with the Texas chainsaw massacre replication, he's setting that down and he's eating a Twinkie. I don't know what was happening but what happened is when my friends saw them, when he went behind the curtain and they were unmasked, it changed the rest of his experience. What had previously led him to fear, he now saw in a different way. He recognized it for what it truly was and the power it had over him was lost. We need to recognize that if we want to see victory from the idols in our lives, including the idol of success, that is the exact first step. We need to recognize our idols. We need to see them for what they are. We need to recognize the power they are claiming over our heart. The way it stirs up longings that pull us away from God rather than toward Him. You see, Laban and Jacob, they miss it in the moment. They're chasing after success. They're longing for achievement. But what the Bible makes clear is that that is not the path that God's designed for our life. In other words, Jesus tells us you cannot serve both God and money. You can either have success as your god or a Savior; but you can't have both. And that warning is right here before us as we come to the text.

But that's not the only idol that we see in this of Genesis. Let's pick back up. In verse 1 of chapter 31 we're going to see a second idol, not just the idol of success but now, the idol of security. The idol of security. And the way that we confront idols like success and security is not just by

recognizing them but by resisting them. So, a recent study came out that asked pastors, what are the most common idols you see in the people in your congregations? You know what the number one was? 67% of pastors said, comfort. The number two right after it at 56%, security. And I think those are two sides of the same coin. We want comfort. We want security. We want certainty in our lives. And perhaps never is that more true than we when we find ourselves in the middle of life's transitions. So I imagine some of you are going through a transition right now in your life. Maybe you've just moved to town. Maybe you're stepping into this church for the first time. It's a new church. Or you've got a new boyfriend or a new roommate or a new spouse or a new family member you're welcoming. A new job, a new major, a new organization. It could be all sorts of things. And in those moments, in the middle of life's transitions, things can feel out of control. They can seem uncertain. And particularly in those moments of uncertainty in the middle of life's transitions, we can long for security in a way that makes it an idol in our lives. What we find in the beginning of Genesis 31 is that this is a time of life transition for Jacob and his family. And we see that same idol of security rearing its head their lives. So, notice starting in verse 1, we see that life transitions reveal the idol of security. It says there,

<sup>1</sup>Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, "Jacob has taken all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has gained all his wealth." <sup>2</sup>And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him with favor as before. <sup>3</sup>Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and your kindred, and I will be with you."

So we see in verse 2 Jacob recognizes this danger and he longs for security as he sees he's no longer in favor. As Laban's sons are a treat to him now. He longs for that. And God speaks to him in verse 3 and tell him, now's the time to return to the homeland. So what happens? Jacob calls together Rachel and Leah to tell them about what his plan is. Let's see what happens in verse 4. It says,

<sup>4</sup>So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was <sup>5</sup>and said to them, "I see that your father does not regard me with favor as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me. <sup>6</sup>You know that I have served your father with all my strength, <sup>7</sup>yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. But God did not permit him to harm me. <sup>8</sup>If he said, 'The spotted shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore spotted; and if he said, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore striped. <sup>9</sup>Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me. <sup>10</sup>In the breeding season of the flock I lifted up my eyes and I saw in a dream that the goats that mated with the flock were striped, spotted, and mottled. <sup>11</sup>Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am!' <sup>12</sup>And he said, 'Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that mate with the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled, for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. <sup>13</sup>I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go out from this land and return to the land of your kindred.'"

So, put yourself in Jacob's shoes here for a minute. He calls together Rachel and Leah to give this report and he doesn't know how they're going to respond. He already feels a sense of insecurity from the threat of others around him. But there's probably an insecurity about, will they follow his direction? Will they respond to God's vision? And so he lays it out to them. He speaks to

them about how the angel the Lord has given him this vision of provision. Giving him this vision of transition. And how do they respond? Let's look down in verse 14. It says,

<sup>14</sup>Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, “Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? <sup>15</sup>Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has indeed devoured our money. <sup>16</sup>All the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, whatever God has said to you, do.”

So, think about this. These two sisters who for years have been bitter rivals. Now, unite together as a family to trust Jacob's leadership, to abandon their homeland, to leave behind their family and their father. And why did they do that? It's because along with Jacob, they see this threat to their security. They know that their livelihood, perhaps even their life itself is in danger. They recognize that it would be better to go to a foreign land than to have their own father treat them like foreigners. So, the text goes on and beginning in verse 17, we also see how life transitions test the idol of security in our hearts. So, notice what it says there in verse 17.

<sup>17</sup>So Jacob arose and set his sons and his wives on camels. <sup>18</sup>He drove away all his livestock, all his property that he had gained, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac. <sup>19</sup>Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's household gods.

So what happens here? It's a jailbreak. While Laban's out in the field, they flee. But before they flee, while Jacob is shearing the sheep, his daughter Rachel is fleecing him. She goes into the house, she takes the idols. She takes the household gods. She steals them. And she wants a taste of home as she leaves. And we don't know all the reasons why. Was this a vindictive effort by her to teach her dad a lesson? Was it a longing for security and familiarity and protection, and she took those gods in order to provide it. Whatever the reason is, what we know is it seems as if these household gods are intended to bring comfort and security to her in the middle of an uncertain journey. It's a bit like that security blanket that some of you and I carried when we were children. You know the one I'm talking about. I had a friend that called their security blanket for their kids a secret weapon. Because it didn't matter how bad the fit was, it didn't matter how emotional they were. If they brought out the secret weapon, it would calm all frustration. It would, it would dry up every tear. Now, why was that? Was there something magical about that blanket itself? Well, obviously not. But that child had associated with it a power over its heart, of their own heart that it on its own could not carry or provide. And what we find here with these household gods, with Rachel and what we see in our own lives is that longing for security can be that same type of secret weapon in our life if we're not careful. Where we give other things the power to calm our hearts and to provide security rather than God Himself. But notice what happens as the text goes on once they pack up down in verse 20. When it tells us,

<sup>20</sup>And Jacob tricked Laban the Aramean, by not telling him that he intended to flee. <sup>21</sup>He fled with all that he had and arose and crossed the Euphrates, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead. <sup>22</sup>When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, <sup>23</sup>he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him for seven days and followed close after him into the hill country of Gilead. <sup>24</sup>But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, “Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.”



And so, I want you notice at the start of this portion back in verse 20, there's the word tricked. Do you see that word there? Tricked? So, Jacob tricks Laban after for years, Laban has been tricking Jacob. And in the original language, that word tricked actually means to steal the heart of someone. Did you suck the heart out of him? And when he tricks Laban, he sucks the heart out of him as his family flees. And for days, Laban doesn't know what's going on. So, finally, he gets word on the third day. And when he hears of it, he doesn't just resign himself to say, "Well, we're better off without him. Best of luck to him." Instead, it's like a scene out of Mission Impossible. They mount up on their camels and they roll out and chase him for seven days. The villain coming after the one who is intended to be the good guy. And right as he's getting there, God stops him with the warning in verse 24. He says, don't speak good or bad against him. In other words, don't carry out the vigilante justice that you were considering. See, Laban now sees the threat to his own security if they depart and he was about to take matters into his own hand until God stopped him. So, notice what happens next. We see the way that Laban confronts these idols of security that are showing up in his own life and in the lives of his family down in verse 25 when it says,

<sup>25</sup>And Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen pitched tents in the hill country of Gilead. <sup>26</sup>And Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done, that you have tricked me and driven away my daughters like captives of the sword? <sup>27</sup>Why did you flee secretly and trick me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre? <sup>28</sup>And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? Now you have done foolishly. <sup>29</sup>It is in my power to do you harm. But the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.'

So, if this were an action movie, now we've reached the high point. The hero and villain face to face. What's going to happen? And Laban confronts Jacob, not just about him fleeing from him but also about him taking the household gods with him. And he makes this accusation. He makes this demand. He wants those idols back. Why? Because Laban sees in them a pathway to his own success and security and comfort. He doesn't want them to be taken away. He's already losing his family. He knows that he's in danger if he loses these as well. But then Laban asked a question that confronts the idol of security in a different way. Down in verse 30, he says,

<sup>30</sup>And now you have gone away because you longed greatly for your father's house, but why did you steal my gods?" <sup>31</sup>And Jacob answered and said to Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force.

And then he said,

<sup>32</sup>Anyone with whom you find your gods will not live. In the presence of our kinsmen point out what I have yours, and take it."

And then Moses tells us,

Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.

Can't you see the idol of security all over this moment? Laban is clawing and pleading for the household gods that have brought him safety and brought him comfort. He wants them back.

Jacob is so sure that that kind of thing hasn't happened that he says he'll put to death anybody who has taken that step. And what he doesn't realize is that his beloved wife, Rachel, has claimed those idols for her own. She's seeking to bring security through her own means. And so what happens now is that in verse 33, Laban goes on a search and rescue mission. Notice what it says.

<sup>33</sup>So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two female servants, but he did not find them. And he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's.

<sup>34</sup>Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel's saddle and sat on them. Laban felt all about the tent, but did not find them. <sup>35</sup>And she said to her father, "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me." So he searched but did not find the household gods.

So, how does Rachel respond to this moment? She knows Laban is coming to search for those idols, those sources of security for her, and what does she do? She doesn't confess and repent. She doubles down. She hides them under the camel's saddle. She lies to him saying, it's that time of the month and she can't rise up. She deceives the deceiver in order to protect her own security. And what we need to recognize here in this moment is that in this passage it's showing us a second way that we go after the idols in our life. We don't just need to recognize them, we also need to resist them. And the reason we see that here is because Rachel doesn't do that. Rather than resisting them, she receives them. She covets them. She protects them. And I hope as you read this story of Rachel hiding the idols in that tent, blocking her father from seeing the truth, you see a glimpse of the way that you and I can so often harbor sin and idols in our own hearts. We're just like Rachel in that tent. Saying, "God you can have everything in our heart except this right here." We're going to hide this one. We're going to stuff it down deep. We're going to lie to those around us who are trying to hold us accountable about it because we need that security. We want that comfort. Our heart longs for this thing more than to turn it over to God and trust Him in this moment. I had a friend of mine not long ago that confessed to me when his children were growing up, he prayed that they would not become missionaries. Now, this guy wasn't an avowed atheist who hated God and didn't want to see the spread of the Gospel take place. In fact, he's a wonderful Christian man and father. And he told me this truth with deep sorrow. And when I got to the reason of why that was the case. He said, "To be honest with you, Philip, I knew that if God ever called one of my children to be a missionary, I might not get to see my grandkids very often. And they might be in danger when they went to another country." In other words, the idol of security had taken such root in his heart that in a sense he was praying against God's design for the mission that God has in the world. And you could sense his heartache over recognizing that reality now. And I just can't help but wonder what are the ways that all of us, you and me, find ourselves protecting and justifying that call to security in a way that might compromise the advance of the Gospel. This pathway is calling us not just to recognize that idol but to resist it.

There's a final idol we're going to see here down through the end of the chapter. We've already seen success. We've already seen security. But the third idol we're going to find here at the end of chapter 31 is the idol of significance. And the idea that this text is going to give us is if we want to find victory over idols like significance, it doesn't mean we just recognize them and resist them, we also need to replace them. So, let's pick back up in the text here where we see this third idol of significance. And if we're being honest, this is the one that drives many of you. I imagine, if you look at these three, success, security, significance, you can find a besetting challenge in your



own heart in at least one of these, if not, all three. And that longing for significance, desires approval from the world. It desires accolades and praise. And we see that showing up in the life of Jacob and Laban here. And what we'll notice starting down in verse 36 first is that the idol of significance tempts us to justify our own standing. So, notice how Jacob tries to justify standing before Laban starting in verse 36. It says,

<sup>36</sup>Then Jacob became angry and berated Laban. And said, Jacob said to Laban, “What is my offense? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me? <sup>37</sup>For you have felt through all my goods; and what have you found of all your household goods? Set it here before my kinsmen and your kinsmen, that they may be able to decide between us two. <sup>38</sup>These twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes or your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks. <sup>39</sup>What was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you. I bore the loss of it myself. From my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. <sup>40</sup>There I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. <sup>41</sup>These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for the flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. <sup>42</sup>If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night.”

Can you sense the fury in Jacob's response? Laban goes on the search for the household gods and when he comes up empty, he mocks him and says, bring em out. What do you got? Let's see em. And as he mocks him, Jacob then brings out his own resume. He says, look what I've done through the last 20 years. The way I've cared for you, provided for you in difficult circumstances, under a difficult master, and this is what I have to show in return. He's trying to prove himself to Laban. He's trying to justify his standing. He's trying to seek significance in the eyes of Laban. And it's not until verse 42 that we start to see a God word perspective of the moment. You look back there and says,

<sup>42</sup>If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed.

So, even though Jacob longs for significance, he at least begins to see that apart from God, he would be in deep trouble. But notice how this passage ends with another temptation for the idol of significance. See, the idol of significance also tempts us to lose our identity. We see that fight for identity right here starting in verse 43 when it says,

<sup>43</sup>Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, “The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day for these my daughters or for their children whom they have borne? <sup>44</sup>Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I. And let it be a witness between me and you.” <sup>45</sup>So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. <sup>46</sup>And Jacob said to his kinsmen, “Gather stones.” And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. <sup>47</sup>Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. <sup>48</sup>Laban said, “This heap is a witness between you and me today.” Therefore he named it Galeed, <sup>49</sup>and Mizpah, for he said, “The LORD watch between you and me, when we are out of one another's sight. <sup>50</sup>If

you oppress my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no one is with us, see, God is witness between you and me.” <sup>51</sup>Then Laban said to Jacob, “See this heap and the pillar, which I have set between you and me. <sup>52</sup>This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, to do harm. <sup>53</sup>The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.” So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac, <sup>54</sup>and Jacob offered a sacrifice in the hill country and called his kinsmen to eat bread. They ate bread and spent the night in the hill country. <sup>55</sup>Early in the morning Laban arose and kissed his children and his daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned home.

You see, this moment could've ended in chaos. Instead it ends in a covenant. They agree to disagree. They agree to part ways. They take these rocks. They set up these pillars. They set up dividing lines. They work through a plan. And as we find this moment, what we see is the way that Jacob swears his oath back at the end of verse 53. Do you see the phrase that it uses there? So, Jacob swore by the Fear of his father, Isaac. In other words, when it's talking about him swearing in the name of God, he doesn't swear in the fear of his own life. He swears in the fear of his father, Isaac. It's as if God has still not yet become his God. He has still not yet made his faith his own. He is forging the covenant on the back of his parent's God, rather than his. Even as he's chasing success, it calls into question his identity. Does he see himself as part of the family of God? It should cause all of us to wrestle with that question this morning. Have you made your faith your own? Maybe you grew up in a Christian home. Maybe you grew up around church and you know all the things about God. But maybe you're just like Jacob. You still see it as the fear of your father. The belief of your parents but as a friend of mine said to me recently, there are no spiritual grandchildren in the family of God. Think about it. Unless you make that faith your own, you will never truly find and follow Jesus.

And I want you to notice the way that this passage points us to Jesus. It shows us a pattern that we can find victory over the idols in our life like success and security and significance. And that pathway comes not just by recognizing them and resisting them but by replacing them, by turning away from them. We see Jacob at last starting to show signs of turning away from his own pursuit of significance and recognizing God's role in his life. But how much more so should that be true of us who know Jesus? Because every passage of Genesis, including this one, is giving us a picture and a window into what God has done for us in Christ. So, think about these three idols, the idol of success and security and significance. And each one of those, Jesus faces and overcomes for us. I mean, just think about the wilderness temptations. In Matthew chapter 4, in the first temptation, He is tempted to turn stones into bread to gain through his own strength, security, and to satisfy that idol. But He turns away from that pull towards security. Or you think about that second temptation when He's tempted to go up onto the top of the temple and cast Himself down to prove His significance by the angels gathering up and surrounding Him and He overcomes that pull towards significance. Or think about that third one. When this, when the devil takes Him on the mountaintop, he shows Him the kingdoms of the world and he says, “All these can be Yours if you'll just bow down and worship me.” He is appealing to that desire for success. He can accomplish the entire mission without the shedding of blood. And Jesus overcomes that as well. But what happens in the life and death of Jesus is He doesn't just overcome those idols for Himself, He makes a way for us overcome them too. I mean, think about what He does in going to the cross. When He comes to the cross through His death and resurrection, He dies the death that we

deserve. He pays the penalty that we owe. He crushes the idols that we have in our own hearts. And how does He do it? Well, remember this text. When Jacob and Laban were negotiating, Jacob said, "I'll tell you what, I'll take all the sheep that are spotted and blemished." But one day, a son of Jacob would come, who the New Testament tells us, comes as the lamb of God without spot or without blemish, to make a perfect sacrifice for you and me. So that we can be set free to follow Him by faith. And the way that we do that is by following the pattern we see here, of recognizing the idols in our heart, resisting their pull, and replacing them with the gift of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our lives.

So let's pray towards that end right now as we close.

Father, I imagine there are people in this room who wonder if they have any idols in their lives, God. They wonder, they don't see it. They they know that they are always around them as a threat. But Lord, would You even now, in the quietness of their own heart, pierce that heart to show them those pockets of the tent of their heart that they've been hiding away just like Rachel. Would You bring it to the light, God? Would You expose it? Lord, if we find ourselves in this life pulled away from You by the allure of the idols in our own hearts, Lord, would You bring us back? Would You set us free? Would You help us to remove them and to replace them with an even greater affection for what You've done for us in Your Son? And would You equip our people to keep living on mission so that we might see the idols propped up in our community and in our country and around the world, stripped away and replaced by hope in You, Jesus, the one true Savior. The only one who can give us freedom through our faith. And we ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.