

Sermon for Sunday, August 31, 2025

Two weeks ago we started to talk about Jacob,

We talked about him and his twin brother Esau

And how Esau traded his birthright with Jacob for some stew,

And how Jacob, with the coaching from his mother Rebekah,

Deceived his father Isaac, making him believe that Jacob, himself was Esau and got the blessing from his father Isaac which Isaac was going to give to Esau.

And how Jacob, again by the coaching from his mother, packed up his belongings and headed to stay with his uncle Laban, who is his mothers brother, because Esau was planning on killing Jacob.

We ended with Jacob's dream of a ladder reaching to heaven and how God revealed himself to Jacob.

This dream of Jacobs is known as Jacobs ladder.

This morning we continue with Jacob and his journey towards his uncle Laban's place.

Jacob continues his travels and finally ends up at a well in the field, and on top of this well was a stone covering the opening of the well.

Here we see the importance of water in that region.

There is a shortage of water in that region, so there is a large stone on top of the well.

At a certain time of the day, shepherds would gather their flocks at the well and the stone would be removed from the top of it so everyone could water their sheep.

Then when the shepherds were done watering their flocks, the stone would be placed back on top to close the well.

When Jacob came closer to the well, he noticed that there were flocks of sheep lying near it.

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Jacob asked the shepherds if they knew Laban, at which they said that they did.

Word got back to Laban that Jacob had come to see him,

Laban ran out to meet and welcome him.

After Jacob stayed and worked for Laban for a while, Laban told Jacob that he shouldn't work for nothing and to tell him what his wages should be.

Laban had two daughters, Leah who was the oldest, and Rachel, who was the younger one.

Jacob thought that Rachel was beautiful and was in love with her, so he told Laban that he would work 7 years in return for Rachel to be his wife.

So they agreed.

After the seven years were up, Jacob told Laban that it was time for him to take Rachel as his wife.

They had a feast and then the wedding ceremony.

Back in those days, the women were heavily veiled for the wedding ceremony,

So Jacob didn't know that uncle Laban played a little switch a-roo on him until the next morning.

Laban gave Jacob Leah to be his wife instead of Rachel.

(here we have the deceiver being deceived)

Since Laban deceived him, I wonder if Jacob is thinking about how he deceived his father by tricking him into thinking he was Esau

Jacob asked Laban why he deceived him?

Laban explained that it wasn't their custom to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one.

So Laban gave Rachel to Jacob to be his wife in return for another 7 years of work

Lets not forget that in the bible, the number 7 signifies perfection, completeness, and divine fullness.

Within time, between Leah and her servants, Rachel and her servants, Jacob had several children.

After Rachel gave birth to their son Joseph, Jacob wanted to go back to his native land.

But Laban is not done with Jacob yet.

Laban persuaded Jacob to stay and tend to his flocks.

In return, Jacob asked for all the speckled or spotted sheep, every dark colored lamb, and every speckled or spotted goat, to which Laban agreed

Jacob did this because of a vision which God revealed to him in a dream.

So Laban got the pure breeds and Jacob got the offbreeds.

Jacob is making a very interesting deal.

They separated the flocks and herds of sheep and goats and Laban put his sons in charge of all of the speckled or spotted sheep, every dark colored lamb, and every speckled or spotted goat.

Laban then put a three day journey between himself and Jacob.

Jacob then took some fresh cut poplar branches, almond and plane trees and peeled back the bark making white stripes by exposing the inner wood of the branches.

Jacob placed these branches in the watering troughs, so that when the animals were in heat and came to drink, they would mate and have kids, and lambs that were streaked, spotted, or speckled all according to the vision which God had shown him in a dream.

But when Laban's animals would come to the watering troughs,

Jacob faced Laban's animals away from the branches which were in the troughs.

By doing this Jacob increased flocks and became prosperous.

Jacob heard Laban's sons spreading lies about him cheating their father and gained his wealth from what belonged to their father.

Jacob also noticed that Laban's attitude changed towards him.

One day when Laban went out to shear his sheep,

Jacob gathered up his family, flocks, herds, and everything he had and set out to return to his home land, not knowing that Rachel stole her fathers household idols while she was packing things up.

Laban had learned that Jacob took off secretly and that his household idols were missing, so he set out after him.

The night before Laban caught up with Jacob, God came to Laban in a dream and told him to be careful not to say anything to Jacob, good or bad.

After Laban caught up with Jacob, they had a few words and Laban wanted to know who stole his idols.

Laban searched everyone's tents but couldn't find them.

When he came to Rachel's tent, she was sitting on a case in which the idols were inside.

She told her father that she couldn't stand up because she wasn't feeling well.

According to my research, there are several possible reasons why Rachel stole her fathers idols.

1. The idols known as teraphim, were idols which people believed to

possess the ability to reveal information including the whereabouts of people - so some scholars believe Rachel stole the idols to keep her father from finding her, Jacob, and their family.

2. Some scholars suggest Rachel's action was a way to show her father the worthlessness of the idols, hoping to pull her father away from idolatry, The act of stealing them could have demonstrated their inability to protect themselves and their owners
3. Still other scholars claim that household gods sometimes played a role in determining inheritance rights. Rachel's theft could have been an attempt to secure her family's inheritance or her own rights.

Understanding the cultural significance of teraphim in the ancient Near East is crucial to understanding Rachel's actions.

Possessing these idols could have been linked to family lineage, social status, and even legal claims to property.

The scriptures do not explain why Rachel took them, but there are some commentaries out there that share why they think she stole them.

So Laban and Jacob made a covenant not to chase or harm each other, then Laban headed back home and left Jacob alone after that.

Jacob also went on his way heading back to his home land.

Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to meet his brother Esau.

His messengers returned to him saying that Esau is coming to meet him along with 400 of his men.

Jacob was scared, so he divided his people and animals into two groups,

thinking that if Esau attacks him, at least one group could get away.

Jacob prayed and asked God to protect him.

Did Jacob not remember the oath which God had made with him, that God would protect him wherever he went.

He spent the night there and selected a number of animals as a gift for his brother Esau.

Jacob sent his servants ahead of him and told them to go on ahead and when they met up with Esau, they were to tell him that these were gifts from his brother Jacob, thinking that he could pacify Esau with the gifts.

He also sent Leah, Rachel, their servants, and his 11 children and all their possessions across to the other side of the stream.

Jacob was left alone and during the night a man wrestled with Jacob until daylight.

When the man saw that he could not overpower Jacob, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip and made it sore as they wrestled.

The man asked Jacob to let him go ,

but Jacob would not let him go until the man blessed him.

The man asked him his name, and he said it was Jacob,

Then the man said, “your name is no longer Jacob, it is Israel, because you have struggled with God and man and have overcome.”

The sun came up and Jacob was limping because of his hip, he crossed the stream and met up with his family.

Jacob looked up and saw his brother Esau along with his 400 men approaching them.

Jacob separated his family and set out in front of them to meet Esau.

When the two brothers came closer to each other, Esau ran to meet Jacob, hugged, and kissed him.

Esau did not greet him the way Jacob thought he was going to greet him.

Jacob thought for sure that his brother still held animosity towards him.

Remember, they are not only brothers, they are twins.

Esau tells Jacob that he doesn't need the gifts which Jacob sent, he has all that he needs.

Esau wants to lead the way for his brother back home but Jacob tells him that he can't travel as fast as Esau can because of all his family and livestock compared to just Esau and his men.

God has certainly touched Esau's heart, because twenty years earlier he was swearing vengeance that he would kill Jacob.

As open and welcoming as Esau appears to be, Jacob is still worried that his brother might not have totally forgiven him and seek vengeance on him one day.

Esau has forgiven Jacob, but they aren't really reconciled,

So Jacob lies to his brother once again in order to get away from him

Instead of following his brother to Seir, Jacob turns and heads for Succoth.

And they never truly reconnect.

As for my brother Paul and I, we have always gotten along together, sure we had our disagreements, but we were always there for each other.

For about the last 2 months, we have worked together almost every Saturday.

Paul helps me work on my 86 GMC truck that I bought, and I help him repair and rebuild his shed.

If you remember from 2 weeks ago, when Paul and I were much younger and we worked together on a project, it was just about guaranteed that one of us would end up getting hurt.

I can honestly say that neither one of us has gotten hurt in the last couple of months, which is good because neither one of us can run like we used to.

We have grown to respect each other and appreciate the talents and knowledge that God has provided to each of us.

Unlike Jacob and Esau, Paul and I are not twins

I always thought of Jacob as a righteous man, but after doing all my research for this sermon,

Seeing all the lying, conniving, deceiving that Jacob had done,

I have second thoughts,

But God had to have forgiven him since

God says in the Bible that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Lets not forget that he is the Jacob, whom God changed his name to Israel, and his 12 sons are the 12 tribes of Israel

This story also demonstrates the old saying, you reap what you sow.

The story of Jacob and Esau highlights the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation.

You can forgive someone for what they have done,

But still be wary that they may do it again.

Their actions may have hurt you so deeply that you can never fully reconcile

You may never have the kind of relationship that you had before it had been broken.

Imagine for a minute that your relationship is like a piece of paper,

When you hurt the other person, you rip the paper in half.

The other person can forgive you and tape it back together,

But it will never be the same as it was before.

Jacob and Esau will never be as close as they were when they were young, because Jacob has ripped the paper too many times.

Esau keeps trying to tape it up with forgiveness,

But there will always be a rift between them because they have never truly reconciled.

God not only forgives us, He makes reconciliation possible.

We have torn our paper with God more times than we can count.

But God's forgiveness keeps taping it back up,

But it's gotten to the point that there is more tape than paper.

But what Jesus did, in His sacrificial death on the cross, was to give us a new sheet of paper altogether.

God sees us as a clean, pure sheet with no tears at all.

God sees us with all the righteousness of Christ Jesus.

Through Christ, we are not only forgiven of our sins

We are truly reconciled with God.

Only the blood of Christ can cleanse our sins as white as snow

AMEN