

Laban

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[0 : 00] Let us turn to the scripture we read to Genesis chapter 31 and we look at verse 29. So we have the words of Laban. It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt, but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take heed, that thou speak not to Jacob, either good or bad.

Now these were the words of Laban to Jacob, having overtaken him after a week's hard riding. He professes that his eager pursuit is evidence of the sense of injury that he had, that Jacob had left him without permitting him to kiss his daughters goodbye, and without being able to send them off with a party and with festive music.

And also his desire to make it good, make good the parting. But with these words he unconsciously lets the mask slip.

He had been bent on mischief, really. The real grasping Laban now comes through, but for the intervention of Jacob's God, that the night before, in a dream, this meeting would have been very different indeed.

The words reveal to us much about Laban, about the state of his heart, and I trust it may speak to us ourselves about our own hearts. But here was a man, and we might say about him, that he was restrained by the word of God.

[1 : 36] He was recognizing the care of God, but still he was refusing the rule of God. And these are the things I would like to look at today about Laban.

First of all, restrained by the word of God. But for the word of God yesterday night, I would have done you hurt, he is saying.

You see, there was a vision he had been given. Jacob was not the only one who had dreams from God on lonely hillsides. Laban too.

Jacob, the fugitive from the fruits of his own selfishness and his sin, was arrested by God at Luz, the place that later was called Bethel, with a solemn reminder of the unseen world and the God with whom he had to do, and the God whom he had sought to do without for so long.

Now even Laban, set on an errand of grasping and revenge, because of his own selfish heart. Because that heart had been touched and because he was bent on revenge, because his gods, his religious treasures had been taken.

[2 : 50] He dreams a dream on the slope of Mount Gilead, and the same God confronts him there. It's true there had been some pious things said by him in the past to Jacob.

You just need to look at the previous chapter. Verse 27, where he says to Jacob, The Lord has blessed me for your sake.

And we wonder, was it just a courtesy to Jacob? Was it flattery to try and persuade him to stay? Or was it a true awareness that the blessing of God attended this man, who had been in his home, who had shared with him in the work of his farm, and the care of his cattle and sheep over these years?

Perhaps he is looking to himself and saying, If this man goes, I'm going to lose this. One wonders what it was. But now, this God has arrested him and has spoken to him with clarity and certainty.

He certainly wouldn't have spoken to Jacob as he did if that had not been so. The presence of God, he discovers, is with Jacob.

[4 : 10] God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream, says verse 24. And he is saying now, no doubt, Jacob's God is real. This is the God that Jacob believed, that Isaac feared, that Abraham followed, all the way from Ar to Canaan.

And that he has brought his own grandfather, Haran, to Haran. This God is no figment. He is there. He is not silent. He is alive. And the blessings that he had enjoyed because of Jacob's presence were no illusion.

This God is real. He is there and he is God. The vision that he was given and then the voice that he heard. As Jacob heard the voice of God at Luz, so Laban had heard it there on at Gilead.

And it was a word of warning that the path that he was pursuing was a dangerous path. And that he was at cross purposes with the plan of God and with the will of God for Jacob, his servant.

And to pursue that path, he had to take, to pursue the path that he had taken was to fight against the purpose of God. There was a much greater plan in operation than the plan that Laban had put into operation these days before when he set out to pursue him.

[5 : 39] There was much more to be considered than his own arrogant revenge of Jacob. He must be careful what he says and what he does concerning Jacob.

For the consequence for himself may well be very serious. It was a word to restrain his evil heart and restrain him from an evil and a wicked purpose.

It was telling him that the God of Jacob's father had a claim on his life too. And he had a right to intervene and to command his obedience and to put a restraint on what he had set out to do.

He still had to face him. And God, this God, had authority over him.

That it startled Laban and put him from his purpose, there is no doubt. And he freely confesses that had this not happened, had this dream not come, things would have been very different when they met at this particular point.

[6 : 44] There is a great reminder to us here that the restraining hand of God is on the world. That evil men are not permitted to do everything that they would desire to do.

That God has a purpose for his people, to protect his people and to fulfill the purpose he has through his people. His spirit is striving with men. Let us see that we are not resisting it.

Lest he says, because he says that his spirit will not always strive with man. There is a time when God, as we read in Romans, will strive no more with wicked men.

He gives them up to do what they chose to do. He gives them up to their sin, to godlessness, and the hopelessness of resisting his purposes. Here is a man restrained by the word of God.

But also we see here someone recognizing the care of God. He certainly could not refuse, he could not, it was impossible for him to deny the protection that Jacob enjoyed here.

[7 : 59] While the voice brought restraint that kept Laban from further opposing the work of God, and thus precluded his going further than God would permit him at this point.

It is clear that God coming to Laban, and the word he had spoken, was not just to prevent him, but to protect Jacob.

And here was Laban acknowledging that the God of Jacob's fathers had a purpose with Jacob. Jacob had been with him, and he had seen the kind of goodness that God had shown him.

He had now had to face up to the fact that Jacob's religion and his relationship with his God was not an empty ritual that he went through, something just to satisfy his conscience, something, a lucky charm, just to keep the spirits away.

But it was a relationship with a living, active God who was committed to keeping him in all his ways, and who was now intervening to save him from danger, restraining from the devices that Satan was determined to set in his way to oppose him and to hinder him.

[9 : 30] You see, Jacob's God is a God of salvation. He's a God who cares, whose care and protection never fails those who love him.

Jacob was an important man also in God's great plan and purpose for the world. And inevitably, Satan was going to oppose. Satan was going to do what he could to hinder.

And Laban was just the kind of person that Satan delighted to have to stand in the way and to hinder the progress and the purpose that God had for Jacob.

But Laban was forced to see that God had a protecting care and love and concern for this man. And so it is that all of God's people have a place in God's plan and purpose, and he is concerned to keep them and to protect them.

Paul could say, I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed unto him against that day. We see a lot more of God's protection and provision for his people in the New Testament.

[10 : 46] Christ, who is able to save to the uttermost, to carry his people right through till they are presented faultless in his presence.

Because he ever lives, this Saviour of theirs, to make intercession for them. He is concerned for them. We see we are allowed to eavesdrop on the prayer of the Saviour as he prays for his disciples in John 17.

And we read of his praying for them, that thou wouldst keep them from the evil one. And that thou wouldst bring them home to me, to be with me and see my glory at the last.

Here is the covenant God whose commitment to Jacob is as good as his promise.

And he will stand by his child, even though all the Labans in the world are determined to stop him and turn him back. And Laban must learn it and know it too.

[11 : 53] The protection that Jacob enjoyed, but also we should notice the place that Jacob occupied. Jacob had a God who was alive. He was a God who kept his word.

And this is seen in the protection of his child at this point. But there is more to it than that. When God's children are in a covenant with Jesus Christ, death itself cannot rob them of their blessings or save them or separate them from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

They are secure. And Jacob's life was being preserved. Why? Because God was not finished with Jacob. Indeed, he had only just begun. He had much more to do with Jacob.

Before Jacob was going to come back into the promised land, he was to have yet another encounter with his God. He was to become Israel, a prince with God. He had a place in God's plan.

He was the descendant of Abraham who had been called out of Ur. He was the one through whom the promise and the covenant that had been made to Abraham would be carried out and would be fulfilled.

[13 : 08] And until his work was done and his part in that plan was fulfilled, Jacob is immortal. Jacob's God is a pardoning God.

He is a protecting God. He is a preserving God. And he is planning Jacob's footsteps too. He is a place in God's purpose.

And Laban must not touch. Touch not mine anointed and do my prophets no harm, says the scripture. And here is God, a God who is in control of history, who is planning the salvation of his people in all generations.

And here is an insignificant shepherd somewhere between Syria and Canaan. And yet he is the linchpin of God's sovereign purpose for the salvation of the world.

And Laban, for all his boasting and power, can do nothing about stopping him or hindering him because of the place that Jacob has.

[14 : 16] Surely happy is that man and blessed whom Jacob's God doth aid, whose hope upon the Lord doth rest, and on his God is stayed. What things Laban is learning and hearing at this last opportunity before Jacob finally goes out of his ken and out of his experience.

What a privilege to realize these things and that what grace God is showing to him in permitting him to understand the kindness and the love that he has for his children who trust in him.

So here was a man that we see restrained by the word of God. And we see him also recognizing the care of God.

But sadly, we see here somebody also refusing the rule of God. when Jacob had his dream at Bethel and the vision that was given him then, you remember how it shook him to the very roots of his being.

He could never be the same again. He was afraid. God is here. I had forgotten about this God. I had lived as though I could outstrip this God.

[15 : 34] I could get on ahead of him and beat him even at his own gain. And he is here. Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not. And he was afraid.

And yet alongside that he saw the care of God. He heard his word and he vowed that this God would be his God. If this God is going to be what he says he'd be, if he's going to take me out and bring me in, then he's going to be my God and this is going to be his house and he's going to have the worship of my heart and the tithe of everything that I have, the worship of my life.

But how different it is with Laban. The dream was a different one, that is true. But how much there was to learn from him. Here was a man outside the covenant people of God.

Could he not have come in like Ruth to come to trust under the shadow of this same God? You see, there was an authority he was bound to acknowledge.

No doubt, the dream had an effect. It certainly had changed his attitude. He did not lay a finger on Jacob. He obeyed the word that he heard.

[16 : 48] He had come charging after him to reclaim the gods that were supposedly stolen. And he was confronted by the God of heaven, the real God, the God with whom he had to do.

It set his own religion in perspective. Gods that could be stolen and a God who was sovereign. The God of heaven and earth.

The God of man. And he acknowledges his authority by obeying him. And there are many like Laban who come, who live in the knowledge of God's providence.

And they come in God's providence to a place where they recognize the truth of God's word and the claims of God's gospel. And they even see the plan of God's salvation stretching out before them and the possibility of their being in that plan and having a place in it by his grace.

Some even begin to come to church. They begin to seek the Lord. They begin to try to do what is right. They say, God is the Lord. I must respect him.

[18 : 04] But here was Laban. He was willing to obey so far but only so far. Alas, there are so many like that. You see, there was authority that he was bound to acknowledge but there also was the attitude that he chose to adopt.

He would come so far but no farther. He calls him the God of your father. He will not make him his own.

And when they swear an oath at Temispa, Jacob and Laban gods appear to be different gods.

Jacob, the fear of, the God of Jacob, the fear of the father Isaac, the one and whom is trusted by Abraham before him.

But the God of the God of Abraham's father Nahor was the God of their fathers, the God of Terah. And Terah, Abraham's father, served other gods.

[19 : 06] The God of glory who appeared to Abraham was not his God. In fact, you read that in Joshua 24 and verse 2. I thought I had it turned up.

Saying that they served other gods on the other side of the Jordan. Not the same God. He didn't leave his old ways.

For all Laban knew, for all the information and the true God that was there and the experience of him in his life. And he was willing to acknowledge that this was a God who was a God who was sovereign and had to be obeyed and whose grace was seen in the life of Jacob.

And who was challenging him there and then to break with his way and adopt the Jacob's God. Still he is content with the idols that Rachel could steal.

Jacob's God would not be his God. He is willing to acknowledge but he is not willing to commit himself to the God of heaven. The God who was evidently a God of grace and salvation.

[20 : 27] I wonder perhaps if someone here fits into this very situation today that they have seen the evidence of the word of God. They perhaps even have been restrained by his word to them.

They know the grace. They have seen lives changed. They recognize the providence and the goodness of God. And you are willing to go so far but still you have your own gods. You worship them in your heart.

Jesus Christ does not sit on the throne of your soul. To be that near is still to be outside the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

God. The call of God is to all men everywhere to repent. To turn from sin. To turn from any other God.

For all the gods are idols dumb which blinded nations fear. Whether it is the God of self or whatever it is. There is one God. The God of Jacob. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[21 : 26] This church is a testimony to that God. The lives of your Christian friends is a testimony to that God. The grace of God in their lives is a testimony to it.

And the call is to you today. Is this God your God? Are you ready to take him and to crown him as your king and Lord? Or will you go as Laban went in the face of all the blessing that was his and the privilege of knowing these things and the insight he had been given still refusing the rule of this God in heart and life.

May God grant that each of us today may crown him as Lord and Saviour and serve him as our king. Let us pray. We pray for thy blessing Lord upon thy word how it can search our hearts.

We pray Lord that we may consider who is God in our heart who is the Lord of our heart. Are we making just an acknowledgement that thou art God or can we say this is my God this is the God and Father of my Saviour Jesus whom I have come to trust in repentance and faith and to whom I look as my hope of salvation and my God forever.

Grant Lord that we may crown him king and serve him from this day onwards. Hear us Lord we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen.