

The Departure

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 October 2026

Preacher: James Tang

[0:00] Thank you, Aaron. Good morning all. Thank you, Paul, for choosing songs and leading us in worship this morning. It's really been in line with what the Lord has been putting on my heart, or at least I've been remembering or seeing.

I don't know about you guys, when you read the SCMP or when you check out the news and you just see all the darkness, the injustice, the corruption in the world.

And it makes you think, what hope is there? And I think you read from the book of Isaiah, and I just opened it up and reminded of our Lord in chapter 53. He had no form or majesty that we should look at him and no beauty that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And later it says, all we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way.

I look at where the state of mankind is. I look at the state of where the world is. Isn't that just us, that we are like sheep who have gone astray? Our life group, a couple of weeks back, we were going through the book of John, chapter 2.

[1:06] And it was that Jesus did not entrust himself to man because he knew what was in the heart of man. Jeremiah 17 says, the heart above all is just deceitful. It is sick.

And I sit here worshipping this morning and just reminded of that, that we live in a dark place. And if you keep pulling that thread as to why are we in this place, you go back and it's a, we've lost the fear of God.

We've lost the trust of God. Oswald Chambers was the one who said, if you don't fear God, you'll fear everything else. But if you fear God, then you won't fear anything else. And how many of our actions can we trace back to the fact that we have not, we're not fearing God in the same way anymore.

We're not filled with the same reverence and awe anymore. We've stopped fearing him and we've stopped trusting in him. It's been discouraging for me sometimes as I just meet people and see people and hear stories.

And I'm just like, we are just so hopeless. We're flaky, we're inconsistent, we're unreliable. But if there's anything the book of Genesis has been showing us is that that's always been the case.

[2:17] But that's not the point of the Bible, just that humans are unreliable and deceitful. But there is a God who is not, that there is a God who is faithful, even when we are faithless.

And I find encouragement in that, I find comfort in that, because I look at the world and I go, what are we doing? I'm just reminded of the words that God said in Isaiah that, hey, your thoughts and your ways are not my ways.

My thoughts and ways are way higher than yours. This is not my first rodeo. I know what's going on. I know how to deal with this. I have dealt with this. You just have to trust me.

We can make our plans, is what Proverbs 16 says, but it is the Lord who establishes every step. As humans, can we live in that place that there is no fear?

That we can just trust him and live every day, have every decision that we make based out of love and trust in God, as opposed to fear of man.

[3:18] This next chapter that we're going to go through now, it just gets worse. It just gets worse because now the deceiver is pitched up against another deceiver.

And these two have a battle. And we're going to actually cover two chapters today, almost, which is going to be the end of chapter 30 and into chapter 31. And we're going to look at how Jacob has this showdown against Laban.

And we're going to see man versus man. And we're going to see how both lose, that humanity just loses in general. So just on that fear and reverence and awe of God and his word, can I invite you

to stand for the word of God as Natalie ministers to us by reading the word to us.

Genesis chapter 31, verse 4 to 16. So Jacob went, sent word to Rachel and Leah to come out to the fields where his flocks were.

He said to them, I see that your father's attitude toward me is not what it was before. But the God of my father has been with me. You know that I have worked for your father with all my strength.

[4:30] Yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages 10 times. However, God has not allowed him to harm me. If he said, the speckled ones will be your wages, then all the flocks gave birth to the speckled young.

And if he said, the streaked ones will be your wages, then all the flocks bore streaked young. So God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me.

In breeding season, I once had a dream in which I look up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled, or spod.

The angel of God said to me in the dream, Jacob, I answered, here I am. And he said, look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flocks are streaked, speckled, or spod.

For I have seen that all that Laban has been doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me.

[5:36] Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land. Then Rachel and Nia replied, do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father's estate?

Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up what was paid for us. Surely all the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to us and our children.

So do whatever God has told you. This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat. Thank you, Natalie, for reading the word to us. Actually, as she was reading, I was trying to pay attention.

But I was also reminded, actually, I got to watch Natalie and my wife, Christina, and Sophie play hockey the other week. She is fierce on the hockey field. And it's really fun to watch. So it's good to have you here.

It's interesting. Last week, we had this battle of the babies. We had the battle of the babies because Rachel and Leah, remember, Leah was the one who was unloved, who was not the pretty one. And they had this battle, just having as many babies as they can.

[6:39] And that's how we get to the 12 tribes of Israel. So what is interesting here is now we see this scene where they're actually united. They're actually agreeing on something, which is very interesting.

And why? It's because they now have a common enemy. Because now they have someone that they have to go against. And that's actually Laban. And it's going to be really interesting for us to unpack what this is.

This is basically Jacob the deceiver versus Laban the scam artist. And so it's a fascinating, somewhat befuddling story that we're going to go through here. But it made me think of talking about just mankind and deceitful and all those things.

Put your hand up if you have ever been scammed before in your life. Has anyone ever been a victim of scamming? Oh, some, some. Ramon, can I pick on you? Would you mind sharing what that was?

I was overseas and I was trying to get some money. I want to give you the mic. I was overseas trying to get some money from an ATM machine. It was all in a foreign language. So someone approached me, said they were going to help me do it.

[7:43] And I realized that I got actually scammed. And I think he may have transferred money to his account. But that was many, many years ago, though. Wow. I learned from my mistakes. I learned from my mistakes.

Good, good, good. Sorry. Who else was there? Now everyone's not going to put their hands down because I want to ask you. Anyone else who got scammed on this side? Oh, Mark has been scammed. Sam, I love it. Just a bit of loyalty right there.

Sam put his hand up. Mark put his hand up. Mark, how did you get scammed? Japan. Yeah. Oh, okay.

So walking in Japan, in the street, saw something that you liked, and then they dragged you in, and then you couldn't leave without buying something. That's happened before to me, too. I've also been scammed. I've been scammed by this company called Regain or Rogain.

Demo just laughed straight away. You know what I'm talking about. There's the promise that if you put this foam on your head, and over a consistent... Now Benny's laughing. If you do it consistently, then you will have follicles that are strong.

[8:49] And so I did it for a whole year, and it was a scam. Do not believe it. Do not believe it. It does not work. Scamming. My next question to you is, how do you feel when you've been scammed?

What kind of emotions go on inside you? Is there a serious sense of injustice here? I can share on behalf of my wife, Christina, she has that strong sense of injustice. If something that she sees that isn't right, oh, she will tell you about it, whether it's in a restaurant or on the road.

She will make sure that if you're not driving in the right lane, or if you just cut her up, she will overtake or undertake so she can get near you, so she can look at you, and point her finger at you, and tell you that there has been injustice here.

She's that kind of person. I'm kind of just... Sometimes maybe I'm not as sensitive as I should be to those kinds of things. But the question I have for you is, how do you feel when you have injustice happening to you?

What's going on in your mind? What's going on in your heart? I happen to think a lot of the things that are happening in this world are because people have lost the fear of God and have also lost the trust of God.

[9:55] And so they do many things, and they take matters into their own hands. And you can see a very confusing story here of two men trying to outwit one another, doing very different things.

Okay, so chapter 30. We're going to try and fly through this because there's a lot, and this story is quite interesting, actually. Chapter 30, verse 25. So, remember, they've had the babies. They've had 12 kids now.

Benjamin is yet to come. So they've got 12 kids, 11 boys, and one daughter. And at this point, 14 years on, from the moment that he laid eyes on Rachel, where he said, let me marry your daughter, and then he got the wrong daughter, and then he had to do another seven years.

14 years on, 12 kids later, Jacob is like, okay, I think I need to go home. I think I've got a lot of kids. I'm actually pretty wealthy. I don't think I need to stay here anymore.

So he turns to his uncle Laban, and he says, send me away that I may go to my own home and country. Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you. 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.

[10:56] Interesting. Laban, at this point, is still not a follower of Jacob's God, but he looks and he goes, well, there's something special about your God. And in fact, because of his blessing on you, I have become rich as well. So I will let you leave.

So name your wages and I will let you go. And so Jacob said to him, well, you know what? I didn't come with money, but I made you a lot of money. I don't really want money. All I want, though, is actually, because the Lord has blessed me.

So what about we split up the flock? How about this? You get all the pure ones, and I'll get the spotted and the speckled ones. And then that's it.

Okay? And actually, at that point, it's usually around 10% of the flock would be the spotted and the speckled ones. So he's like, look, just give me a small portion. I don't need that much. I came with nothing. I've got enough now. Why don't we just do that?

Laban, ever the businessman, said, great. This is verse 34. Laban said, good. Let it be as you have said. You know, that's pretty good. That went way easier than Jacob thought.

[11:53] But little did he know, straight after that, can you see how much of a scoundrel Laban is? He says, good. Let it be as you said. But that day, so he didn't even go home and think about it and go, wait.

Now, if I do that, then we'll lose a lot of money. None of that. Straight away, he knew what he wanted to do. That day, Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, everyone that had white on it, and every lamb that was black, and put them in charge of his sons.

And he set a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob pastured the rest of Laban's flock. So he's like, great, deal. You have the spotted and speckled ones, and I'll keep all the other ones.

And then the next thing he does is he sends all the spotted and speckled ones away, three days away, so Jacob doesn't see them. Injustice. Scamming. Deceit. But then Jacob does something really interesting.

Verse 37. Then Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and plain trees and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the sticks. Basically what he did was he got a lot of these sticks, and then he made them stripy, and then he put them in front of the flock, because they had this belief that whatever the animals were looking at during mating season, it would impact the offspring that would come out.

[13:09] Okay? So those of you who know our story a little bit, Christine and I, we grew up in England, and I was a secondary school biology teacher for seven years. So this deeply offends me.

Why does this offend me? Any biologists? Anyone whose favorite subject was biology? No one is saved here. No one. Well, then GCSE biology, here we come.

There's something called alleles, dominant and recessive ones. People are getting PTSD as they think about this. It's all coming back. So. And I feel deeply with this as well, because at the young age of nine, when my mother realized that I wasn't as tall as my white friends at school, she said, well, let's get you taller.

How do we get you taller? How about we introduce you to this sport called basketball? And let me buy you a skipping rope and go do some skipping, and hopefully you'll catch up with the white boys. Because that did not, actually, no, we don't know whether that did happen or worked or not, because I might even be shorter than I am now.

But my mother also did not have an acute knowledge of genes, because what she didn't realize is that nothing that you can do can affect how your body is, at least in the height perspective.

[14:31] Interestingly, Jacob, there was this ancient folklore that basically believed that if you put some things in front of certain animals whilst they were mating, the animals that come out would be that.

So he would put striped sticks in front of the sheep and then hope that the sheep would come out. So actually, he, calling out Laban's deceit, then made up his own plan.

It all sounds pretty silly right now to even see this story, right? But I paused for a second and go, oh, I wonder whether there are some beliefs or myths that I grew up with that actually have been scientifically disproven over the years.

I've also told you guys and joked with you in the past that I grew up in the late 1900s. Who else grew up in the late 1900s here? There we go, Paul. Thank you very much. Hands going to be right. The late 1900s, when dial-up internet was first invented, incredible thing, the only problem with it was you had to pull out the socket from your phone and drag it to your computer and plug it in, and then it would block the home phone line.

So no one would be able to call in. And then your parents would find out, and then you'd be in trouble. There were a couple other ones. And I realized, even growing up in the late 1900s, there were myths that I had believed in that have now been scientifically proven to be wrong.

[15:46] Such as, especially maybe the Chinese context, don't sit too close in front of the TV when you're watching it, because why? Because your eyes will burst and implode.

So I used a bit of help from my secretary here called Gemini just to find out a little bit more. So there was this myth that don't sit too close because you'll burn your eyes out in front of the TV.

Why was that? Because in the late 1960s, there were a certain model of TVs that emitted tiny amounts of radiation due to a manufacturing defect in the 60s. That's when the myth began.

But by the 80s and 90s, the cathode ray tube TVs actually had no threat to eyesight whatsoever. The only thing that you could get if you sat close to the TV for a long time was that you would get very tired eyes and dry eyes.

Any doctors, you can come and talk to me afterwards if that is false. The other one that I was told is if you're chewing gum, don't swallow it. Because what would happen if you swallow the gum? Seven years, it would stay in your digestive system is what I was told.

[16:52] But actually, especially Hubba Bubba, one of my personal favorites, actually through a very natural process called peristalsis, where your body just kind of churns it out, it'll come out within one to two days.

Not seven years, apparently. Another thing that I grew up with was the term stranger danger. Have you heard of that? Training kids to basically look at a stranger and basically stay away and not talk

to them.

What they have now found, the majority of kidnappings are not by people who are strangers. It's by people who are known, family or acquaintances and friends. So the stranger danger actually ended up actually causing children to not even trust policemen or staff or people who they actually can call out to help for.

So stranger danger has now been removed from the social dictionary. What's another one? Another one was when you have a nosebleed, what are you supposed to do? Doctors? Matthew? Matthew? You're a bone doctor, so you don't know. I was told in the late 1900s that you are supposed to put your head up like this, right? I've since found out that's not the case. That is not the right way.

[17:58] You're supposed to keep it down or even just a slightly angled here. Janice is just losing her mind. I know, wait, what? So please, when you have a nosebleed, let me see if I can tell you why.

Tilting the head back causes blood to flow down the pharynx into the esophagus and stomach. Blood irritates the gastric lining, frequently inducing nausea and vomiting, or can enter the airway in severe cases. Medical consensus instructs leaning slightly forward and pinching the soft tissue of the nose for 10 to 15 minutes.

Our minds unraveling as we speak. Again, growing up the era that I grew up in, there was something that actually babies were told to sleep frontside. Because why?

Parents were frequently advised to place infants to sleep on their stomachs under the assumption that it would prevent them from choking and that they would actually sleep better. But actually, that turns out to not be true now.

So if you look at midwives and advisors now, it actually is, there was a back to sleep campaign in the 90s that reminded parents actually to put the babies to sleep on their back and that actually reduced sudden infant death syndrome by 50%.

[19:01] It's interesting, isn't it? We put our faith in knowledge and science when, or just plain old myths, and we actually realize that often they might not be true.

Sometimes we look at our lives and we think we are wise, but the truth is we might not be. Proverbs 3 says this, let's not be wise in our own eyes.

Another one was putting AA batteries in the fridge because that supposedly would help. That does not help. And my final one for you is if you have a beer belly, it is not because you've drank too much beer, because beer does not go straight down to your belly and stay there.

That's not how scientifically it works. It's just because you had a lot of calories. And for men, it usually accumulates around this area. And doing sit-ups, which is in the 90s, what we were told, if you do sit-ups, you'll get rid of your beer belly.

That does not work because that's not how, that's just not scientifically true. So Jacob, by putting some striped sticks in front of the sheep, it does not work.

[20:08] Yet for him, it did. That's the interesting thing. So we carry on now. Chapter 30, towards the end, that's the scheme that he did.

Thus, the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants and camels and donkeys. So here's my first point I want to make. Sometimes we have become so self-reliant on our own schemes.

And we think that we are where we're at because of us. But the truth is, we are not the architects of our own destiny. We do, the reason why we are sat here, you are sat here with whatever acclaim you have, or whatever influence you have, or whatever resource you have.

Can you imagine just for a second that yes, you did work hard at school. Yes, you did prepare for that interview. But for a second, just stop here and go, well, was it really me? Or was it actually the faithfulness and the provision of God?

Often, often for us, we think it's us. And now there is this element where there is human agency, where God actually invites us to work as hard as we can to glorify him, to prepare as hard as we can for exams to glorify him.

[21:18] And human agency is a thing, but it is not above divine sovereignty. Can you imagine Jacob's pride? Ha! Laban. Tried to take the spotted and speckled sheep away.

Look at me with my striped sticks to combat that, and I win. It makes me think of the quote, let's see if I can find it here.

Self-reliance is a subtle form of atheism. It is the declaration that we do not need God to manage our lives, secure our future, or establish our worth.

We might say we believe in God, but then we worry about getting the jobs that we want, getting into the course that we want, getting the money that we want, and then we try and rely on ourselves to get there. And what Tozer, A.W. Tozer, is saying here, that kind of self-reliance is actually a subtle form of atheism, atheism, because you say you believe in God, but your actions don't actually match up with it.

Augustine says this, God is always trying to give good things to us, but our hands are too full to receive them, full of our own plans, our own control, and our own schemes. We always seek control because essentially we don't trust in God.

[22 : 28] even Laban, why was he so welcoming to Jacob when he first came? Why? Because he saw an opportunity. He got rich last time that household came, and he's going to get rich again this time, and he does.

Talks about the transactional relationships that maybe we try and have. I mean, the Asian culture is all about guanhai. It's all about relationships, but if we think further into that, we're actually trying to trust in those relationships that we have to give us what we want.

We've turned all of those into functional and transactional relationships, and then we wonder why we don't trust in other people. So, chapter 31 now.

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 this wealth. It's interesting. We talked about envy last week. We talked about Rachel and Leah having this constant comparison with one another, and how we commented on the quote.

Roosevelt said that comparison is actually the thief of joy. It's the assassin of contentment is what John Tyson said, right? Envy is the enemy of peace, and you see here Laban's sons getting envious towards Jacob to the point where they start twisting the truth.

[23 : 42] They said, this guy, he's getting so rich. Anyway, everything that he has is from our dad anyway. No, actually, a lot of it comes from the blessing that was Jacob's to begin with, but the sons are getting envious. So what do they do?

They start talking. They start talking to all the people around them, and they start talking to their dad, and from then, Jacob starts to hear that actually, the favor of the family is not now on him anymore.

And so he's like, well, they're not treating me the same because they're getting very jealous, because they're envious. So what happens? Actually, God speaks up, chapter 31, verse 2, and Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him with favor as before. Then the Lord said to Jacob, return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you.

What a poisonous thing envy is. Laban's getting really rich because of Jacob. But because he sees that Jacob is getting even richer, he's not happy anymore.

It's not the same as us. We have everything that we need, but we look across at someone else who has more than what we have, and we start thinking, well, that's not good either. The danger, the toxicity of envy.

[24 : 42] So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah, and basically what he does is he speaks to his two wives who are now on the same page, and he says this, I see that your father doesn't regard me with favor as he did before, but the God of my father has been with me.

You know that I have served your father with all my strength. The father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not permit him to harm me. Interesting, Jacob's starting to get it. He's starting to get that it actually wasn't his own sticks and schemes that got him to where he is.

He's starting to see that it's more than just that. He's starting to see that it was actually God who gave him all these things. He said, the spotted shall be your wages, and basically what he's saying here, he's recounting the story of what's happening, and then, verse 11, then the angel of God said to me in the dream, Jacob, and I said, here I am, 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.

I am the God of Bethel where I met you before, 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. Jacob's saying, wow, your dad was cheating me time and time again.

Just pause there for a second. Of course, you've got a deceiver describing a scam artist, and you can see the deceiver here is kind of like painting a rose-tinted picture of himself, that he was honest and that he's been cheated, which, of course, we know isn't fully true either.

[26:10] But isn't that what happens when there's deceit in our own hearts? We start believing in the lies that we create for ourselves. We start giving ourselves the benefit of the doubt. We start explaining away our own actions.

We give ourselves the benefit of the doubt, and yet we look at someone else and we say that actually we know their heart is corrupt and deceitful. And so he explains this to his wives, and he said, it's time to go.

Then, verse 14, Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, is there any portion of inheritance left to us in our father's house? Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? So whilst Rachel and Leah were envious of each other, they also had serious daddy issues.

Why? Because their dad sold them. Dad actually sold them to another man to gain 14 years worth of labor. So they're not close to dad. And so they're saying, well, you know what?

Our dad doesn't really treat us as family anyway, treats us as foreigners, so yes, why don't we follow you now then, whatever God has said to you, do. So what happens? They go. But they don't go in an upright kind of way.

[27:11] They sneak away. So verse 17, so Jacob arose and set his sons and his wives on camels. 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.

Laban had gone to shear his sheep and Rachel stole her father's household gods and Jacob tricked Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he intended to flee. It's interesting, sometimes we obey God's instructions and we do what God tells us to do, but we don't do it in a right godly way.

So God tells him, you can go home now. So what do they do? Instead of going upright and confronting Laban and saying, this is what we're doing, they sneak away. And so he sends his wife and kids away first, but just before they go, Rachel does something sneaky.

The deceiver has married a deceiver. So Rachel actually goes back into dad's house before they leave and she steals what we know to be, what it says here, I've just lost it.

Rachel stole her father's household gods. These were little statues. These were called teraphims and basically what they represented was actually family inheritance, authority, and actually protection from the little gods that those families would actually follow and worship.

[28:25] Stop. Take a breather. There's the whole plan, deception, the spotted sheep gets sent away. He then uses sticks and somehow it works, not because of the science, but because of God.

And then it's time to go. Rachel's seen all of this and seen that the God of Jacob, the God of her husband, can be trusted, that the God of Jacob can do incredible things. And yet just before she leaves, she cannot help herself.

She goes into dad's house and grabs his little statues. Reminds me a little bit of Lot and his wife when they leave the city of darkness.

And she looks back and turns into a pillar of salt. Makes me think when you, I mean, this is a question that sometimes is asked, if there was a fire in your house, what would you go in and grab? And what you go in and grab will show you that is the most important thing to you.

What does she do? She goes in and grabs her dad's gods. A pocket god. Though of course, we all know that pocket gods do not work because a God that can fit in your pocket is not really any good at all.

[29:37] But it makes me think, what pocket gods do we have? What things do you go back to to rely on? If your house was on fire, if your life was on fire, what are the things that you would go back to?

Of course, if you grew up in Sunday school, your answer would be, well, Pastor James, I'd take my Bible with me. That's cute. That's good. As long as it's a paper one. Remember, the digital one won't save you. But what pocket gods do we take with us?

Maybe it's our own accolades. Maybe it's our achievements. Maybe it's the things that you go back to because you're like, oh, this is how I find my work. This is how my future can be secure. We laugh at it and it almost seems silly that she goes back to get it, but I actually think we all go back to get our own little pocket gods.

It's important as we look at the book of Genesis, as we look at the Bible, we realize we will always face the Labans in our lives.

We go out into this world, we will see injustice. We will be in danger of getting scammed. The question is, what God are we relying on? Or which God are we relying on?

[30:46] So anyway, they are self-reliant and then they are self-righteous because it's really interesting. Rachel does not tell her husband that she stole the little statues. What happens after that?

Laban finds out. They always find out. Verse 22, when it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, he took his kinsmen with him and pursued them for seven days and followed close after him into the hill country of Gilead.

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. So they have a three-day head start with their wife and their kids and the camels and the whole camp and Laban finds out three days later and chases them for seven days and actually catches up and actually overtakes because he's angry.

Because he's angry. Why did you do that? Why did you take away my daughters and my grandchildren and all the livestock and you didn't even have the decency to tell me is what he's saying. But thankfully for Jacob, God intervenes and actually whilst he's chasing, even Laban gets to hear from God.

How I yearn to have God speak to me in dreams and yet you have here Laban who doesn't even believe in God, a scam artist still hear from God and God tells him don't do anything to Jacob.

[31:57] So verse 25, Laban overtakes Jacob and then they have a confrontation and here's a confrontation and suddenly the scam artist sounds very self-righteous as well. Laban said to Jacob, what have you done that you have tricked me and driven away my daughters like captives with a sword?

Why did you flee secretly and trick me and did not tell me so that I might have sent you away with myrrh and songs with tambourine and lyre? Really? You think that's what you would have done if Jacob told you that he was leaving with your daughters and the grandchildren and all the livestock that you would have sent them away with a blessing?

Isn't it interesting? There comes a point when you get so used to deception that you get so used to lying to other people you start lying to yourself as well. Can you see Jacob and Laban both giving themselves the benefit of the doubt?

We sat on the outside and go gosh pass the popcorn. Both of you are scoundrels and yet can you see they both have developed this self-righteousness about them and so before we kind of point the finger and go whoa you guys you guys don't know how blind you are to your own sin it should also send shivers down your spine and my spine going whoa how often do I do that?

How often do I choose to be selective with the truth to make myself feel better about myself? verse 28 and why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell?

[33:16] Now you have done foolishly it is in my power to do you harm but but the God of your father spoke to me last night saying be careful not to say anything to Jacob either good or bad and now you've gone away because you longed greatly for your father's house why did you steal my gods?

Oh that is okay I don't know if many of you are sarcastic here growing up in England sarcasm is the highest form of humour and so how sarcastic is that?

because you longed greatly for your father's house well why did you steal my gods? if you and your God are so good why are you taking my little ones? oof I think that should stab some of us in the heart because there are people out in the world that we live and where we work and where we study where there are people who don't follow the God that we say we follow and we tell them that we trust in the almighty God and yet we fall prey to the same temptations to the same deceit that they do and how easy would it be for them to look at us and go well you say you trust the God of Abraham the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob yet you're kind of relying on the same fixes that I'm relying on you're using my gods instead it's a little bit pathetic isn't it?

you can see Laban saying that with a little grin why are you stealing my gods if your God is so great? and here is Jacob's answer verse 31 because I was afraid how often are our decisions based on fear based on fear of man for I thought that you would take your daughters away from me by force this is the same guy who had God himself say I'm going to bless you I'm going to be with you yet you're scared of Laban that song that we sang the third song that we are no longer slaves

to fear that we are children of God and yet we run around in our workplaces in our schools in our families terrified of what people can take away from us and we have to understand that if God is for us then none can be against that God is truly pleased and proud of us and loves us unconditionally imagine again for a second if we all were filled with that truth in our hearts then we wouldn't be afraid that other people could take things from them even if a suspicious person comes to offer help at an ATM machine we don't need to be afraid because we know we have a God who is for us and will protect us and that what the enemy means for evil he will still turn for good and for the good of those who love him

God will still work I need to remind myself of that truth all the time yet I often fall back on my self-reliance I fall back on my self-righteousness interestingly remember Jacob doesn't know that his wife stole the little statue so then he gets angry anyone with whom you find your God shall not live in the presence of our kinsmen point out what I have that is yours and take it now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them so he's saying hey you say we've stolen your gods search go everywhere and honestly if you find someone who's stolen it that person can die without knowing that his own wife his own beloved wife had actually been the culprit interesting this deceiver is self-reliant and is self-righteous and is also very ignorant of the sins that are in his own household so often do we have that we've deceived ourselves to the point that we are holy in God's sight that we are doing well because we do all these things we completely cover over the cracks and the moments of deceit in our own hearts and then we're defiant and then we lash out at others ignorant of the planks in our own eyes so anyway

[37 : 10] Laban goes into Jacob's tent and Leah's tent and they look around they can't find anything now verse 34 now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel saddle and sat on them Laban fell all about the tent but did not find them 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 she was in her time of the month and so you've got Rachel here who sat on a camel and the Laban and all the other servants are looking around and they go up to her and then she tells them oh it's my time of the month so I can't be moved and what does any guy do oh okay yeah sure so you do yeah I'm gonna stay away don't want anything to do with that and so she gets to hide it the deceiver has married a deceiver as well so anyway they get away with it Jacob gets very angry verse 36 said to Laban what is my offense what is my sin that you have hotly pursued me for you have felt through all my goods what have you done what have you found of all your household goods send it before my kinsmen and your kinsmen that they may decide between us two he pleads to justice even though he is the culprit of injustice himself

I don't know you see this self-reliance in the sticks and the schemes you see the self-righteousness that comes that is exposed even though his heart is deceitful and I just can't help but think how often how often am I the same how often do I fall prey to the same things that look so ridiculous on Jacob right here I'm gonna fast forward a little bit towards later in chapter 31 and here's a key line I actually just before that these 20 years verse 38 these 20 years I have been with you your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks what was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you I bore the loss of it myself remember back in those days if you were looking after someone else's flock and then one of the sheep were actually killed by an animal you would actually that shepherd would actually have to bear that cost themselves but he says I didn't even pass that on to you I bore the loss myself is what he's saying from my hand you required it whether stolen by day or by night there I was by day the heat consumed me and the cold by night and my sleep fled from my eyes do you know how many years

I have slaved away for you without charging you anything again the self-righteousness that comes through can you how would you treat me this way and accuse me of this when I have done so much for you is what he's saying verse 41 these 20 years I have been in your house I have served you 14 years for your two daughters and 6 years for your flock and you have changed my wages 10 times which is just a figure of speech that he's just constantly moving the goalposts 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 in the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night oh he sees it again not fully because he's still got a wrestling match with God later next week but for now what he sees is that everything that has happened up until this point has been because God has been his defender it's encouraging to finally see that Jacob gets it that it wasn't because of his own deceptive schemes to survive it wasn't his shrewdness that got him rich it was because the

God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac had been on his side how wonderful would it be that we can look across at our colleague look across at the people who we might fear might actually try to scam us and try to take advantage of us and we can say you know what you can do whatever you want to me because I have God on my side

I'm not afraid of injustice I'm not afraid of being scamming because I know that my God will protect me and so hey by all means stab me behind the back try and get that promotion if you want to it doesn't matter if God wants me to have it I'll have it and if I don't get it it's because he doesn't want me to have it I mean it all sounds quite simple as I say it like that but how often do we struggle with that every time someone tries to overtake us we're like whoa but if we truly understood who we were in God how loved we were and that God was the one who provided for us then we would not worry we are back to the age old issue of trust from the very beginning when Eve did not trust in God did God really tell you about that is God really on your side will God really provide for you think about your worry and your anxiety right now the thing that you're most worried about whether it's your business whether it's your family whether it's your children whether it's your parents what is it that you worry about and can you trace it back to essentially a mistrust of God and the temptation to take matters into your own hands of course if you're a student here please don't be tempted to go well I'm just going to trust God with my studies and I'm not going to study because God is for me and none can be against me that will not work because God there is a human agency element involved in here where he does want us to work and keep the garden that he's placed us in but can you get to a point where you have worked in the best way that you can and still prioritized God and said

God you know what whatever university I end up at is the university that you want for me whatever job I end up having is because that's the one that you have ordained for me whatever spouse you have prepared for me or not prepared is whatever you think is best for me again I cannot say this enough the heart is deceitful above all things it is sick who can understand it you and I we both have the same thing which is a disease of the heart because we have stopped trusting in God we have stopped fearing in God and we have started to take matters into our own hands but the beauty of the gospel comes when you realize there is a God who is sovereignly for you that you don't need shadow tactics you don't need to pull on those strings of relationships to get what you want because God is a loving father and that if you ask he will give if you knock the door will be opened if you seek you will find we look at the book of Genesis and what we see are not just words on a piece of paper but a mirror a mirror to our own sin a mirror a mirror to our own deception we are intent on deceiving others we are intent on deceiving ourselves we are trying to hide from God because we are Laban we are Rachel we are Leah we are Jacob and so

[43:57] I almost finished where I started what hope do we have this world is dark I am dark and yet the reason why we have this Bible the reason why we sit here is because there is a hope because whilst we do look a little bit like Jacob Jacob was also the archetype of something else Jacob of course was the archetype of someone else and that is Jesus Christ himself the son of God Jesus is the true Jacob Jesus was faced with injustice he was faced with scamming he stood in a court of Sanhedrin placing evidence on him that wasn't his accusing him and trying to kill him and yet what did he do he just stood there and he just trusted in God the same man in John 2 who said what the Bible says did not trust in man because he knew the heart of man entrusted himself to the court of man and said yes

I'm here why not because he trusts them he knew exactly what was in their hearts but what did he trust he trusted in God he subjected himself to a loving father not easily but very painfully and we see that in the garden of Eden when he said God dad if there's another way please if there is another way now is the time to pull the plug I've seen enough I've spent 33 years on this earth it is enough God if there's another way to save this group but he knew that there was no other way because no man can save themselves because every man is doomed for destruction the only way humanity can be saved is someone who is sinless steps into that world and Jesus willingly painfully entrusts himself to God he is the bridegroom who comes back for his bride he is the shepherd who takes every loss and puts it on himself he looks at our deception and sees that we're still sinners and yet loves us and dies for us anyway he sees Judas hiding and scheming but instead takes off his robe and washes his feet we as Christians can go out into the world and take any offense and any injustice done to us any persecution that can be done to us because this is nothing compared to what you did to our Lord

Jesus has taken on the ultimate offense for us so that we no longer need to be offended by anyone so when you next meet that relative who is always rude and condescending and disrespectful to you that boss who just speaks down to you that colleague who constantly tries to cut in front of you you can say it is okay be my guest the God of Abraham the God of Isaac the God of Jacob is with me and there's nothing that you can do about it the fellowship we've been reading the book of Hebrews we've been contrasting the old way and the new way the old law and the new way and the old law weakened by the flesh is what Romans 8 says but Jesus came to fulfill what the law could not come to bring not just the law but to fulfill the law with grace and truth so we can stand in the face of injustice we can stand in the way of offense and be completely okay because we know that we have our high priest who sympathizes with every weakness but was not tempted or sorry was tempted but did not fall into sin we pray that we would have the same resilience application what do we do with this what do we do with seeing these two men deceiving one another self-reliant self-righteous the first thing is

I think we just have to diagnose our own shadow tactics what are the things that you've been trying to do to climb your way up or to get out of your mess living on half-truths not standing upright for what you know the Lord is calling you to what are the things where you know you're not fully in the wrong but you're also not fully in the right diagnose our own shadow tactics confess them bring them out into the open where do we manipulate circumstances and people ourselves thereby exposing our reliance on ourselves and our mistrust of God diagnose them bring them out into the light where in our lives are we actually managing people and circumstances and not actually loving them we're just trying to control them we're trying to do what we want through these people and through these circumstances can we live with this surrender this trust this fear of God and not fearing anything else let's spend a moment now

I want to ask you just to do business with God yourself the God who sees into your heart and to repent and to surrender any shadow tactics that you might have any mistrust that you might have here's another truth that can be really freeing to you you cannot do this by yourself what you're trying to do is equal to the sticks and schemes of Jacob only God only God spend a moment in silence now as we reflect on the word of God and I'll invite Paul and the team to come up Jesus we spend a moment now each of us coming to you with our sticks in one hand and our pocket gods in the other we've become so used to relying on ourselves tricked by the enemy in believing that we need to fight to get what's ours because we are unloved unprovided for abandoned but that is so so far from the truth we have a God who loves us to the point where he would give his only son to die for us and so that we could be called children of God so those sticks those schemes that we've put in place in our lives to get where we want to go or at least we think that's what's helping us they look just silly in front of you it's like a 90s kid not knowing how the world works we sit here now not really knowing how you work but your thoughts and your ways are higher than ours and our job is to trust you so we give those sticks back to you and those pocket gods that we can't help but grab on our way out the inheritance the authority that comes from the world

[52:33] Lord we let go of those too they have no place here not in the presence of the most high God who is faithful in every way so regardless of where we are in our lives what circumstances we face what troubles we are trying to overcome would you give us the faith to declare it is well with our souls because our saviour lives and fights for us and walks with us and provides for us it is well let's stand and responding worship can at what are what are going on with our aber we are going on as they're going on as they're they're going on