

## Genesis 30:25-31:55 — God Watches My Business

**June 5, 2016**

It is great to have you at CrossWinds. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. As a church, on both of our campuses, we are studying the book of Genesis. Today, we continue our study in Genesis 30:25. Take out your outlines and open your Bibles or iPads to that chapter.

This part of Genesis tells us about the life of Jacob. His entire life was a zoo. In previous weeks, we saw he was tricked into marrying more than one wife. Some of you guys think that would be a great idea. It is not all the fun it is cracked up to be. Last week, we saw his home was a disaster. There was constant competition between Jacob's two wives for his love and affection. His home was a continual girl fight. That is ugly. One of his wives was named Rachel. She was cover model, just drop dead gorgeous. She was passionately in love with Jacob and he passionately loved her. The problem is that for the first seven years of their marriage, she could not provide the one thing every wife wants to give her husband — children. Jacob's other wife, Leah, was Rachel's older sister. She wasn't attractive. Nothing about her made men stare. In Hebrew her name literally means "the cow". When a woman is called "the cow," you know things are not good. That was Leah. Jacob didn't love her. Jacob hated her. He didn't plan on marrying her but under cover of darkness she tricked him on his wedding night to be the the woman in the bedroom. She tricked Jacob into marrying her. That is not the best way to begin your marriage. The one thing she had going for her was she was incredibly fertile. She popped

out six kids in nothing flat. Last week we saw how, as a result of the constant conflict between his wives Jacob eventually ended up with four wives and a dozen kids in only seven years. Last week we said that Jacob's family was one of the most dysfunctional families in the Bible. Amazingly God in his grace took this dysfunctional family and turned them into the foundation of his people, the twelve tribes of Israel. If God can redeem and use one of the most dysfunctional families in the Bible for his glory, we can rest assured that he can redeem and use our dysfunctional families too.

Last week we saw how God worked in Jacob's dysfunctional family. Today, we see how God was also at work in Jacob's dysfunctional job. Jacob worked for one of the most miserly, crooked, tight-wadded bosses on the planet. If you think your boss is mean, just wait until you get a sample of Jacob's father-in-law Laban. To make it worse, Jacob worked for family. He couldn't just leave. He was stuck working for a crook that shafted him at every turn.

This morning we have a huge amount of text to cover so I hope you brought snacks. We will be here awhile. Thankfully, there is some serious humor in this text so hang on for the ride as we join Jacob working at his dysfunctional job with a crooked boss.

As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "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. Name your wages, and I will give it." Jacob said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you, and how your livestock has fared with me. 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?" Genesis 30:25–30 (ESV)

Last week, Rachel finally had her first child after seven years of marriage. Jacob was not planning on spending 14 years in Laban's house. He was only planning on spending a few months until his brother's anger cooled down and he could return home. Jacob found himself trapped working for his father-in-law. Jacob was sure his parents were wondering what happened. Did he die? Did he marry? Did he have kids? Fourteen years after he left, his parents still don't know what happened. He hadn't even had a chance to introduce his wife to his parents plus his other wife, his other wife, and his other wife. It was going to be hard to explain. It was a very complicated marriage. He would have loved to have his parents enjoy at least some of the dozen grandkids while they were still in diapers. Jacob wanted to hit the road.

Laban was a businessman. He was always thinking of the bottom line. It turned out Jacob was an essential employee. Jacob was the one responsible for making the family business successful. Laban didn't want to lose Jacob so he made a counteroffer. He said, "I've learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you." Apparently Laban was talking with the demons and the demons told him Jacob was good for business. The demons said Jacob was an employee Laban didn't want to lose. I don't know what Laban was into. Maybe it was tarot cards. Maybe it was astrology. Maybe it was a Ouija Board. Maybe he was visiting the palm reader that used to work in Arnolds Park. I don't know. I just know Laban was plugged into something spiritual and it wasn't good. Laban said to Jacob, "I don't want you to leave. Name your wages so I can get you to stay. Jacob, what do you want? Do you want a raise? Do you want to be

part of the company dental plan and the vision plan? Do you want me to buy you a company car? You name the price. What do I need to do to get you to stay?"

Jacob was honest with him. Laban's family business was in shambles when Jacob came. It was barely profitable. The business was a mom and pop joke. Jacob was like Willie Robertson on Duck Commander. He took Laban's small business and made it an international success. Jacob made a great deal of money for his father-in-law. The business was incredibly profitable but Laban was not sharing the wealth. He was keeping it to himself. Laban was eating steak every night. Laban drove a Ferrari. Jacob was forced to feed his 12 children and four wives Ramen noodles. As for transportation, Jacob was still riding the used moped he bought from a high school kid.

Jacob had a problem. He couldn't provide for his family. As a husband and a father, that was his responsibility. He needed to look out for his wives and children before he looked out for the profit of his boss. Jacob was not lazy. This was Jacob realizing Laban would never put a profit-sharing plan into place. The more money Jacob made for Laban, the more money that went in Laban's pocket while Jacob and his wives were so skinny they looked like war refugees.

Here is what was wrong with Laban. *Laban was a lover of money, not a lover of people.* Laban looked at family relationships and wondered how he could use them for his advantage not how he could bless them for their advantage. Some of you know what I mean. You are afraid to do business with family because they expect you to do everything for nothing. That was Laban. *Laban loved money and used people when he should have been loving people*

*and using money.* He was backward. Laban should have been using his success to bless people, feed people, clothe people and house people, especially his daughters and grandchildren.

Jacob wanted to move away because Laban wouldn't make room for him at the top of the business even though Jacob was the reason for the success of the business. Some of you are in a family farming business or another line of work and you completely understand this situation.

He said, "What shall I give you?" Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, I will again pasture your flock and keep it: let me pass through all your flock today, removing from it every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats, and they shall be my wages. So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into 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." Laban said, "Good! Let it be as you have said." 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. And he set a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob pastured the rest of Laban's flock. Then Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the sticks. 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, the flocks bred in front of the sticks and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. 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. 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, 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. Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys. Genesis 30:31-43 (ESV)

Jacob made his counteroffer. "Here is what I will do. I will keep watching over your flocks and you don't have to give me a thing. Let me pass through your flocks and remove for my own the speckled and spotted sheep and goats

plus the black among the lambs.” This was a nice plan. Jacob was going to start a side company called “The Odd Sheep Company.” In this part of the world about 80 percent of the animals were solid in coloration and 20 percent of the flock had spotting or striping in their coats. It sounds fair. As the flocks grew larger, each of their salaries would increase. Jacob would keep the oddball sheep for his side business to help feed his family and he would take care of Laban’s solid color sheep for free. Since a solid coat versus and speckled or spotted coat determined who owned the animal, it would have been easy to keep things fair and honest.

Laban agreed to the deal. Being the cheat who didn’t care about providing for his own children and grandchildren, on that very day he went through the flocks and pulled out all the speckled and spotted animals and sent them away on a three-day journey with his sons. Jacob went to the flock to look for his paycheck and discovered his father-in-law ripped him off again. If you are getting angry at Laban for acting like such a greedy, money-grubbing, cheeseball against his own family, you are feeling what you should be feeling. This is what Jacob had gone through day after day for the last 14 years. Every angle Laban could find, he used to rip off his family and pad his already fat wallet. He ruined Jacob’s wedding night. Then he stole Jacob’s paycheck. This is depressing.

Jacob had a few tricks up his sleeve. First, he did this really weird trick with sticks. He put tree branches that had parts of the bark peeled away in the watering troughs. When the animals came to drink and mate they would mate while looking at these sticks. Why was he doing this? Scholars are all over the

place on their thoughts. Some scholars think there was something in the tree branches that made the animals more fertile. I don't think that is what was happening. I think Jacob subscribed to a prevalent belief at that time that thought you could control the outcome of newborn animals by what their parents were looking at when they were conceived. We know this is nonsense. We took high school biology. We know about DNA. Jacob didn't. Why did Jacob do this? Jacob was trying to work himself out of the pickle from Laban. Even though we know it was foolish, Jacob was trying to create spotted and speckled animals he could call his own. Jacob was working hard to get himself out of a tough situation. In the same way, Jacob only put these tree branches in the watering troughs when the healthiest animals mated in hopes that the healthiest animals born would be spotted and speckled. This is more evidence of Jacob working hard to get himself out of a tough situation.

Here is the point. When Jacob faced a situation that looked hopeless because he was consistently cheated by his father-in-law, not only did he trust God to come to his rescue but he also did the hard work of trying to work his way out of the jam. Jacob's motto wasn't simply "trust God;" it was "work hard and trust God." This is great application for each of us. When we are in a jam in the office, we are not to just sit around hoping God will come to the rescue. We are also not to just work hard believing we are the ones that need to save ourselves. We are to pray hard and work hard. God works through both means to come to our rescue.

That is exactly what happened to Jacob. Over time, more and more spotted and speckled young were born into the flock. Jacob's portion went up and Laban's portion went down. As we will see, on one level that was because of Jacob's hard work in breeding the animals, even though his methods were faulty. At the same time, Jacob's rescue came from God and his grace.

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." 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." So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was 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. You know that I have served your father with all my strength, yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. But God did not permit him to harm me. 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. Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me. In the breeding season of the flock I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream that the goats that mated with the flock were striped, spotted, and mottled. 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 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.'" Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has indeed devoured our money. 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." Genesis 31:1–16 (ESV)

This business relationship continued for six years. In those years Laban's wealth slowly transferred from Laban to Jacob and more and more spotted and speckled animals were born. What looked like Jacob's stick in the water trough trick was actually God sovereignly determining that more and more sheep and goats would be for Jacob's Odd Sheep company.

As often happens, when your business becomes wildly successful, you need to take a low profile because people become jealous of your success. Those of you who are successful in business know what I mean. When people realize you are successful, they start to treat you differently. Sometimes people become jealous of you. That is exactly what happened to Jacob. Laban's sons became jealous of him. Laban became cold towards him. It began to feel like it was a good time to move out of town because even though Jacob was a loyal hard-working employee, the incredible success of his side business resulted in others treating him differently.

Finally, to make things abundantly clear, God spoke to Jacob and told him it was time to head home. I don't know how God spoke to him, just that God spoke to him. Isn't this often the way God leads in life? He doesn't work through one angle but it is through multiple angles that we begin to get the hint God is telling us to make a major move. We see doors around us shutting and finally God confirms it in our spirits that it is time to go.

Before Jacob could just pack up and head out of town, he needed to gain the agreement of his wives. If they didn't want to go, it would be a fight for the whole trip. Leaving the family business wouldn't be easy business. He got his wives to join him in the field so they could have some private conversation and he laid out his case.

1. Your dad doesn't like me anymore but God has been with me.
2. I have been a good employee but your dad has been a terrible boss and a terrible father-in-law. Jacob served Laban with all of his strength but Laban

changed his wages 10 times. Thankfully, every time Laban changed his wages, God fought for him. If Laban said the wages were striped sheep and goats, that is what was born. If it was spotted ones, that is what was born. God was the one crushing Laban for his lousy business practices and for starving out his own daughters and grandchildren. God was lifting up Jacob who was the honest, hard-working employee and putting down Laban, the crook.

3. God confirmed in a dream that he was going to shift Laban's wealth to Jacob because of the lousy way Laban treated him.

Amazingly, Rachel and Leah agreed on something. They agreed that their dad was a loser who was ripping them off. He left his own daughters out of the inheritance in his will. He is a cheapskate.

1. He treated his own daughters like foreigners instead of family.
2. Laban devoured their money. Laban took the 14 years of dowry wages that Jacob paid to acquire his daughters and he spent all of it in Vegas at the casino. Fourteen years of salaries all went into slot machines and to the poker table. The bumper sticker on the back of Laban's camel said, "I am spending my children's inheritance." Proverbs tells us godly parents leave an inheritance for their children. They don't spend the inheritance of their children.

In short, Rachel and Leah were totally ticked at their dad. He was ripping off their family. They could barely feed their children. All Laban cared about was

himself and he took care of other people better than he took care of his own family.

Laban was an incredibly messed up father and an incredibly heartless businessman. Here is what we need to notice: The success of his business was not based on his ruthlessness or scheming. It was based on God and his grace. After a while, it caught up with him. God removed his hand of grace from him and redistributed the wealth from Laban to Jacob. It wasn't Jacob's sticks in feeding troughs that did this. It was ultimately God who was watching over Jacob. God honors those who honor him.

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. He fled with all that he had and arose and crossed the Euphrates, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead. When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him 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." 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. And Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done, that you have tricked me and driven away my daughters like captives of the sword? 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? And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? Now you have done foolishly. 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.' And now you have gone away because you longed greatly for your father's house, but why did you steal my gods?" Jacob answered and said to Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force. Anyone with whom you find your gods 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. Genesis 31:17–32 (ESV)

Having secured his wives' loyalty for his plan of escape, Jacob waited until sheep shearing season when Laban would be out of town on a long business trip before he skipped town. Jacob drove the flocks in front of him and packed everything on camels, which is the equivalent of a Hebrew U-Haul. Rachel, on the way out the door, stole her father's gods. More about that in a moment.

It took Laban three days to figure out Jacob and his family were gone and another week to catch them. You can feel the tension. Jacob and his wives were running for their lives. When Laban came home to find the house empty he mounted a posse to chase down Jacob and family. The picture created in the Hebrew is that Laban was going to punish Jacob. Heads were going to roll. The Hebrew words used in this section are often used in war scenes. Things were about to get ugly.

Here is where it gets interesting. God took care of Jacob's startup business by ensuring that only the types of animals that would profit Jacob were born into the flock. Then God broke into Laban's dream and warned him to not touch Jacob on the night before Laban planned to attack. This was unexpected, God-sized protection. God was watching over Jacob's business. God was watching over Jacob's life. How much help do you think Laban was getting from his gods?

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. 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. 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. Genesis 31:33-35 (ESV)

Why did Rachel steal Laban's gods in the first place? What is the purpose of this little scene? Most scholars don't know. Here is my idea. Laban stole Rachel's wedding night. Now Rachel was stealing something of great important to her father, his gods. Laban thought his gods were the key to his success.

Then things got funny. Laban searched Jacob's stuff. He went into all the different tents and felt everywhere but where Rachel was sitting because Rachel was having her period. Here is the funny part. Laban's gods could be stolen.

Unlike how Jacob was rescued by his God, Laban had to rescue his god.

Laban's gods couldn't even save themselves from getting sat on by a woman having her period. They were powerless to save themselves and they were powerless to make one bit of difference in Laban's life. Jacob's God controlled the birth of every animal in Laban's flock. Jacob's God could supernaturally break into someone's dream to protect Jacob from death and destruction.

Jacob's God is the only true God in the universe. Who is the real God watching over your life and mine? Which God is in control of your life and your business?

Then Jacob became angry and berated Laban. Jacob 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 found of all your household goods? Set it here before my kinsmen and your kinsmen, that they may decide between us two. These twenty 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. From my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. There I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. 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." Genesis 31:36-42 (ESV)

Finally, Jacob lost it and let 20 years of frustration fly. Jacob said he was a model employee while Laban was a terrible boss. Jacob took extra good care of the female sheep so they didn't miscarry. He never took any sheep home for himself to feed his family. If an animal was torn by wild beasts, Jacob bore the loss. This is unheard of integrity and commitment to the company. If anything was lost or stolen, Jacob paid for it. That was the kind of work ethic Jacob displayed while getting ripped off by Laban. Jacob worked in the heat of the day and the cold of the night. Jacob worked hard to ensure the success of the business while Laban changed Jacob's wages 10 times to ensure he didn't make a profit. Thankfully, God is the one who looked out for Jacob and saved him again and again.

Here is one key point you need to take away from this morning: God knows what is going on at your office. He knows everything about your work. As a boss, he knows if you are ripping off the government by not reporting taxes. He knows if you are not profit sharing. He knows if you are a tight wad with your employees. He knows if you are a painful boss or a good boss. In addition, if you are an employee, God is watching too. He knows when you are lazy at work. He knows when you take advantage of your boss. He knows when you work extra hard on the job and you go out of your way to put your boss' best interests above your own, even though it causes a little extra heartache and time. God is watching. You are not working to earn a paycheck. You are working to earn the approval of God. God is watching. Over time, your honesty and integrity will be honored by God. Over time your laziness on the job or your

dishonesty toward your boss will also be noted by God. More important than your paycheck is that you honor God in the way you work. At the end of the day God will honor those who honor him.

### **Application**

1. **Work for an audience of one.** For 14 years of life Jacob faithfully served a boss that took advantage of him. For 14 years it looked like Laban was getting away with using and abusing Jacob and his employees. God was watching. It was not Jacob's striped sticks in a feeding trough that saved the day but God's providence that slowly caused Laban's business to decline and Jacob's Odd Sheep company to succeed. This summer on the job, when you have a chance to cut corners or take advantage of your boss or extend your coffee breaks, remember you have an audience of one. God is watching and he will honor those who honor him and he will humble those who dishonor him. That is the way life works.
2. **Seek the God who can change your life.** Laban spent his days worshipping his household idols, idols that were powerless to help him. They couldn't keep themselves from being stolen. They couldn't keep themselves from being sat on by a woman having her monthly cycle. They were powerless. The one true God of the universe, that Jacob knew and that we know is worth seeking, saved Jacob's career and his life. If he can save Jacob, he can save you. He is not powerless. He is powerful.
3. **Only God can set me free from slavery.** Jacob found himself working as a virtual slave for Laban. God saved Jacob from the slavery of Laban's iron grip. In the same way God set his people free from the iron grip of Pharaoh

who held them in slavery in Egypt. Every more importantly, God offers to set us free from the iron grip of Satan and slavery to sin through faith in his son Jesus. God is not powerless, like Laban's gods. He is powerful and is intimately involved in our everyday lives. Just like he set Jacob free from slavery to Laban, today he can set you free from the grip of sin if you will repent of your sin and ask Jesus to take the steering wheel of your life.



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