

Genesis 31:1–16

You Need Jesus More Than You Know

Main idea: God sees that our problems are worse than we understand them to be, but He is working out our good in them, and He tells us this so that we will see that our greatest need is not so much an end to our problems as it is to belong to Him, and especially to have Him belong to us in Christ.

¹ Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has acquired all this wealth." ² And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, and indeed it was not favorable toward him as before. ³ Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you."

⁴ So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock, ⁵ and said to them, "I see your father's countenance, that it is not favorable toward me as before; but the God of my father has been with me. ⁶ And you know that with all my might I have served your father. ⁷ Yet your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me. ⁸ If he said thus: 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore speckled. And if he said thus: 'The streaked shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked. ⁹ So God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me.

¹⁰ "And it happened, at the time when the flocks conceived, that I lifted my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the rams which leaped upon the flocks were streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted. ¹¹ Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, 'Jacob.' And I said, 'Here I am.' ¹² And He said, 'Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams which leap on the flocks are streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. ¹³ I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family.' "

¹⁴ Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? ¹⁵ Are we not considered strangers by him? For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money. ¹⁶ For all these riches which God has taken from our father are really ours and our children's; now then, whatever God has said to you, do it."

Introduction

(Illustration of Jonathan Isaac). A "light" view of our problems puts us at risk of a "light" healing of our problems, which is no healing at all. We must come to terms with how big they are, so that we will come to God on His terms.

1. God sees so much more than we see
 - a. What "Jacob saw" in v2 is the tip of the iceberg compared to that about which God says, "I have seen" in v12—"all that Laban is doing to you."
 - b. Even more than that, God had seen that Jacob's faith was weak. He had prioritized goats over God and the gospel. He was staying in Haran instead of seeking to keep the vow from Bethel. The God of Bethel was One who would return him to the land of promise, but Jacob seemed to have lost interest in the promise.
 - c. Whatever you see of your circumstantial problems, they are actually worse.
 - d. Whatever you see of your spiritual problems, they are actually worse.
 - e. If we try to address the situations of our lives based only on what we see and know, we are fools. We must address what we see based upon what God says, because only He knows the full depth of the problems. If we see our situation lightly, we will "follow the dictates of our own evil hearts," but if we acknowledge the limitations of what we can see, and that He sees and knows everything, this will push us to thinking and living according to His perfect Word!
2. God does so much more than we see
 - a. What Jacob could see was Laban putting the flocks that he seemed to need three days away (30:34–36) and Jacob's own selective use of striped rods (30:37–42).
 - b. What Jacob couldn't see was God controlling which rams would leap on the flocks. (illustration of the polka-dotted zebra)

- c. What Jacob learned that God had done
 - i. “But God did not allow him to hurt me,” as Jacob now relates to his wives in v7
 - ii. Taking away all that is Laban’s and giving it to him (v9, 16).
- d. What God is doing in your life
 - i. If you are an unbeliever, is taking away everything from you. (cf. Luk 6:24–26; Rom 1:32–2:9)
 - ii. If you are a believer, is giving everything to you. (cf. Luk 6:20–23; Rom 8:28–39 “nor Laban, nor China, nor FB, nor cultural revolution...”)
- 3. God Himself is so much more than anything else that we desire
 - a. God’s Word to Jacob was to reorient him to God’s own presence. He wasn’t “exceedingly prosperous” (30:43) because he had stayed in Haran on Laban’s terms, or because he had outwitted Laban, but because “the God of my father has been with me” (v6).
 - b. God’s Word to Jacob was to reorient him to God’s promises. God could have given the promise “I will be with you” in Haran. But this is no generic presence of God. So, God identifies the land as “the land of your fathers” and Jacob’s destination as “to your family.” This is God in covenant commitment. A promise that spans generations. A promise that is bound up in Christ, Whom God will bring through this family.
 - c. What Jacob needed, far more than a change of geographical location, was to be reoriented toward Christ. A chiropractic adjustment of his soul to focus upon the presence of God and the promise of God, so that trusting God with the outcome, he could act not out of self-preservation but out of thankfulness to God and love to God and others.
 - d. What Jacob needed was to keep his vow, “If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God” (28:20–21). And now God is saying, “keep that vow” (v13). Go back to your family!
 - e. What each of us needs most of all is to think and act in light of a true knowledge that God is with us and that He has made Himself our very own in Christ.
 - i. Seeing God Himself as our greatest need means making diligent use of the means of His grace, because it is especially through the use of these means that He continually gives to us Himself, stirring up and nourishing our faith.
 - ii. Yes, this is consistent with following His law and wisdom for the addressing of our problems. It made sense for Jacob to extract himself from the situation with Laban (it made sense for Joseph to flee Herod with Mary and Jesus!). There may be many things that are right and wise for you to do. This does not exclude such things.
 - iii. But because God’s presence and promise are the greatest needs, the diligent use of those means by which He nourishes us in His presence and promise is the greatest of the right and wise things for us to do.

Conclusion

God sees that our problems are worse than we understand them to be, but He is working out our good in them, and He tells us this so that we will see that our greatest need is not so much an end to our problems as it is to belong to Him, and especially to have Him belong to us in Christ