Messy Life:
The Story of Jacob
Part 11
The Great Escape

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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A publication of DISCIPLE U, the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you? ...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you? ...and ***why?***

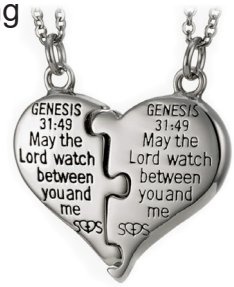
Observation—*What do I see?*

- Read the heated, antagonistic dialogue between Laban and Jacob (Genesis 31:26-32 and 36-43). Comparing it to Ephesians 4:31–32, make a list of the things they did wrong in their relationship.

  They clearly don't trust each other, yet they ended peacefully (v. 55). What do you think enabled that?

Interpretation—*What does it mean?*

- When Jacob and Laban had aired their disputes with each other, they created a "heap of witness" (v. 44-54), calling upon God to "watch between them when they are apart". Lovers anticipating a protracted season of ***unwanted*** separation sometimes buy a necklace like this, affirming their love and asking God to protect their beloved and reunite them ASAP! Are Jacob and Laban affirming their deep affection and a desire to be reunited? If not, rephrase what they're hoping for.



Application—*What do I do with this?*

- Lovers have misinterpreted Jacob and Laban's "heap of witness" along the lines of Numbers 6:24–26. They have noble intent, but what ***dangers*** exist when we misconstrue the meaning of Scripture?

  Clearly, deriving an ***un****biblical* idea is dangerous, but is there any harm in getting a ***truly*** biblical idea ***from a passage which does not teach that truth****?* Is that OK? What could go wrong?

- Review what you observed from the dialogue between Laban and Jacob (Genesis 31:26-32, 36-43). With whom—be tactfully discreet, yet honest—do you most often follow their poor example?

  As Pastor Doug taught, *"Even if **you** are only 20% responsible at fault in the dispute, take 100% responsibility for **your** 20%!"* (And, Luke 6:41–42 teaches us to do that first!) How do you think you're doing in the application of these principles?

  In the end, Jacob and Laban still did not "see eye to eye", yet they parted peacefully. Will you do that?

Sermon Summary Genesis 31:22–55

As we learned a couple weeks ago, if we are successful - if we are blessed in life - it's because God chose to bless us. And He often chooses to bless us despite ourselves! He blesses us despite our sin and hard-heartedness and manipulative ways. We also saw that Jacob was motivated by God to leave Laban and go back to the land of his ancestors. Without notifying Laban, Jacob packed up his family and his livestock and they made their getaway. What would Laban do when he discovered their departure? (v. 22-23)

Laban's intentions were not good. He was angry. Jacob did not force his wives to leave. They made the decision together. But Laban wanted to retrieve what he had lost, by whatever means necessary. Laban was working at cross-purposes with God. Jacob's return to the land of his ancestors was all part of God's master plan to bless the world. It goes back to the promise God made to Abraham many years before, as first recorded in Genesis 12:1-3. Jacob was returning to dwell in the land God had given him, and Laban was foolishly attempting to thwart that plan. But God intervened (v.24-28).

Laban moved from empty complaints to empty threats (v.29). This statement is very revealing. It discloses what Laban would have done if God had not intervened and warned him not to harm Jacob (v. 30). The last question seemingly comes out of nowhere. He asks, "Why did you steal my gods?" Remember that on her way out, Rachel secretly stole her dad's household idols (Genesis 31:19). Jacob knew nothing about Rachel's theft. Rachel had acted on her own, for reasons not revealed in the Biblical text. Up until this point Laban had been doing all the talking and Jacob had listened patiently to his tirade. It's time for Jacob to respond (v. 31-32).

What kind of god is it that can be pilfered—stolen? These are the impotent gods that Laban was so eager to retrieve (v.33-35). Rachel is sitting on her dad's gods. That is not an act of respectful worship. That is an indication to me that she did not believe in these false gods. This whole scene makes a mockery of these false, pagan gods!

When Laban's desperate search turns up nothing, Jacob can hold back no longer. All the frustration that has built up over the last 20 years comes gushing out (v. 36-42). In Jacob's mind, it didn't really matter what anyone else thought about these family matters, because God had rendered judgment in Jacob's favor. Laban stubbornly concedes nothing (v. 43). In his mind, he is blameless. Jacob is the guilty one. It's hard to reason with someone like that, isn't it?

Jesus' sage advice about how to handle this situation can be found in Luke 6:41-42. Jesus' point is this: When you are in conflict with someone, begin by taking 100% responsibility for your contribution to the problem. You may only be 20% responsible. But take 100% responsibility for your 20%! The truth is, rarely is the other person all to blame. It is only when you are willing to own up to your own shortcomings that you become clear headed enough to fairly address the other person's shortcomings.

Had Jacob and Laban consistently practiced Jesus' teaching, there wouldn't have been all of this animosity. There are other Biblical principles that, had they been applied, their relationship might not have become so contentious (Ephesians 4:26-27). Did you know that it is possible to be angry and not sin. You just have to use that negative energy to attack the problem, rather than the other person. Paul is saying, "whenever possible, try to solve today's problems today. Don't let the sun go down on your anger." Paul continues in verses 29-32. Neither Laban nor Jacob had practiced these principles. Too often, we don't either, and it contributes to damaged relationships. But because of God's warning, Laban had no recourse but to seek some kind of peace treaty with Jacob (v.44-54). To finish sealing the covenant, a sacrifice was made and they shared a meal together; it was called a peace meal. And then Laban departs (v. 55). What can we learn from this story?

I. God sometimes directly intervenes on behalf of his people. He doesn't always. Sometimes it is God's will that we experience suffering and persecution. But sometimes He directly intervenes just like He did with Jacob. God intervened to protect Jacob. Even though God doesn't usually grant such 'hard protection' to His people, this text is a comfort to His suffering church. For we know that God will never allow the church to be extinguished.

II. Conflict between people can be mediated by applying Biblical principles of conflict resolution. If we would listen to God and apply Biblical principles of conflict resolution - like the kind we've talked about today - we could live in peace with one another. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and he has called us to be peacemakers in the world (Matthew 5:9). We are never more like God than when we seek to bring peace where there is hostility. Such peace is especially desirable among God's people (John 13:35).

III. We learn how not to bring about peace. It all worked out in the end, but Jacob and Laban did not model peacemaking for us. How many times have you followed their poor example? It all worked out because God sovereignly intervened. When we find ourselves at odds with others, the first thing we should do is invite God into the peace process. Follow Biblical principles of conflict resolution, but most importantly, pray. Ask God to intervene and then determine to be a peacemaker, not a peacebreaker.

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

Jacob and Laban lived in constant conflict. How can we live in peace with others? Romans 12 gives us very practical steps to peace—with almost anyone...

Monday— Study Romans 12:1-2. What is the non-negotiable foundation for peace with others?

Tuesday— Study Romans 12:3-5. What is the attitude (towards self and others) fosters peace?

Wednesday— Study Romans 12:6-8. A focus on getting (v. 3) leads to turmoil. On what should we focus?

Thursday— Study Romans 12:9-13. Rate your obedience to these thirteen commands.

Friday— Study Romans 12:14-17. With which ***one*** person do you ***most*** need to obey these commands?

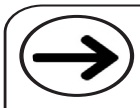
Saturday— Study Romans 12:18-21. How do we conquer ("overcome") relational conflict?

Bible Text: _____ Date: _____

What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) it is found.]

What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would ***this text*** answer it?

What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.

With whom will I share what I learned from this text? [and what was their response?]