

The Hard and Humbling Road of Holiness

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 0 0] But now, we're going to turn to our Bible reading for this evening. And Willie Phillip, our senior minister, is going to be preaching to us shortly, and he's continuing in the book of Genesis.

Do grab a Bible. If you don't have one with you, we've got plenty available at the sides, the front here and at the back. And it's important to follow along as we read and later as Willie preaches to us.

We're going to read this evening from Genesis chapter 29, the very first book of the Bible. Genesis 29, and we're going to read from verse 1 through to verse 30.

Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east. As he looked, he saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep lying beside it.

For out of that well, the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep and put the stone back in its place over the mouth of the well.

[1 : 1 4] Jacob said to them, My brothers, where do you come from? They said, We're from Haran. He said to them, Do you know Laban, the son of Nahor?

They said, We knew him. He said to them, Is it well with him? They said, It is well, and see, Rachel, his daughter, is coming with the sheep. He said, Behold, it is still high day.

It is not time for the livestock to be gathered together. Water the sheep and go, pasture them. But they said, We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well.

Then we water the sheep. While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. Now, as soon as Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban, his mother's brother.

Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman and that he was Rebecca's son.

[2 : 2 7] And she ran and told her father. As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house.

Jacob told Laban all these things. And Laban said to him, Surely you are my bone and my flesh. And he stayed with him a month. Then Laban said to Jacob, Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing?

Tell me, what shall your wages be? Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance.

Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel. Laban said, It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man.

Stay with me. So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. Then Jacob said to Laban, Give me my wife that I may go into her for my time is completed.

[3 : 43] So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. But in the evening, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob and he went into her.

Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant. And in the morning, behold, it was Leah. And Jacob said to Laban, What is this that you've done to me?

Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me? Laban said, It is not so done in our country to give the younger before the firstborn.

Complete the week of this one and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years. Jacob did so and completed her week.

Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant. So Jacob went into Rachel also and he loved Rachel more than Leah and served Laban for another seven years.

[4 : 53] Amen. This is God's word. We'll do turn to Genesis 29 and the passage we read together.

There ain't no way but the hard way. So get used to it. Last week I was quitting Led Zeppelin. This week it's the rock band Airborne.

I'm not having a midlife crisis. I'm way past that. It's just sometimes that theological truths are voiced in rather unusual places. Like in the chorus of a rock song.

There ain't no way but the hard way. That actually does express a lot of the reality of the Bible's teaching about much of the Christian life, doesn't it? Certainly Moses repeatedly taught God's people that the road to holiness was a hard road and a humbling one.

Remember how the Lord your God humbled you for 40 years in the desert, he said. As a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

[6 : 04] The New Testament tells us just the same. God disciplines us for our good, says the apostle in Hebrews 12, that we may share his holiness. Now we've seen through Genesis how God's grace works so tenaciously through his people, relentlessly to achieve his overarching purpose of salvation.

But his grace also is at work in his people to transform them for glory. God cares not just for his plans, but for his people so that they would be holy like himself to share his holiness.

But you see, that road to holiness has always, always been a hard one and a humbling one. And so the wonderful new beginning that we saw last time in Jacob's life, in his personal encounter with God at Bethel, that is just the beginning.

It's the beginning of a hard and humbling road of holiness. Without which, remember Hebrews 12 tells us, without which, no one, no one will see the Lord.

Because every true believer really is a child of God, then there is no way but the holy way for us. Because every believer in this world is still a sinner.

[7 : 27] We very rarely learn that road except through the hard way. Isn't that true? Certainly that's what this story is all about. That begins here for Jacob.

So I want to look at it as it unfolds here. From a well of discovery through a wedding of deception to reveal a work of discipline in Jacob. God has to perform if his life is going to find that true destiny God has given him in his hands.

And what Jacob discovers about himself here, you see, is I suspect what many of us need to discover about our own lives in the road to holiness that Christ calls us to.

There ain't no way but the hard way for most of us. We better get used to it. Look at verses 1 to 14. They're all about Jacob's promising discovery at the well.

And here's another story of God's marvelous providence. And the repetition of a delightful pattern here speaks about how God's marvelous providence is always at work to further his purpose of grace through his people.

[8 : 34] It's often the case, isn't it, for a new believer who's encountered God personally that sunshine is everywhere. It seems to be so evident, so exciting in their lives. And after his experience at Bethel, Jacob certainly has got a spring in his steps.

Beginning of verse 1 here says he literally went on his journey. Literally, he picked up his feet. And in verse 2, by no time at all, here we are and he is hundreds and hundreds of miles further east.

Immediately, in the place that God's promised. And look, here's a well with lots of sheep. Well, Jacob knows a great family story about a well, doesn't he? In a far country in the east.

And a wonderful wife for his father that came from it. And Moses here has actually known several stories about exciting things happening at wells. One of them actually involved Moses himself. You can read in Exodus chapter 2.

He turned up at a well where a bunch of Boorish shepherds were annoying some young women. And he played the hero and rescued them. And he got a wife out of it as well. And actually, it's something of a very similar situation here.

[9 : 38] The shepherds that we see in verse 3 here, they're not exactly the most active workers, are they? Seems like this is a heavily unionized outfit at this well. There's a huge stone over the well.

Now, that's not just to stop people falling in. That's to regulate the water supply. There was no self-service at this well. No, everybody had to wait. And everybody had to water all at the same time.

Can't have anyone getting an unfair advantage here, can we? This sort of well will go down very well in somewhere like France, I suspect, you know, where they're into that sort of thing. Anyway, Jacob, sorry if you're French here, it's no particular offense intended to you.

But Jacob, he is a traveling foreigner, and he comes along, and he tries to converse with him. He's very polite, isn't he, in verse 4? My brothers, where are you from? And they answer just quite monosyllabically, Haran.

As if to say, well, where on earth do you think we're from, you idiot? Timbuktu. This is the well of Haran. But Jacob is upbeat here, and his heart must have leapt when he heard the name Haran.

[10 : 43] That's my mother's time. I'm here. And so he blurts out, do you know Laban, Nahor's son? We know him, they say. Well, tell me about him, says Jacob.

How is he? Tell me about the family. He's oozing with excitement. He's desperate to know. Verse 6. It's well with him. He's fine. It's a bit like, maybe a bit like somebody from Glasgow going through to Edinburgh and standing at a bus stop trying to strike up a conversation with somebody, and you're all chatty and all of that, and the person from Edinburgh just looks at the bus and goes, hmm?

I'm from Edinburgh, by the way, so I'm insulting myself here. And so they say to him, look, there's Laban's girl. Go and annoy her with your questions. Ask her. And I think Jacob's getting frustrated here.

You can sense it. So he tries one last time in verse 7. Why aren't you guys working? Why are you wasting the day? Why not just water your sheep? Get on with the work. And you see in verse 8, that goes down like a lead balloon.

Well, we can't do that because we've got rules here. And the way we do things here is not like that. We wait for everyone.

[11 : 58] And then we water the sheep. That's the way we've always done it here. That's the way it stays. All right? Yeah, that's what they're saying. Actually, there's a very important point here because Jacob's prowess and his entrepreneurial spirit in managing livestock, that's something that's become very important as we read on in this story.

But anyway, while he's still speaking with them, look at verse 9, here comes Rachel with her father's sheep. And wow, what an effect she has on Jacob. Look at verse 10. He springs into action. Not that she told anything yet about her, are we?

But we can guess. She's a stunning woman. But more than that, she's Laban's daughter. And these are Laban's sheep. See how verse 10, he keeps saying Laban's name.

What is he saying to us? This is God's doing. God's hand of providence has brought him to this very place that his parents have sent him off to. So Jacob decides to show these shepherds now how a real man gets to work.

Look, he's single-handed. He breaks the picket line and he rolls this huge stone aside. There's a big health and safety notice on that stone saying not to be moved by less than five men once a day.

[13 : 06] But Jacob just goes there, takes the thing off, and look, before you know it, he's watered the whole of Laban's flock. Who does he remind you of? His mother, the ten camel woman, remember? Chapter 24.

Now obviously he's eager to impress Rachel, but above all I think he's willing to show, isn't he, his worth as a valuable man, a worker, somebody with resources. And it worked because Rachel runs home to tell Laban and Laban immediately runs out to meet Jacob.

Why does he do that? Well, of course he remembers, doesn't he, the last time somebody came from this family far away, what did they bring with him? Camel loads of gold and jewels and gifts and all kinds of things.

But not this time. Look at verse 13. Jacob told Laban all these things. And no doubt he had to explain his relative penury, his lack of means.

I don't know how much of the story of what's gone before he did tell them. I suspect it was a fairly sanitized version. But he was obviously very keen, wasn't he, to show himself as a worthy relative.

[14 : 11] He wanted Laban's daughter in marriage. That was a big part of his whole mission. And it seems at first that everything is absolutely wonderful. He's accepted as part of the family, verse 14.

He stays a whole month in safety and in comfort. Jacob's faith surely at this point is buoyant. It seems that God's presence is manifesting with him.

It seems everything is unfolding wonderfully according to plan and he's rejoicing in that. Some of the commentators like to slam Jacob here.

They like to contrast this scene with chapter 24. Oh, in chapter 24, Abraham's servant prayed at every point. Abraham's servant set a character test and all the rest of it.

Oh, he's only interested in this beautiful girl, Rachel, so he's unspiritual. I think it's really rather overly pious. It seems to me that the overwhelming thing that we're supposed to see here isn't a contrast with chapter 24 but it's a similarity.

[15 : 14] God's same marvelous providence is bringing delight to Jacob's heart just as he brought delight to Abraham's servant and to Jacob's father, Isaac. And just as God so often delights to our hearts when we're new to faith.

Isn't that so? Maybe you're a new Christian. Haven't you felt like Jacob here in chapter 29, verse 11 very often? Weeping tears of joy, tears of happiness at what God's done in your life.

Or perhaps you can think back to when you first found Christ. That's how you felt, isn't it? That's evidence here of Jacob expressing his joy at God's goodness in his life.

He's praising God for what he's done. He just built an altar, remember. He's just offered vows to God. And now he's weeping with joy.

But just because he doesn't use exactly the same words in prayer as Abraham's servant did, just because he doesn't use the right evangelical language, somehow some people think he's unspiritual.

[16 : 16] Sometimes Christians can be very wooden, very sanctimonious. It's just unnatural, isn't it? No, Jacob is full of joy. He's rejoicing in God's marvelous providence.

It's full of joy. It is calling to be part of God's great redemptive purpose. But notice, there is a difference from chapter 24.

Despite all the joy, we haven't yet heard a word, have we, about marriage. And Jacob isn't here with all kinds of gold and gifts to offer to Laban.

He's made a great entrance into Haran by rolling away the stone, but as one writer says, there are many huge obstacles to be rolled away before he can return to his land in peace. And one of the biggest of those obstacles is going to be his uncle Laban.

And we see that, don't we, in the next scene from verses 15 to 30. It's all focused on Laban's painful deception at the eventual wedding.

[17 : 19] And here's a story, not of God's marvelous providence, but of the very mysterious providence of God. Again, it's a story of repetition, but this time, repetition of a deceitful plot.

And it speaks of God's mysterious providence which is always also at work to further his purposes of grace in, in his chosen people.

God's providence does delight us, it does hearten us, it does bring us, many times, tears of joy. But God's providence will also discipline us and humble us.

And sometimes that will lead to tears of real pain, won't it? The pain of sharing in the calling of a people who are called to be holy. Only a humbled people can be a holy people.

And here's the thing, humility, especially for able men, especially for gifted men. Humility usually only comes a very hard way.

[18 : 27] And in Laban here, Jacob had certainly met his match, hadn't he? Laban was a man with his eye very firmly on the main chance always. And look at verse 14, wasn't it true?

You, Jacob, are bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. Boy, these two men were absolutely peas from the same pod. They were both very smooth, very manipulating.

But here's the thing, Laban had been at this game a lot longer than Jacob and in this situation, he very firmly had the upper hand. And so, in verse 15, what you see is Laban knows that the con is on.

And he starts roping in his mark, his victim. And in Jacob, Laban has a perfect victim, doesn't he? Because he's shown his old cards to Laban already. Laban knows full well that he's fallen head over heels in love with Rachel.

He knows that he needs from him his daughter as a wife. And he also knows that Jacob is penniless. He's got no dairy money. So he's ripe for the picking.

[19 : 30] So in verse 15, he says, well, let's talk about wages, Jacob. And it sounds, doesn't it, like he's being very generous. Should you serve me for nothing? But actually, his words here are quite ambiguous.

If he was really being generous, what he would have said is, well, nephew, you are part of our family. So I'm going to invite you into the family firm as a partner. We'll work together.

That's not what he says, is it? He's going to exploit him as a servant, paying him just wages. And that word serve, by the way, is a very key term all the way through the story of Jacob's time in Haran.

Seven times, you read it just in this passage alone. Jacob becomes an indentured servant, virtually a slave to Laban. And the Israelites hearing this story the first time would certainly shudder at that word because it's the word that was used of them as slaves, bond servants in Egypt.

So name your wages, says Laban. What's Jacob going to say? Do you think Laban suspects? I think Laban knows exactly the sort of thing Jacob's going to say.

[20 : 39] But first, what's this in verse 16? Moses is a great storyteller, isn't he? We're all thinking what's going to happen with Jacob and Rachel and so on?

And all of a sudden, here's a twist. Oh, it's not just Rachel. There's two sisters. There's an older sister called Leah and oh dear. Poor Leah isn't a stunner like Rachel.

In fact, what we're being told in verse 17 really is that poor Leah is quite ugly. Nobody really knows what was wrong with her eyes. Don't think it means her sight was bad. Maybe she had cross-eyed or something.

But whatever it is, telling us that she's got funny eyes is a kind of polite way of saying she really wasn't very attractive. And that was a problem for her, but it was also a big problem for Laban because Laban would find it very hard to get a daughter like that married off.

So when Jacob comes to him with verse 18, you can almost hear the cogs whirring in Laban's head, can't you? Wow, this is a win-win for me, he's thinking. I can get seven years work out of Jacob and because he's a foreigner and because he has no idea about our marriage customs, I can dump Leah on him and I can kill two birds with one stone.

[21 : 59] Look at how crookedly Laban deals with Jacob here. What does he reply? Verse 19. He doesn't say, does he? Oh yes, Rachel will be yours.

He just says, better I give her to you than some other man. He doesn't say yes to Jacob's request. He doesn't mention Rachel's name either, does he? Just her.

But he does say yes to the seven years of free labor. And that's a huge price by the way to pay. The law of Moses set an absolute maximum bride price of 50 shekels.

That's in Deuteronomy 22. And that was about three years worth of pay, we know. Often it was actually a lot less than that. But Laban doesn't say to Jacob, oh dear boy, seven years, that's outrageous.

The normal three will be fine. And in fact, because you're a family, let's cut it down to one and a half or two at the most. He doesn't say that. He wants the full seven. And he kept him to it, verse 20.

[22 : 59] And again, Deuteronomy chapter 15, the law of Moses is explicit that any indentured laborer must be released after six years of labor. And no, he wants the full seven.

It's heartless exploitation. But look at the second half of verse 20. Here's a verse definitely designed to appeal to women. They seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

Isn't that romantic? I bet if he'd written that in a card for Rachel giving it to her, she'd have framed it and had it on the wall. Gentlemen, on your next wedding anniversary, if you want a really good time, you write to your wife a card that says, we've been married 35 years but it seems just like a day because of my love for you.

I guarantee you that's worth your while. So I'm told anyway, I know nothing of these things but the Bible's very realistic, isn't it? It understands how to draw us into the story as men and as women.

And actually verse 21 is a verse that the men will certainly understand. After seven years there's no beating about the bush with Jacob here. Give me my wife. Maybe he is getting suspicious of Laban.

[24 : 15] There's a bit of a note of desperation there but he's certainly desperate to have Rachel. I want to go into her, he says. We know what that means. I want her bodily. I don't want just the thought of her anymore.

That's natural. That's right, isn't it? Seven years is a long, long time to wait. In our day to day people don't wait seven days, do they? Before they jump into bed together.

Jacob survived seven years. Far too long. And by the way, just in the passing, let me say that that is why long, long engagements are a very bad idea.

Sometimes people inflict that upon themselves because they think, oh, we've got to save up for the dream fairy wedding. Sometimes, dare I say, it's the parents who want young people to save up for years and years or for them to wait years and years.

You're putting an awful lot of pressure on young people. Certainly don't be engaged for seven years. But Jacob somehow managed this Herculean task.

[25 : 14] But he was counting and at last he really feels things are looking up and he thinks, this is going to be so great. Give me my wife that may go into her because my time's completed.

He was a happy man at that point. But again, notice, Laban doesn't answer him. Verse 22. But he does arrange a wedding.

He does it all properly and publicly. He made a feast. Verse 22. And by the way, that is a word that implies that there'll be not only plenty of good food but plenty of good wine as well.

And that may well explain, partly at least, what follows. This was a great celebration. And it culminates in Laban giving his daughter, who of course would be fully veiled in the culture, giving his daughter to Jacob.

And off they go into the darkness of that bridal chamber. And it looks like everything is as it should be. The father gives a wedding gift of a maid servant to his daughter.

[26 : 19] It's all wonderful. And Jacob was absolutely, surely on cloud nine. And the next morning, verse 25, as he awoke, rubbed asleep from his eyes, rolled over to gaze into the eyes of his beloved.

Behold. Which we could probably translate here. Ah! It was Leah.

And smiling sheepishly back at him wasn't the love of his life. But it was the poor, ugly sister Leah. I'm sure that's not the first time.

I'm sure it won't be the last time that a man wakes up next to someone who the night before he thought was a wonderful goddess when he had a pretty big drink in him, but discovered something very different the next morning.

But here you see it was something utterly devastating, wasn't it, for Jacob. What have you done to me? He shouts at Laban. What have you done to me? But Laban, you see, is as cool and calculating as ever.

[27 : 34] Oh! Don't forget to mention the way we do things here. We like our traditions, don't we? Remember? The well and all that.

Sorry, I thought you were a very intelligent sort of chap. I thought you would grasp that, but don't worry. Don't spoil the rest of the week. There's a wedding to celebrate. We don't want glum faces around.

Keep it sweet. Then you can have Rachel too. For another seven years, of course. And Jacob had no choice, did he? He'd been absolutely had. And so verse 30 tells us he gets Rachel.

But all the joy of that discovery is embittered, isn't it, about the pain of that deception. And this time, you can be certainly sure that the seven years of slavery felt exactly like that.

Bitter, hard labor. Verse 30, he had Rachel. He loved her. He loved her, not more than Leah, but rather than Leah.

[28 : 37] Because he'd never loved Leah. And as Derek Kipmer puts it, the story ends with the very embodiment of anticlimax, a miniature of man's disillusion experience from Eden onwards.

And we'll come in due course to the consequences of all of that in this household as the story unfolds with more and more misery as the years go on. But for now, we need to ask the question, don't we, what is God doing?

What is going on here? What's happening? That must have been what Jacob was saying. That is a question we often find ourselves asking, don't we? And things seem to go utterly wrong.

What's going on? What is God doing? Well, God doesn't speak in this story, does he? At least not audibly. He doesn't appear. But he is present with Jacob just as he promised, but just not in the way that Jacob envisaged.

And the text does explain it to us. Subtly, yes. But very, very clearly. The whole story with its echoes of the delightful pattern at the well in the past, but also with its echo of the deceptive plot that Jacob himself had been involved in in the past, that's telling us what this is all about.

[30 : 00] It's telling us that Jacob's promising discovery at the well and Laban's painful deception is all part of God's purposeful discipline at work in Jacob's life.

God's providence is at work around Jacob's life to discipline him, to humble him, and to transform him by grace for his good so that he will share God's holiness.

Let me just try to draw together what Moses' message is for his people and what the Holy Spirit's message, therefore, is for us as he's preserved this in the Bible for us. First of all, it's very clear, isn't it?

He wants us to see that all sin hurts. That we don't have power over our sins, but our sin can very easily have power over us and it will haunt us and it will hurt us and it will harm us, especially, especially where those sins are relational sins.

Sins against other people. Sins particularly against people who are close to us. They can have a terrible entail of hurt, can't they? Consequences that will dog us long, long into the future.

[31 : 14] There's no getting away for that, is there? Not in this story, but we know also in our own lives too. Jacob fell under Laban's power because of what he had done to Esau and to his own father.

Remember? He wouldn't have been there otherwise, would he? He certainly wouldn't have been at Laban's mercy. And remember, Isaac's favoritism of Esau, that at least in part led to what happened in chapter 27.

And that's now breeding Jacob's favoritism of Rachel over Leah. As we'll see, that tension breaks out years later in the story of Joseph. And in the end, we'll nearly break old Jacob's heart when he's old and near death.

What does the Apostle James say? We're all tempted by our own self-desire. And desire, he says, when it's conceived gives birth to sin.

And sin, when it's fully grown, brings forth death. Don't be deceived, my brothers. God is not mocked, says the Apostle Paul.

[32 : 21] You reap what you sow in life. Sin hurts. Sin will hurt you. And sin will hurt those that you love. And the sins of God's people hurt God's people the most.

And then go on hurting them for a long, long, long time. So don't deceive yourself. Sin hurts, always. But don't despair either because in God's hands, secondly, the sin that hurts can humble us.

Things aren't out of control in this story, nor are they out of control in your life or in my life. When the joy of God's marvelous problems suddenly turns into the pain of his mysterious providence.

God will actually use even our sins and the devastating consequences of our sins. He'll use them to discipline us, to humble us because we're his children and because he loves us.

And he'll allow some of the disasters that our sin sets in motion, he'll allow it sometimes to roll on in ways that really will horrify us, not because he hates us, not because he's punishing us, but because he loves us.

[33 : 35] And through that painful process, he's purifying us and perfecting us. And he's doing that for our everlasting blessing. Can you believe that?

Friends, that is what God is telling us plainly here and in many places in his word. He led you in the wilderness 40 years. He let you hunger to humble you, says Moses.

Because as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you. He disciplines us for our good, says the apostle, that we may share his holiness.

For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant. Of course. But later, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness. He disciplines those that he loves as his true sons and daughters.

And no discipline, no discipline is pleasant. It's always painful. And the reason so much of it is deeply and desperately painful is that very often it involves God humbling us by confronting us with our own sinfulness face to face, up close and personal.

[34 : 50] Because that's often only the way that we will see the truth that God can see and that others can often see but we can hardly ever see. And it really humbles us, it floors us when that happens. It snuffs out our pride, our presumption, our self-righteousness.

Isn't that exactly what confronts Jacob in this story? Look at verse 25. Look what he says. You have deceived me. And as soon as those words came out of his mouth, don't you think he felt that hit in the stomach that you feel when you know that you've been exposed?

Jacob, the great deceiver, deceived, hit by the misery that he inflicted on his father, that he inflicted on his brother.

Remember, he deceived his father through a veiled identity in the dark when he'd had a good meal and plenty of wine. Do you remember? And look at verse 26.

It rubs it in even further. Now, Jacob, in our country, in our culture, we don't supplant the rights of the firstborn. No matter how superior the younger one thinks they are.

[36 : 03] Do you see what God's doing with Jacob through Laban's treachery? He's holding a mirror up to Jacob, isn't he? He's saying, have a look, Jacob. Do you see? Do you see yourself? I'm showing you you.

Do you like what you see, Jacob? Are you proud of what you see? This is the man, Jacob, that I came down the stairway from heaven at Bethel to bless. Do you deserve my promise?

Do you deserve my blessing? It's very painful, isn't it? It's devastating when something like that happens here. I wonder if it's ever happened to you. And God's faced you with your sin just like that.

Behold, you're the man, like Nathan said to King David. And God does that to us sometimes, but thank God that he does because in his infinite mercy he uses even our sins, even sins that harm and hurt, and he uses them for good to humble us, to discipline us, because he loves us, and because he is determined to transform us from what we were so that we will share his holiness.

And it's painful. It's deeply painful. Deeply painful for Jacob here to be faced with a reality about himself, about his own heart. It was deeply painful for Simon Peter.

[37 : 25] Do you remember when Jesus turned and stared at him? And suddenly Peter realized what he'd done in denying Jesus three times. And he ran off. Just as it was painful for him again.

Do you remember after the resurrection on the beach when Jesus made him face up to it again three times standing by that fire of coals just like he denied him on that night and said to him, Peter, three times, do you love me?

Do you love me? Do you love me? But Jesus is a great sin therapist. And even out of our greatest sins he works discipline to humble us.

Because in his hands even the sin that hurts can humble us and therefore it can work holiness in us. That we might share his holiness.

That means so that we can become like Jesus himself. that's what God was doing here with Jacob. Remember I said the word serve is so prominent in these stories.

[38 : 35] Why is that? Well, Jacob was being taught to become a servant. And there's great irony of course isn't there? Because the promise of God was that the older Esau would serve the younger Jacob.

But here's Jacob serving as a servant to Laban. But that's the point isn't it? Because you see in God's economy his chosen seed the one whom all will serve is the one who will humble himself and become the servant of all.

Even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve said Jesus. And you see Jacob was the chosen seed in his generation. God's servant. The Lord's anointed one.

He was to be the focus of God's blessing. He was to be honored by everybody. Jacob in a very real sense did hold the keys to Bethel. The keys to the gate of heaven.

The blessing of God was to come through him. And so he had to learn how to be the true servant of God. To share in his holiness you see.

[39 : 39] And friends that's the way it is for those who will be true servants of Jesus in every age. That's the way it is and must be for all the true seed of Abraham. All who in Jesus Christ will serve with him and reign with him.

Jacob's not the only person to have needed a Laban in his life. Where's God in the midst of all this terrible injustice that I'm facing from these people?

Oh Lord please take this terrible Laban person out of my life. See we might find ourselves praying like that mightn't we? But maybe you see just maybe when we are the Lord is teaching us something about our own sin and our own self.

He's maybe holding up a mirror to us. And he's saying to us that pain that you feel about those people gossiping about you that's just like that terrible pain that those others felt when you were gossiping about them.

Do you remember? Or that pain when you feel because people are telling lies about you and besmirching your name well now you understand how those people felt when the shoe was on the other foot and you were the perpetrator.

[41 : 01] And if you see God's holding up his mirror to us like that painful as it is he's doing that because he loves us and he wants to humble us to make us like the Lord Jesus so that we will share his true and holy humanness.

It's painful. It cannot not be for sinful people. There ain't no way but the hard way for us because we're sinners. It's never going to be pleasant. But we need to get used to it because if we are real Christians and because God does love us we are going to experience both his marvelous providence but also we're going to experience his mysterious providence.

He will delight us. He will hearten us. But he will also discipline us and humble us. Those whom I love I reprove and discipline said the risen Lord Jesus.

Remember to the church in Laodicea. So be zealous and repent he said. Behold I'm standing at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come into him and I'll come in and do just that.

It'll be hard and it will be terribly humbling. That's the only road of holiness with our God and without that none of us will see him and he wants us to see him and he's determined that we shall see him and he's determined that on that day when we do see him we will be like him because he's led us on the hard and humbling road of real holiness.

[42 : 55] Well let's pray. Heavenly Father we find it so easy to look at others and see the sin so so hard to see our own and it is so painful when you hold up your own mirror to us but we thank you that you do so that we might be those who grow in faith and love and grace so that we might know more and more of your salvation and so that we might become like you to help us we pray lead us firmly along that road and help us to help one another for the glory of our Savior Jesus Christ Amen