

(Genesis) 47 - the Stirring Up of Jacob's Nest

by S. Lewis Johnson

God calls Jacob to leave Haran to deepen his spiritual life and to fulfill the Abrahamic promises, and Jacob's response and decision are guided by God's presence and provision.

Duration: 45:08

Scripture: Genesis 31:11-55, Deuteronomy 32:11-12, Matthew 6:33, Hebrews 13:5

Topics: "Jacob"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by acknowledging the length of the chapter being discussed, which is 55 verses long. He then reads excerpts from chapter 31 and mentions that he will cover the entire chapter in his message. The sermon focuses on the story of Jacob and Laban, specifically highlighting the covenant made between them and the covenant sacrifice and feast that followed. The speaker also draws parallels between the story and the spiritual life of believers, emphasizing the need to step out of our comfort zones and learn new things about God.

Transcript

This morning we have a large chapter to consider in our exposition. It's 55 verses long and so I'm going to take the liberty in the scripture reading of reading just a few excerpts from chapter 31 and then in the message I will try to make some further effort at covering the entire chapter. But let's turn to Genesis chapter 31 and let me read a few verses beginning with the first verse for our scripture reading.

Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's son saying, Jacob has taken away all that was our fathers and from what belonged to our father he has made all this wealth. And Jacob saw the attitude of Laban and behold it was not friendly toward him as formerly. Then the Lord said to Jacob, return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives and I will be with you.

So Jacob said and called Rachel and Leah to his flock in the field and said to them, I see your father's attitude that it is not friendly toward me as formerly but the God of my father has been with me and you know that I have served your father with all my strength. Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. However, God did not allow him to hurt me.

If he spoke thus, the speckle shall be your wages then all the flock brought forth speckled. And if he spoke thus, the striped shall be your wages then all the flock brought forth striped. Thus God has taken away your father's livestock and given them to me.

And it came about at the time when the flock were mating that I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream and behold the male goats which were mating were striped, speckled 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 now your eyes and see that all the male goats which are mating are striped, speckled and mottled for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. I am the God of Bethel where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to me. Now arise, leave this land and return to the land of your birth.

Notice incidentally then in verse 11 references made to the angel of God, but when the angel speaks in verse 13 he says, I am the God of Bethel. It is another one of the theophanies of the Old Testament designed to prepare Israel for the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The angel of God or the angel of Jehovah is a reference to the Lord Jesus who carried on ministry before he became incarnate in the virgin's womb and through the birth in Bethlehem.

Now in the remaining verses here, verses 14 through 21, Rachel and Leah express their agreement with Jacob in his desire to leave and Rachel also steals the household gods from Laban her father. Then in verse 22 we read, when it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, then he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him a distance of seven days journey and he overtook him in the hill country of Gilead. God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream of the night and said to him, be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad.

And Laban caught up with Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country and Laban with his kinsmen camped in the hill country of Gilead. Then Laban said to Jacob, what have you done by deceiving me and carrying away? What have you done by deceiving me and carrying away my daughters like captives of the sword? Why did you flee secretly and deceive me and did not tell me so that I might have sent you away with joy and with songs, with timbrel and with lyre and did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters.

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 speak either good or bad to Jacob. And now you have indeed gone away because you longed greatly for your father's house, but why did you steal my gods? Then Jacob answered and said to Laban, because I was afraid for I said, lest you would take your daughters from me by force.

Now he's not making an excuse for stealing the gods, but rather for fleeing. He doesn't know at this point that the gods have been stolen by his wife, Rachel. The one with whom you find your gods shall not live.

In the presence of our kinsmen, point out what is yours among my belongings and take it for yourself. For Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them. Now the next few verses describe the search and the failure to find anything and we read in verse 36, then Jacob became angry and contended with Laban and Jacob answered and said to Laban, what is my transgression? What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me? Though 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 too.

These twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten the rams of your flocks. That which was torn of beasts, I did not bring to you.

I bore the loss of it myself. You required it of my hand, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. Thus I was.

By day the heat consumed me and the frost 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 changed my wages ten times.

If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac had not been for me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the toil of my hands. So he rendered judgment last night.

The remainder of the chapter is the record of the covenant made, suggested by Laban, made between Laban and Jacob, and also of the covenant sacrifice and the feast that followed. And then in the final verse we read, And early in the morning Laban arose and kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Moses, the great lawgiver, in his final words to the nation, gave them some instruction that has been called the Song of Moses. And in that Song of Moses he said to the nation Israel, As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings.

So the Lord alone did lead him, that is Israel, and there was no strange God with him. In these words there is a clue to the strange ways of God with men. And we want to look at that this morning as we consider the subject, the stirring up of Jacob's nest.

Those who have studied eagles know that eagles have some very interesting little habits and little ways of teaching the young eaglets how to fly. Eagles and their young like to stay in the nest for a considerable period of time, but the time comes when the little birds must be thrust forth from the nest. And so the result is that the eagles destroy the nests and then push the little birds out.

And as they fall out into the air, not realizing that they have the capacity to fly, they have to learn by the experience of fear and then of the mother's help that they do have it within them to fly and to make their way along in the air. So the result is that as they fall, the mothers catch the eagles and then drop them again and then catch them and drop them until finally they're able to fly for themselves. It's a beautiful parable of human life and it also has some application to the spiritual life of believers.

It is characteristic of all of us to want to stay in the old home, to be around the same people, and to live in the same general type of atmosphere in which we have grown up. But the time comes when it's necessary for us to make our way on our own. In spiritual things it is like that too.

And it's necessary for us from time to time to be thrust out of the comfortable surroundings of our particular spiritual existence in order that we might learn some new things about our great God. One of the greatest things that happens to a Christian is the experience that God brings into his life that forces him like the little eaglets to learn to fly for himself, realizing always that underneath are the everlasting arms. Now Jacob, it appears, was afflicted with a great deal of contentment at this time.

He had been in Heron for about twenty years. He had now become a part of that part of the country. He had a family now with wives and children, and he had large flocks.

He had become a successful rancher. And the result was, like Ulysses and his crews, or Ulysses and his crews, he was in danger of forgetting the land of his birth. The thing that was happening to Jacob was the thing that often happens to us as believers.

God has called us to be strangers and sojourners here upon this earth, every one of us. And the tendency of each of us is to plant our feet firmly upon the present ground upon which we are standing, in the present life in which we are living, and to want to stay there, and to lose the pilgrim spirit, to lose the sense of a life in which we are truly trusting God moment by moment. Jacob had become occupied with his possessions.

He also has now become afflicted with wives who are, to some extent, idolatrous, as is evident from this very account. And in addition, he had other things that were keeping him tied to this life instead of pressing on to the life that God desired for him to have. He was living in a foreign land.

So what happens to Jacob is what is often the thing that happens to us. God must, like the loving eagle, thrust his little eaglet forth in order that he might learn some further things about the life that was intended for him. So Jacob must be pushed from this contented nest, or this nest of contentment in which he was living, and from the inferior spiritual life which he has been living, in order that he might truly become what God intends for him to become, as we shall see in the latter chapters of this book, Israel, the prince with God.

Now through it all, you can notice the thing that is encouraging for anyone who is, like Jacob, thrust by God into unusual experiences. There is underneath Jacob all the time the divine care, or the providence. Providence is a word that means literally to see beforehand.

And so the providence of God is that power of God by which he, able to see beforehand, cares for his children in the experiences that they undergo. Back in Genesis chapter 28 at Bethel, God had given Jacob the fundamental promise. In the fifteenth verse of that chapter, Behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land.

For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. Now the experiences of Jacob's life looked at from the divine standpoint are experiences in which God undertakes for him constantly. In the third verse of the thirty-first chapter, the chapter that we are looking at this morning, the Lord said to Jacob, Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.

And then, of course, when Laban takes out after Jacob in order to run him down and to do harm to him, it is God who intercepts Laban and warns him that he is not to do anything that is to harm Jacob and his family in any way. It's important for us to know that when we are thrust forth into experiences designed by God to deepen our spiritual life, we have the rest or we have the sense of the providence of God undergirding us. If I were to be asked what would be the greatest thing that could happen to Believer's Chapel, I think I would have to reply, the greatest thing that could happen to Believer's Chapel would be for the congregation to have the experience that Jacob has in this chapter of being thrust forth into a new experience in order that there might be development and growth, growth into a new plane of spiritual living.

It seems to me that in so many of our evangelical churches, we tend to reach a certain pattern of spiritual living, almost a certain plane of spiritual living, and then we seem to be satisfied. And Sunday after Sunday and week and month after month, year after year, we seem to make no progress at all. The greatest thing that could happen to us would be for God to thrust us forth and force us to make some new

advances in the Christian life, resting of course in the enabling power of God through them.

Well Jacob now has been twenty years in Laban's land and God thinks that it's time to leave and so does Laban. He thinks it's time for Jacob to leave too. In fact, there is working in the heart of Jacob a kind of noble discontent, a kind of noble restlessness with the life that he is living.

That's expressed back in chapter 30 and verse 25 where we read that Jacob said to Laban, Laban send me away that I may go to my own place and to my own country. And then on top of that, the sons of Laban had become jealous and envious of Jacob because of the blessing that God had given to him. And they began to complain that Jacob was stealing things from Laban.

That of course was untrue. And Jacob also noticed that the attitude of Laban had changed. Formerly he greeted him by, with a big hearty handshake and a mouth full of teeth, but that seems to be gone now.

He notices that Laban no longer is as friendly as he formerly had been. It's all very wrong so far as Jacob is concerned. He had spent 14 underpaid years working for Laban.

And in addition, Laban had taken advantage of him in many other ways. He had changed his wages 10 times. So you can see that he had suffered a great deal.

Laban is one of those kinds of men that afflict many of our churches. He was the kind of man who had a second-hand religion. He could talk a lot about the Lord God, but at the same time he could do many things that indicated that he was not a true believer at all.

He, his religion is a kind of second-hand religion, a mixture of truth and error, a blending of the consciousness of the divine presence. But at the same time he has a belief in the terrafim, or a belief in images. We have a lot of people like that in our churches.

They attend church on Sunday morning. They acknowledge that there is a God. They say they believe in God, but their lives reflect an idolatry that is directly contradictory to the other things that they profess.

So Laban is that kind of man and you will see that kind of thing in him through this chapter. But it is God's voice that finally stirs Jacob effectually. And we read in the third verse, return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives and I will be with you.

This is God's voice stirring up his little eaglet. The Bethel promises are renewed. He promises that he will be with him.

And did you notice too that it is God who is responsible for the leading. One of the greatest blessings of the Christian life is the assurance that it is God who leads us. We do not really have to find the will of God for us, for he reveals his will to us.

He leads us. Our responsibility is to follow. We do not have to seek his leading.

He constantly leads. The characteristic of the children of God is that they are led by the Holy Spirit. We are constantly led by him.

Our responsibility is simply to recognize what he is doing. And God speaks to Jacob and says, Jacob, now it is time for you to go on back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives. For remember, underneath all of these experiences of Jacob there are those fundamental Abrahamic promises that through Abraham

and his seed, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, all the families of the earth are to be blessed.

Jacob is a wise man in some ways and very unwise in other ways, but he was wise here because he called a little conference of his family. He called for Leah and Rachel and he said, let's go out in the field and have a little conference over some matters that God has brought to my attention. And when he's there, he acknowledges God's blessing in the midst of his troubles.

Incidentally, that's the first step in overcoming troubles. He argues his case with his wives in order to persuade them to follow him as he goes back to the land. For after all, they were Laban's daughters and so they must make a decision.

It is either Jacob or Laban. His argument is in the form of three contrasts. First of all, he argues based upon Laban's displeasure and God's pleasure.

He says in the fifth verse, I see your father's attitude that it is not friendly toward me as formerly, but the God of my father has been with me. So you can see your father is displeased, but God is pleased with me. Then he argues based, argues with an argument based upon the craftiness of Laban.

An unwearied kind of craftiness is over against the unwearied protection of God. He says, you know that I've served your father with all my strength, yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. However, God did not allow him to hurt me.

And then he says, take a look at the diminishing flocks of Laban, and then take a look at the multiplying flocks that God has given me. He says, if he spoke thus, the speckled shall be your wages, then all the flock brought forth speckled. And if he spoke thus, the striped shall be your wages, then all the flock brought forth striped.

Thus God, notice he attributed to God, thus God has taken away your father's livestock and given them to me. This is a rather interesting thing and Jacob refers to the dream that he had seen. In the dream he had seen the animals in heat and mating by the water troughs, and on the basis of that he had devised his little schemes that we read about in the preceding chapter.

One of the commentators explains what happens in this way. The actual animals that mated were not ring streaked, speckled, and spotted at all, but were animals in the solid color flock belonging to Laban. The meaning of the dream is quite plainly that these animals were heterozygous rather than homozygous, carrying the particular genes for streaks, spots, and speckles, even though their own coats were all solid color.

God could see into the gene structure, though Jacob could not, and he knew the true nature of the animals. So Jacob learned from this experience in which he sought to follow what he saw in the dream that God was really with him. Now then, he calls for a decision and we read in verse 14 that Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, do we still have any portion or inheritance in our father's house? Are we not reckoned by him as foreigners? Someone has said, reputation is what people think we are, character is what we really are.

Now Jacob calls for a decision, and based upon reputation, one might have thought perhaps they might decide for Laban, but they decide for Jacob, because there was something fundamentally right about Jacob in the midst of all of his wrongness, whereas there was something fundamentally wrong about Laban in the midst of some of the things that were right about him. And so they say, he's treated us as

foreigners, he sold us, he's entirely consumed our purchase price, he's taken our diary, so to speak, and he's used it for himself. And so they side with Jacob.

Laban pays the hidden price of all covetousness. Ultimately, covetousness means that we lose what we think that we have gained, and he has now lost his daughters and also his grandchildren, who are referred to here. Well, they decide to make a hasty journey, and in the midst of the decision to make the journey, it is Rachel who steals the household idols that were her father's.

These little teraphim were small idols, usually only several inches high, although there have been found some that were quite a bit larger. They were very valuable, were often made out of very precious metals, and so they were worth something in themselves. But they also signified some things that were significant as well.

They signified, it is thought by some, that the person who possessed them had certain rights of inheritance. The Newsy tablets suggest this, and consequently some have thought that Rachel stole those because she wanted rights of inheritance. But at any rate, she did, and when Laban is away from their home, Jacob gathers his flocks together and his family together, and hurriedly makes his way back to the west, to his homeland.

Well, three days later, Laban finds out about it. It was a simple matter for Laban to overtake Jacob, because he, of course, had his large flocks and also his large family. And so Laban, after a journey of about seven days, overtook Jacob.

But a surprising thing happened. God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream of the night and said to him, be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad. And here again, divine protection aids Jacob.

Incidentally, this is a most edifying, I think, illustration of an important principle in the Christian life. Have you ever noticed that when a person comes to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, out of a life of unbelief, that there is immediately trouble and strife among friends and family? Have you ever noticed that? That's always true. There is always a fierce struggle that takes place when a person becomes a believer, in the midst of companions and friends and relatives who are unbelievers.

It's the same fierce struggle in the spiritual sphere that takes place between the Lord and Satan. And it's carried out in the midst of the human sphere. So here is a believer who is anxious to make a separation between himself and the worldly unsaved people of the East and go back home where Jehovah is honored.

And a fierce struggle ensues with the family, friends, material interests fighting to keep the Christian from identifying himself wholly with the Lord. The world pursues after the Christian who wants to make a decision for the things of God, struggles with that Christian, seeks to persuade him not to make that foolish decision. It asks us why we are not content to abide with the world.

What is wrong with the world? It also professes its willingness to honor our particular religion. In fact, we'll have a feast together and we'll have joy and song and timbrel and lyre. As Laban says with reference to Jacob when he catches up with him, it appeals to our feelings and asks us why we are so cruel in separating ourselves from the world.

Often the world accuses us of arrogance because we have attributed our salvation to the Lord God and affirm that we have come to know him whom to know is eternal life. And then of course finally it reproaches us with our inconsistencies which are many of course because the doctrine of sanctification is a doctrine that has to do with our Christian living and we are all in the process of being sanctified. There are many inconsistencies in the lives of all of the saints and it is easy for the worldling to pick out some inconsistency in the life of a believer.

And so we are reproached with the inconsistencies and Jacob was too. Why have you stolen my gods? But that struggle is an important struggle and if you have come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ you will know exactly what I mean because there is a struggle immediately with the world. Often when a husband becomes a Christian there is a struggle with his wife.

When a father and mother become Christians there are struggles with children. When children become Christians there are struggles that take place between the children and the parents. And frequently there are businessmen who come to faith in Christ and there are struggles with their employers and even their employees or their friends, the persons with whom they do business.

There is a fierce struggle. The world always fights under the direction of the evil spirit to keep the believer within the circle of its own influence in order that we might not identify ourselves with the Lord God. It's not surprising then that Laban pursues after Jacob.

Now he didn't like Jacob. He was not friendly to him. But there was some moving force deep down within that wanted to keep this man in his presence even though he didn't like him.

It's a strange inconsistency that the world has. It wants to have the believer and have the believer one of them but it despises the believer and does not like them. Well now finally Laban overtakes Jacob and after the divine interruption.

Incidentally this is the third time that the patriarchs have a rather inglorious rescue by the Lord God. Abraham was rescued by the Lord God ingloriously when he was in the midst of sin. Isaac the same and here is Jacob following along in the paths of his fathers.

Well Laban finally comes into the presence of Jacob and in the twenty-fifth through the thirty-second verses there is a kind of stormy interview. He exaggeratedly tries to put Jacob in the worst light possible. He plays the part of an outraged parent and even a grandparent complaining that he'll not be able to see his daughters or his sons.

And of course he speaks of his grandsons there. He reminds us of a person who sends flowers to his mother on Mother's Day and then lets her do the dishes and babysit for the grandchildren throughout the years. Our big words are often expressed on certain days but the rest of our lives we live the same self-centered little lives that we have always lived.

Well Laban is like that. And then he reaches the climax of his berating of Jacob by saying, why did you steal my gods? Jacob doesn't know about that which has taken place and so we have the picture of a very tense search that is made of the tense of the individuals in Jacob's family. But you know Laban has to learn a very important lesson too.

And that is that our children usually reflect us. Now Laban was a very crafty, guileful individual. Very cunning.

And Rachel was his daughter. And so Rachel is very crafty and cunning and she is full of guile. And so Rachel outwits her own father.

And you read about it in verse 33 through verse 35 and it illustrates for us the spiritual principle, God makes the wrath of men to praise him. And so Laban suffers from his own sins. His sin of craftiness and cleverness and his own daughter outwits him.

Well Jacob has long pent up emotions. And these find expression now after it has been discovered that there is nothing wrong with Jacob's encampment so far as Jacob knows. He becomes very angry.

He contends with Laban and he says, what's my transgression? What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me? You've felt through all of my goods and what have you found of your household goods? Set it here before your kinsmen and my kinsmen that they may decide between us two. And he reminds him of what he has done for Laban. He said, twenty years I have been with you.

Your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried nor have I eaten the rams of your flocks. That which was torn of beasts I didn't bring to you. I bore the loss of it myself.

You required it of my hand whether stolen by day or stolen by night. Thus I was. By day the heat consumed me and the frost by night and my sleep fled from my eyes.

Now that last statement is one of the most interesting statements that I know of in this section of the book of Genesis. Of course Jacob is eloquently berating Laban for failure to find anything and his words pass unchallenged because Laban knows that what he is saying is really the truth. But listen to how he describes his life as a shepherd.

The life of a shepherd one might think was an easy life, but it was not. At night the temperature often went below freezing. They had nothing but some skins.

In the daytime the heat was so hot, as he expressed it here, that the heat consumed him. At night it was the cold and then they often spent a month or two out on the hills and in the pastures unable to sleep because of the necessity for caring for their animals. And so Jacob reminds Laban of what it means to be a shepherd.

Now the thing that I like about this is it reminds us what shepherding spiritually is in this life. There are lots of people who want to be a shepherd. There are men who say I want to be an elder in a local church and shepherd the flock.

There are those who say I would like to be a pastor teacher, having the gift of shepherding the flock of God and teaching the flock of God. Well this is a picture of what it is to be a shepherd of the flock of God. In the daytime it's the heat that consumes.

In the nighttime it's the frost and the cold and in the meantime no sleep at all. It's not an easy task. It's an incidental reflection of what it means to be a shepherd of the flock of God.

I don't want to discourage any of you young men who want to be shepherds but rather to encourage you, but to remind you that in shepherding the flock of God it is not an easy task. And the good shepherd is the one who is willing to bear the heat and bear the cold and bear the tiredness and ultimately to give his life for the sheep. That's the work of the good shepherd.

Jacob was a shepherd and he was a good one and he illustrates in his own life what it means to be a biblical shepherd. It's not a romantic kind of existence as it is often pictured and one only has to read the adversities of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 to realize what it means to be a shepherd of the flock of God. Well Laban evidently after Jacob's outburst thinks that it's possible that Jacob will one day return with a larger force than he has now and he might come and decide that he wants to war against me bringing Isaac and all of his possessions with him and so he decides that resignation is the thing that is most suitable and so he suggests that he and Jacob make a covenant.

And so Jacob agrees. A pillar of remembrance is set up and a pile of stones and they enter into a relationship that is a kind of blood brother relationship. And even in the covenant words however Laban suggests that Jacob is a devious kind of individual.

We read in verse 48 Laban said this heap is a witness between you and me this day therefore it was named Goliad and Mizpah for he said may the Lord watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other. If you mistreat my daughters or if you take wives beside my daughters although no man is with us see God is witness between you and me suggesting that Jacob might mistreat his daughters. And Laban said to Jacob behold this heap and behold the pillar which I have set between you and me.

This heap is a witness and the pillar is a witness that I will not pass by this heap to you for harm and you will not pass by this heap and this pillar to me for harm. The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor the God of their father judge between us. So Jacob spore by the fear of his father Isaac and then the chapter concludes with a reference to sacrifice and a feast.

Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain and called his kinsmen to the meal and they ate the meal and spent the night on the mountain. Now that I think is important too for in the midst of this chapter that tells us just the ordinary details of life we finally conclude with the two men sitting down in the relationship of enmity brought about by virtue of the shedding of the blood of sacrifice. All of course a picture of the fact that there is no peace there is no resolution of enmity apart from sacrifice and especially in spiritual things.

Without shedding of blood there is no remission. If there is no sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross there is no salvation for any individual. It is by virtue of the propitiation which has been accomplished through the bloodshed there that we are able to enter into a relationship of justification.

Therefore justified by faith we have peace with God justified through the foundational work of the blood of the cross of the Lord Jesus. So even in these simple little stories we find adumbrated the work of the Lord Jesus who is to come. So God teaches his eaglets that they must fly on their own.

The pilgrim spirit is the thing that God desires in his believers. We are pilgrims and sojourners. We are here for a time to accomplish a task.

It is not our task to build up here upon this earth great riches. It's not our task to become so attached to the earth that we cannot grow in spiritual things. I think there is also a beautiful illustration here of the principles of divine guidance.

Believers often ask how can I know the will of God? Well listen to the experience of Jacob. What happened to him? Well first of all there came a desire in his heart to go home. That was implanted there by God.

And he spoke to Laban about it. He gave utterance to his desire. Then the circumstances became favorable.

Laban's sons were jealous of Jacob. And then in addition Laban himself became unfriendly to Jacob. So that circumstances confirmed the desire that God had put in his heart.

And finally God spoke to him from his word. And generally speaking when the desire of the individual confirmed by the circumstances and the word of God takes place, we have some indication of the guidance of God in our own Christian lives. And how beautiful the divine providence over this often rebellious servant.

He loves his own, not as we so often falsely tell little children, because we are good. But he loves us in order that he might make us good by his grace. The greatest thing that could possibly happen to us would be that God should thrust some of us out of the nest of contentment which has been built for us.

That this congregation as a congregation should know something of what it is to grow spiritually. To have some new experiences. They may not be pleasant outwardly.

It was not pleasant for the little eaglets to be thrust out of their nest. To have the nest torn up by the eagle. But as they were thrust out and through the experience they learned some of the capacities that they had within them and some of the things that were intended by their very existence.

The experiences of life that we have are designed to teach us, to prepare us for a deeper, more significant, more meaningful spiritual life. That would be my prayer for you. And it would be what I would ask that you pray for me.

God might tear up some of the contentment that we may have come to live in and enable us to make an advance. We can say it has been a year of spiritual advance, of spiritual growth, of the knowledge of God increasing in our own experience and life. If you're here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we remind you that the beginning of life is the acknowledgment of our sinful condition, our guilt, our condemnation, and the reception of the Lord Jesus as our own personal Savior, the one who loved us and gave himself for sinners.

If God has revealed to you through the scriptures that you are a sinner, then this salvation is for you. May God help you to flee to the cross, receive the forgiveness of sins as a free gift, not by joining the church, not by praying through, not by doing good works, not by observing the ordinances of baptism or the Lord's Supper, but in free grace, as a gift, receive the gift of life, becoming a member of the family of God, justified by his wonderful grace. And then may God through the Holy Spirit guide you and direct you into a relationship to him that is deep and significant and meaningful.

May your life be useful for the glory of our great triune God. Let's stand for the benediction. Father, we are grateful to thee for the privilege and opportunity that is ours to hear the Word of God, to read it, to have the assurance of the forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the assurance of the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

O God, may the result be, as the days pass by, that our experience of the triune God deepens and grows as we learn of thee through the Word of God. Enable us, Lord, to launch out in trust. May we learn what it is to have underneath us the everlasting arms as we seek to fly in the air of spiritual experience to the glory of God.

If there are some here who have not yet come to Christ, give them no rest or contentment in their lost state. May they flee to him who offers eternal life, free of charge, on the principle of grace. And for believers, Lord, give us a deep, holy discontent with our present spiritual existence.

Enable us to grow, long to grow, long to experience deeper things, more significant and useful things for the glory of God, not for our glory. May grace, mercy, and peace go with us throughout this week for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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