

# Crisis in Abraham's Life 02

by Rick Bovey

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a servant's heart and a right attitude towards work, using Jacob's example from the Bible.*

**Duration:** 30:53

**Scripture:** Genesis 30:33, Genesis 31:6, Genesis 31:41, Genesis 32:10, Genesis 33:11, Deuteronomy 8:18, Proverbs 8:20-21

**Topics:** "Abraham"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher talks about a man named Jacob and his attitude towards work and relationships. The preacher acknowledges that Jacob is often seen in a negative light, but believes there is good in him. He highlights four qualities that Jacob possessed: humility, gratitude, contentment, and integrity. The preacher uses Bible verses from Genesis to support his points and encourages the audience to learn from Jacob's example and develop a servant's heart.

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## Transcript

I knew it was going to come, but I don't think he really thinks we've worked them all out. We're living the same split level, and they usually get back before we do. They're a little older, and their door is shut.

I haven't tested to find out if it's locked yet, but we do appreciate Dan and Martha. We're helpful in my wife's emotional problems. In those days, she needed a lot of help.

She's not here. And you wouldn't tell her, would you? Yes, you would. I know Eddie Schwartz would.

Chuck Swindoll has written a number of books. And one secular bookstore somehow bought and stopped his book called *Improving Your Service*. Guess where they put it? In the sports section.

And one Christian came into the bookstore and saw this book over there and went to the proprietor of the store and said, You know, that really isn't what that book's about, and told her what the book was about. And she says, Well, that's all right. We're selling quite a few of them.

And I don't know if Roy has got that book for sale up at the bookstore or not, but I imagine he would have it in the right section under golf. But I'd like to talk about the servant's heart this morning. So if you turn to Genesis chapter 28, and we're back to Jacob.

Before we give some of these people just a totally bad rap, Jacob is one of those that we have a tendency of not seeing much good in his life. There's some good in this man in a number of areas. And I think he can teach us something about how to behave in a relationship.

How to behave in this situation in relationship to an employer. Twenty years he worked for Laban. Now I was listening the other day to one of Jack Benny's old programs from 1953.

And the program went on that he was given an inheritance by a rich aunt that died. \$5,000. And this attorney came and he had the \$5,000 check.

And you know, Jack Benny loves money. And they say, Are you the Jack Benny who was born in Waukegan, Illinois? Oh, yes. Are you the Jack Benny who began playing a musical instrument when you were in fourth grade? Yes.

What instrument was that? A violin. Right. And went through all these different questions and said, Well, you're obviously the man we're looking for.

Oh, by the way, when were you born? How old are you? I'm 39. Oh, that doesn't fit. Because the Jack Benny I'm looking for was born in 1894 and he's 59.

Are you that man? And Jack Benny thought about it, said, No, sir. I'm not that man. And all of his friends are sitting around, How could you do that? And the guy left and Jack Benny is so happy and all the rest.

And they said, Jack, how could you? He says, I always know a bargain when I see it. And they said, What bargain was that? Where can you buy 20 years for \$5,000? Which has absolutely nothing to do with Jacob and Laban. You're in Genesis 28.

Let me quote just a couple of verses before that. Deuteronomy 8, verse 18. But thou shall remember the Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth.

Proverbs 8, verse 20 and 21. I, in reference to wisdom, lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment, that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance, and I will fill their treasures. Ah, looking forward to this message, aren't you? How to get wealth, how to inherit substance and be filled with treasures.

Well, let's put these, of course, in terms of the eternal values that we as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, not the kind that moths and rust and thieves can take care of, but the kind that are of eternal value and consequence. But here, Jacob is involved in an employment situation. But let's go back.

It's very important to see this confrontation again with God at Bethel. Now, again, there's a reconfirmation of the Abrahamic covenant with Jacob. In verses 13 through 15.

And then we see his covenant. His vow in verse 20. If God will be with me, this is he's looking for the presence of the Lord in his life.

If he will keep me in this way that I go, he's looking for God's safety, his protection. Thirdly, if God will give me bread to eat, looking for provision. And if he will give me raiment to put on, he's looking for clothing.

And fifthly, it's so that I come again to my father's house in peace, and he's looking for peace and the return of his family. Now, these five ifs, and again, like we said yesterday, that is not the best prayer, to be

praying towards God. It is somewhat of a challenge.

You do this, God, then I will respond. That's not the way the creature should respond to the creator. To one who is saved should respond to one who does the saving.

To one who is just a speck of dust responds to one who is the omnipresent sovereign God of the universe. That is not the kind of prayer that is the best kind of prayer to pray. Then he says, then shall the Lord be my God.

And this stone which I have set for a pillar shall be God's house. And then notice the third thing. And of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee.

One brief comment to the side. There is a lot of discussion about tithing today, whether believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are to tithe. Of course, a tithe is a tenth.

And one of the arguments that goes against tithing is that tithing was something that happened under the law. Well, just an exegetical note here. Jacob predates Moses, doesn't he? Jacob is tithing far before Moses was ever born and was given the law by God.

Tithing was a practice of the believers before the law. Just an interesting comment, which may or may not have anything to do with this still. But anyway, let's go to Jacob and his relationship now in chapter 29-31 with Laban.

And he arrives up at Haran where Laban lives and he is going to enter into an employment contract. Now, I guess I'm very glad that we live in the 20th century. I didn't have to get into an employment contract or a dowry or anything like that.

All I had to do was steal her to get my life. But Jacob comes and he's an honorable man and he enters into an employment contract with his future father-in-law. And Laban said unto Jacob, verse 15, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for naught, tell me, what shall thy wages be? And so they come up with an agreement that he's going to work seven years for this beautiful and well-favored, and you might want to do a word study on those two words sometime.

He paid a rich compliment to Rachel. But he didn't exactly uncompliment Leah either. He's not saying that Rachel was beautiful and Leah was a dog.

By no means is that what he's saying there. Rachel was just the one that hit his eye. And he liked her, so he entered into an employment contract.

And then good old Laban did his thing, and you know the story, until we get down to verse 27. And after Jacob said, Wherefore then hast thou beguiled me? And Laban says, Well, we've got to do it that way. And he says, Fulfill her week, and we will give this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years.

And, of course, he was doing this because Jacob was a valuable servant to him. So now we're up to 14 years. Now, chapter 30, verse 28.

And here, he's worked the 14 years for Rachel and Leah. And now, he says, verse 28, He says, Appoint me thy wages, and I will give it. And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle was with me for as little which thou hast, and all the rest.

And so now he goes on, and he's going to serve for another six years that he's going to serve Laban. So he enters into an employment contract. Now, I think most of you understand a little bit about an employment contract.

Some jobs don't require the signing of an employment contract, per se. But there is an agreement between the employer and the employee as to what that employee is going to do and how the employer is going to remunerate the employee for his services. Now, I assume that all of you who are working at jobs, one way or another, have entered into that employment contract except for you housewives.

You agreed to be wife, mother, and all the other things that come with marriage. But there's not much in the way of remuneration. And I don't think many of your husbands make enough money to pay you the salary that you earn by being a housewife in a home, being a keeper at home.

I don't think there's enough money in the world to pay women. And I am insulted when people come up and ask my wife if she works. Aren't you? I mean, if she wants a break, she can go out and get a job in the work world.

But what she's doing at home is just phenomenal. I'm basically a lazy individual. So she does more than her share.

So here there's an employment contract. And this employment contract, from time to time, may be renegotiated. You may get more remuneration from your employer.

You may get more responsibility. Of course, you have to agree to taking on more responsibility. Of course, they usually don't give you much choice.

If you want this job, you'll agree to do more. And of course, usually in our workaholic-type world, what they do is they bribe you into it. We'll give you overtime.

We'll give you this, that, or the other thing so that you'll work more hours. But anyway, there's an employment contract between Jacob and Laban. But how do they approach it? If you read chapters 29, 30, and 31, you'll find that 12 times a key word is used.

And that key word, you'll see it in verse 15. He says here, "...shouldest thou therefore serve me for naught," verse 18, "...I will serve thee seven years," verse 20, "...and Jacob served seven years for Rachel," verse 25, "...did not I serve with thee for Rachel," verse 27, "...we will give thee this also for the service, which thou shalt serve with me," verse 30, "...and he served with him yet seven other years," chapter 30, verse 26, "...give me my wives and my children for whom I have served thee." Again, let me go, "...for thou knowest my service, which I have done," verse 29, "...thou knowest how I have served thee," chapter 31, verse 6, "...ye know that with all my power I have served your fathers," and verse 41 of that same chapter, and we read here, "...thus have I been twenty years in thy house, I have served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters and six years for thy cattle, and I have changed my wages ten times." And by the way, those changes were not upward. Here, the characteristic of Jacob's relationship with Laban was characterized by this word, serve, serve.

Now, I would like to suggest that that word is not just in the employment relationship, but it does include the employment relationship that we have in our various levels of work. It might include those of you who are self-employed. You end up serving the public, don't you? Or those of you who are employees.

You serve your boss. And that means even if you are a union employee working for a contractor or some other individual, that your relationship is described as being one of service. Or a husband in relationship to his wife could be described in relationship to her as serving her.

Or a wife in relationship to her husband. Or parents to their children. Or children to their parents.

Or believer to one another in the body of Christ. And all the relationships of life can be described by this word, service. And here is a man.

Another man has defined this that the servant's heart is becoming excited about making someone else successful. Now, I'd like you to take a look at this servant's heart and how it's demonstrated in the life of Jacob. The first thing you see in chapter 29, verse 15 is that when he agrees with his employer, that's what he works for.

If you get a job working for an employer and he decides that he's going to pay you minimum wage and you agree to work for it. Okay? Three dollars and whatever it is. 65 cents an hour, that minimum wage, something like that.

And you agree with your boss to work for three dollars and 65 cents an hour. Does that give you the right to say, well, now, really, 365 isn't worth 40 hours' work. It's worth about 25 hours' work.

So the other 15, I'll kind of not work too hard. I'll kind of take it easy because I'm only getting minimum wage. Now, we can have an attitude like that, couldn't we? But Jacob agreed with Laban.

He says, this is what I'm going to do for seven years. And, of course, when he had that kind of attitude, notice verse 20, and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her. When you approach working with the right attitude, that it's amazing how it doesn't become a burden, it doesn't become a chore.

You know, down in Dallas, back when Dallas Seminary was cheap, it's not cheap anymore, but I was working and I couldn't have a job working for a marketing company. And the marketing company, first thing they did, they sent me out interviewing people about how they like beer. And I did the first survey.

And how do you like the flavor of the Bubbies? And I just sent it back. It was a good job making about \$10 an hour, and it's good money for a seminary student, but I just can't do this. I mean, maybe the next one might be all right.

So I went down to Labor Pool. Labor Pool, like manpower. It's right next to a flop house in downtown Dallas.

A flop house is where the bums sleep off the night before and they roll out of this place about 6 o'clock in the morning to get a job where they make \$10 so that they can, and that's what it was. For \$8 worth, \$10 we earned. So I got down there this morning and they asked all these people, would you like a job at Foremost Dairy? And all of them apparently had tried that job at Foremost Dairy.

I didn't know enough to turn it down. So I went out to Foremost Dairy for this job and it was back in this un-air-conditioned room with all the old milk bottles that had come in. They still got the old milk in the milk bottles and it stunk to high heaven.

It was about 110 degrees outside and 140 inside there and I said, well what do I do? And he said, you take this hook and you do this. And so for 8 hours I did that and the guy came back out after the end of 8 hours and I cleaned out the whole room and he took a look at it and he says, what, you're still here? He didn't expect me to still be there and I didn't know. He said, well everybody else is telling you to hook it.

He said, will you come back tomorrow? I said, sure, \$10. So I went back down to Manpower, that labor pool that day, got my \$10. Went back out the next day and he did the same thing.

I didn't know enough not to do that. And the end of that day he offered me a job full time with Foremost Dairy working in the ice cream freezer. 20 below zero.

Oh, was that a refreshing break. But when you take a job, you work for the terms that you agree with and you put in your 40 hours whatever it is that you agree to. That's what Jacob did.

Second thing, when you work for your employer, it should be something that is profitable to your employer. Notice verse 27, chapter 30, And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favor in thy eyes, tarry. He said, listen Jacob, if you like me still, stay here, would you? Because I have learned by experience that the Lord has blessed me for thy sake.

How many of your bosses could say that? How many of your bosses could say, hey listen, would you stay here please because I found out that because you're working for me, God is enriching me. God has blessed me. God, and that word blessed, there again is that word, God made me happy.

And from Laban's term, I think that's got to be monetary. I'm richer now. And that's the idea that you get, that Laban didn't have much before, Jacob came along and now he's got a bunch.

God has blessed me because of you. And what an attitude that Jacob must have demonstrated before Laban. Now, chapter 30, verse 31, in working for Laban, he didn't seek easy money.

And Laban says to him, what shall I give thee? Okay, what shall I give thee? And Jacob said, thou shalt not give me anything. If thou wilt do this thing for me, I will again feed and keep thy flock. How many of you turned down a bonus from your boss? A Christmas bonus.

I'm not saying you should, by the way. But Jacob's motivation was not going out and trying to find the easiest money possible. Now, I can remember somebody who invited us over to their house for dinner, we thought it was.

And then he took us down. He says, would you like to see my basement? Sure. We went down to his basement and there just happened to be two chairs sitting in front of this chalkboard.

And he says, oh, can we tell you something that we are involved in? Oh. And first thing, he took us this row of pictures. Here was a preacher in this church and he sold our product and he went direct.

And now he owns an airplane and a Cadillac and he doesn't need any money from the church. And here's somebody else. They take vacations in the Bahamas every year.

And this. And this. Oh.

Please have a seat. And if you do this, that, and the other thing, you will be on easy street for the rest of your life. You won't have to work anymore.

And that was not the attitude that Jacob had. He wasn't looking for something for nothing. He wasn't looking for the least amount of work possible.

Getting by with the least amount of effort expended. Fourthly, chapter 30, verse 33, So shall my righteousness answer for me, Jacob says, in time to come, when it shall come for my hire before thy face. Everyone that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and brown among the sheep, that shall be counted stolen with me.

He worked in such a way that no one could accuse him of doing anything wrong. Now, it's been kind of interesting at our chapel that every once in a while, I keep seeing these little pins showing up saying U.S. Government on the pins. That means the property of U.S. Government.

And the last time I checked, our building is not owned by the U.S. Government. Nor is anybody on salary in our chapel from the U.S. Government. And I'm amazed at how many U.S. Government pins have showed up at our assembly.

Now, we have a number of our people who work for McDonald Douglas, which is a defense contractor, and they get their pins from the U.S. Government. And I have not been courageous enough to go around finding out who is permanently borrowing U.S. Government pins, even though everybody else is doing it. Or, well, we took 20 minutes our coffee break because everybody else does it.

On payday, we take an hour and a half for lunch because everybody else does it. Or the boss really doesn't care, and that's not true, is it? The boss really does care, but he probably just doesn't want to make a stink over it because he knew he probably wouldn't win. Or I put in some overtime, and I got this coming to me.

He worked in such a way that nobody could accuse him of wrongdoing. Chapter 31, verse 6, Jacob says to Laban, Ye know that with all my power I have served your father. Now, this is Jacob saying it to his wife when he's having trouble with Laban.

With all his power he served. No quotas. We got bricklayers unionized in the city of St. Louis.

They only have to lay a certain number of bricks per day. And I know some bricklayers who worked back before there was a bricklayers union in St. Louis. And he, this one particular man, he could lay in an eight-hour day four to five times as many bricks as they're required to lay now.

And I want to tell you, when they get up to whatever that brick is, they don't lay one more brick than they have to. And of course with their contract they get a number of beers for free. That's supposed to be provided by the contractor and things like that.

But they've got a quota. This is all we're going to do. No more.

There's no shirking, no slowdowns, no strikes as far as Jacob is concerned, that he served with all his might. Now, he had a good employer, didn't he? He served in spite of the fact that he had a wicked, selfish employer who deceived his employee. How many of you have an employer who is deliberately trying to deceive you? Even non-Christian bosses don't tend to do that, do they? I've known a lot of non-Christian bosses who are very honorable individuals.

This boss was a guy who changed his wages how many times? Ten times. Ding, ding, ding, ding. How long would you stay at a job when they reduced your wages? What kind of working conditions did he provide? Look at chapter 31, verse 40.

Thus I was, and the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. That sounds like poor and dangerous working conditions. Osha should be out on that one.

Jacob 31, verse 38. The twenty years I have been with thee, thy ewes and thy she-goats have not cast their young, and the rams of the flock have I not eaten? That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee, I bear the loss of it. Of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night.

He says, when I was working for you and things didn't work out right, I took the brunt of it. And when sheep were born and you didn't know about it, I gave an accounting for it. He was completely trustworthy.

Chapter 31, verse 39. Again, down through verse 42. Here was a man who didn't have any personal rights.

He didn't have, you know, the good working conditions. His wages got changed ten times. 42, except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac had been with me.

Surely thou hast sent me away now empty. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked thee yesterday night. Here was a guy who was willing to let the whole matter rest with God.

He didn't take matters into his own hands. He didn't go over and talk to any other people and say, hey listen, we've got to do something about this. He sacrificed his personal life.

There was no worker demand, no collective bargaining, no grudges, no stewards, no wildcat strikes, nothing like that. He sacrificed all this. And he worked under adverse working conditions, as we see here again in verse 40 of chapter 31.

And in all of this, this was a fantastic employee, how does an employer respond? His employer responds and says in chapter 30, verse 27, you are valuable to me. A man who approaches his job as a servant's heart will become valuable. In fact, that's the way you can control a situation.

Instead of expecting to be served, you serve. And you know what happens when you serve? You end up in control. What did Joseph do when he ended up in Potiphar's house? He served.

And what happened? He was in charge. Got thrown in jail. What did he do? He served.

What happened? He ended up being in charge. He served Pharaoh. What did he do? He ended up being in charge.

A person with a servant's heart is amazing the power and control that you'll have in a situation when you just approach it with a servant's heart. And even then, here's a guy, an employer, who beguiled, deceived, decreased his wages. He tried to hurt Jacob.

He afflicted Jacob and all these different kinds. Laban is an illustration of about the worst kind of employer that you could have. And yet through all this, you know what happens? The blessing of God was upon Jacob.

The Lord's blessing was upon him. We see that in chapter 30, verse 27. Oh, God has blessed me because of thee.

God increased Jacob's substance like he prayed for back in chapter 28. That the presence of God was with him in chapter 31, verse 3 and 5. God protected him in chapter 31, verse 7. God vindicated him. God was the one who defended his cause, chapter 31, verse 9. And he was promoted later on after this service.

He was a Bethel before. He served for 20 years. And now he's at Peniel.

And now he's ready to become Israel. How did he get ready to become Israel? By 20 years of serving. And he had flocks and children.

Here was a man who learned how to serve. And the end result in Jacob's life, notice what happened in his life because he served. Just these four things very quickly.

Chapter 32, verse 10. I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies. Here was a man who learned by a servant's heart humility.

Chapter 32, verse 10 again. You see there here that he learned gratitude. And of all the truth which thou showed unto thy servants.

He is a humble man. He is a grateful man. He is a man who's learned to be satisfied.

Chapter 33, verse 11. He says, Oh, isn't this a phenomenal statement? Take I pray thee, he thought he said this, my blessing that is brought to thee because God has dealt graciously with thee because I have enough. You bosses, you ever had an employee say that to you? Don't raise my salary.

I have enough. There's a guy who works for the federal government up in Chicago. He's making \$40,000 a year and they want to raise his salary.

He says, I don't need to raise his salary. He ends up losing his job. They couldn't understand.

I mean, what's wrong with you? Everybody in your category is going up. I don't need any more. We're already taking away from the tax.

I don't need any. There's a man who learned to be satisfied. And he is a man who learned to give his time back to the Lord.

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