

Settling Down

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[0 : 00] Okay, well, morning, everyone. With your Bibles in your hands, come with me to Genesis chapter 30. And here's C.S. Lewis on the screen.

I've been reading poems, romances, vision, literature, legends, and myths my whole life. If I know what they are like, I know none of them are like the Bible.

So be reminded as you pick up the Bible this morning that this is no ordinary book. Come at this enthusiastically this morning. Come at this expectantly this morning. That as we open this book, the voice of the living God is heard.

So often we can just go through the motions, can't we, when we come to hearing from God as we open his word. But come at that expectantly this morning. I know none of them are like the Bible.

So Genesis 30 verse 25 is where we are today. I want to tell you about a lady who I met on holiday called Mary. So we're on holiday to Bath in the south of England.

[1 : 11] Mary was part of the church family there. She ran the kids church. She looked after her kids. And we bumped into Mary on the Monday after the Sunday that we met her. And so she asked me what life was like in Edinburgh.

And so I told her. And after telling her, I responded and asked her the same question. I said, what is life like in Bath? And here's what she said. She said, there's a joke that we tell ourselves in Bath.

That Bath is a place where, and this is her line, it's the place where ambition goes to die. Right?

And I made a joke about how that should be the new city motto. I don't think she got it in my accent, but we moved on. But before we go hating on Mary, believe it or not, she was being hugely complimentary about the place where she lives.

Right? If people are interested in climbing career ladders and making a name for themselves, trying to make it in a city, they go two hours east and they go to the big smoke.

[2 : 16] They go to London. Right? But if you want a nice life, if you want good schools, if you want stunning scenery, if you want wonderful Georgian architecture, safe neighbourhood, recycling bins go out on the right day, et cetera, et cetera, then you go to Bath.

And the subtext of what Mary was saying is that this is a city where people come and they settle.

And I heard her say it, and it reminded me of the greatest fear that I have for my Christian life, and I wonder if it's yours as well.

Not physically speaking, but spiritually speaking, is that I just settle down in this world. And life's cushy, and it's nice, and it's comfortable.

And I let the things of this world, the comforts, the pleasures, take me, and the currents of that sea cause me to drift away from my love for Jesus Christ.

Right? I stop pursuing and learning more of the big heart of Jesus. Let me tell you, it's the most easy thing in the world to stand up here and deliver something when your heart's not in it.

[3 : 31] I never want to get to that stage where this is not a burning passion of mine to know Jesus more, to see more of his character and his love stamped all across my life, enjoying him and living in light of who he is.

And what this is today is God's loving and gracious invitation to us to be a people who are living for the heavenly city.

As the reformers used to say, what was said of them, that they were forward tilted people. Right? Life was lived on the tiptoes expecting that this is not the final destination.

Do you know, it's the easiest thing as well in my generation, people my generation talk about their forever homes. Right? Buying your forever home. And you can be in that home for 10 years, you can be in it for 50 years, but let me tell you, this is not your forever home.

And why this matters, and whoever you are here today, I want you to listen to this challenge that comes at this today. Why you should listen is that we are all meaning-seeking creatures.

[4 : 43] We are all meaning-seeking creatures. We are all looking for a bigger reason for which we exist. Something to live for, something to make your life worth it.

And it is all wrapped up in our culture's newfound craving for an identity. Yeah? Something to make your life make sense.

You know, it was astrologer Carl Sagan, who, as I understand it, wasn't a believer, commented on a picture that NASA took of the Earth from their Voyager spacecraft, right?

Some 4 billion miles away from Earth. See if you can find it on the screen. Right? The picture that's become famous as the pale blue dot.

And its conclusion, after seeing this picture and reflecting on the smallness of planet Earth and the seeming insignificance of our little lives on planet Earth.

[5 : 41] He said this, he said, if we crave some cosmic purpose, then let us find ourselves a worthy goal. In other words, we're so small, who knows what's going on?

You better make your life worth something and find something to live for. Makes sense, doesn't it? If that's your outlook on life. You've got to find your meaning.

You've got to find a purpose. And I'm reminded that every time I turn on the news and I see things like the just oil activists, right? And that's not a comment at all on the validity of the cause.

It's just a little snippet example of how people in our world are desperate for something to believe in and give their life meaning and worth. But what God is saying today to the Christian believer is not that you need to go out and find yourself a worthy goal.

The gospel is the opposite. The gospel says, God by his grace, that I've given you a worthy goal and I've saved you to live for a worthy goal.

[6 : 45] To quote Seth Lewis in his book, Dream Small. And he's a believer and he says this, once you grasp that God has given you the goal, you don't need to find your own meaning in life.

He said this, I'm not interested in naming my dreams at empty promises, no matter how big they look. I want to spend my strength and my short time on this planet on things that really matter, no matter how small they look.

And so into our world, dear friends, that encourages you, what's always the second question we ask people after, where are you from? What do you do? Right?

And so often I know that many of you answer that question and you feel like you don't have a good answer for that, what do you do? Maybe particularly if I'm going to pick one, maybe particularly if you're a mum who stays at home, you're a parent that stays at home and you answer that question and you think, actually, am I living for something?

Absolutely it is because it's caught up in what God has given you as an identity. All of us is an identity. We're living for something bigger than just what we do with our lives and Hebrews 11 gives us the interpretive lens through which we can understand the massive change that goes on in Jacob's heart today as God says, come and live for the better city.

[8 : 01] This is what the writer to the Hebrews says, by faith he, and that's Abraham, he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country.

He lived in tents as did Isaac and Jacob who were heirs with him of the same promise for he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.

As it was with Abraham, so it is with Isaac. As it is today as we read about Jacob, God is calling him to live for the bigger and better city. And so as we take in a turning point in Jacob's life today, I want us to see and look out for these in the reading that there are two big barriers that God is calling Jacob by faith to overcome as he responds to God's word this morning.

What we're going to see is that Jesus has defeated those barriers for us and he's calling us to live in light of who he is and to live for that better city as we delightfully and diligently pursue him.

So this is Genesis 30 in at verse 25. And guys, maybe we could get the words on the screen and follow with me in your Bible, please, if you have one there.

[9 : 26] Genesis 30 in at verse 25. Watch for the turning point. Think about the two barriers. Think about the better city. After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, send me on my way so I can go back to my own homeland.

Remember, Jacob is living away from his homeland almost as it were under house arrest it feels by this guy Laban, right? Give me my wives and children from whom I've served you and I will be on

my way.

You know how much work I've done for you. But Laban said to him, if I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you. He added, name your wages and I will pay them. Jacob said to him, you know how I've worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. The little you had before I came has increased greatly and the Lord has blessed you wherever I have been.

But now, when may I do something for my own household, what shall I give you, he asked? Don't give me anything, Jacob replied. But if you will do this one thing for me, I will go on tending your flocks and watching over them.

[10:47] Let me go through all your flocks today, let me go through all your flocks today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark colored lamb and every spotted or speckled goat.

They will be my wages. And my honesty will testify for me in the future. Whenever you check on the wages you have paid me, any goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted or any lamb that is not dark colored will be considered stolen.

Agreed, said Laban. Let it be as you have said. That same day he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted and all the speckled or spotted female goats, all that had white on them and all the dark colored lambs and he placed them in the care of his sons.

Then he put a three day journey between himself and Jacob while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban's flocks. Jacob, however, took fresh cut branches from poplar, almond and plain trees and made white stripes on them by peeling the bark and exposing the white inner wood of the branches. Then he placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs so that they would be directly in front of the flocks when they came to drink.

[12:11] This will all make sense when we go through it, okay? When the flocks were in heat and came to drink they mated in front of the branches and they bore young and they were streaked or speckled or spotted.

Jacob set apart the young of the flock by themselves but made the rest face the streaked and dark coloured animals that belonged to Laban. Thus he made separate flocks for himself and did not put them with Laban's animals.

Whenever the stronger females were in heat Jacob would place the branches in the troughs in front of the animals so that they would mate near the branches but if the animals were weak he would not place them there.

So the weak animals went to Laban and the strong ones to Jacob. In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to his own large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys.

Jacob heard that Laban's sons were saying Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all his wealth from what belonged to our father. And Jacob noticed that Laban's attitude towards him was not what it had been.

[13:24] Then the Lord said to Jacob go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives and I will be with you. So Jacob sent word to Rachel and Leah to come out to the fields where his flocks were.

He said to them I see that your father's attitude towards me is not what it was before but the God of my father has been with me. You know that I've worked for your father with all my strength yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times.

However God has not allowed him to harm me. If he said the speckled ones will be your wages then all the flocks gave birth to speckled young and if he said the streaked ones will be your wages then all the flocks bore streaked young.

So God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me. In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked speckled or spotted.

The angel of God said to me in a dream Jacob I answered here I am and he said look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked speckled or spotted for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you.

[14:42] I am the God of Bethel where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.

Then Rachel and Leah replied do we still have any share in our fathers in the inheritance of our fathers estate? Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us but he's used up what was paid for us.

Surely all the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to us and our children so do whatever God has told you. Amen.

And this is God's word to us this morning. And just remember that big thing. God's called to Jacob to live for the bigger city where he is and live in faith.

Jacob's away from home he's living under Laban and God says return. And so here's the first of the two barriers that God's inviting him to overcome in faith.

[15:47] Right? And see if you see these things in your life. Because I saw them in my life at the minute as I've been walking through this. Here's number one. There's too many mistakes in my past.

I mean it's just been blow after blow and mistake after mistake in Jacob's life thus far hasn't it?

Things that have happened to him but things that he has done to other people.

and the fallout that's come off the back of that. Right? Total them up. He's been hurt by his dad.

He's been led astray by his mum. He's cheated his brother.

He's been tricked by his father-in-law. He's got two wives who are at each other's throats. He's sitting there with kids from four different women and to top it up he's living miles away from home.

And that is what we would call today that is what we would call baggage. And maybe that's you today. Dear friends we cannot undo the past but we can take God at his word and we can come to him and to receive his mercy and grace and we can change and begin to live for the future.

[17:05] Our God is the God of endless compassion and grace. So you're not amazed with how patient he is with his people? How patient he is as I look back and as I think about the mistakes that I've made in my life as I think about the ways when I was young and I used to think about and speak to people oh God he's so patient with us.

And that's exactly what God says at verse 13 of chapter 31. He calls himself what? He says I am the God of Bethel. Now that's a reference a really significant reference and feel the forgiveness and invitation that's here is the reference to something that's happened in Jacob's life back at verse 10 of chapter 28.

Jacob's had a dream if you remember that scene of the stairway between heaven and earth and God says because of who I am I'm going to give you this land and you're going to be a blessing to the nations and even though you go I'm going to bring you back to this land and that's the promise that God has made Jacob but the thing to see is that chapter 30 might be a two chapter jump for us but it's a 20 year jump chronologically in the life of Jacob.

You do the maths right? That's a lot of mistakes that's a lot of regrets in 20 years think about your life in 20 years. There's a lot going on between Bethel then and God saying return now it's been 20 years and Jacob's got to be asking himself is he not?

See the mess that I've made of it in 20 years time the mess I've made of it here and now does that nullify the promises that God made to me back then? You know we had an English teacher at school substitute teacher from America from New York I think we nicknamed him Yankee and there was one rule in his classroom and he took it straight from the baseball umpire and his rule was three strikes and you're out so if he called you out three times if he called you out in late homework if he called you out talking in class then that was one strike and you got three and you used to get what was the dreaded lunchtime detention and all that meant was just you spent your lunchtime walking around picking up litter and you got to ask yourself is God like that?

[19:35] Is it three strikes and you're out with the Lord? When God says return and says I'm the God of Bethel it is him graciously reminding Jacob that this is not primarily about you that we preach a gospel that is bigger than just behavior modification the entry to the gospel is not behavior qualification it is simply the blood of Jesus Christ and faith in him what God is teaching Jacob here is this is not primarily about you it is about me and my unchanging character and my heart for the peoples and the nations of the world this is about my perfect timing this is about my unstoppable and good promises and this is about me doing the thing from your line in the future that's ultimately going to be the blood bought price to free you from the grip and the debt of your mistakes and your painful past this is not just a get out of jail free card that God has given

Laban here it doesn't matter no God sees and God will deal because God loves is he thinking in his heart in this moment there's too many mistakes in my past you thinking that this morning do you

know what the second one is that there's too many unknowns about the future because Jacob to get up and go home here is not easy this is not going to be a hero's welcome back in his homeland right think about what he's just walked away from he's got to go back God has called him to go back to Isaac who he conned he's got to go back to Esau who he tricked so to follow the Lord there and to face up to his old sins who knows what way that's going to go but the promise that God makes to him at 31:3 is the thing that he's got to hold and he's got to walk by faith with and it's a really simple promise here it is that

God is with him right God holds the future it's God's plans and purposes it's God who is the sovereign one and if Jacob is looking for proof of that that God is with him he'll need look no further than all the ways that God has blessed him despite Laban's best efforts to make life as hard as possible for him and that's what's going on here with the flock of animals in case you're wondering in case you're wondering you're definitely wondering what on earth is that all about okay what's going on Jacob Laban is effectively giving Jacob he said you can have the best Jacob has effectively been given the worst by Laban right Laban has handpicked the best for himself done a runner and said you can have the rest best and yes Jacob has used his wisdom and experience in cattle breeding techniques to give it his best shot that's what all that stuff is about about the peeling of the branches and whatnot he's giving it his best shot because that stuff is kind of folklore in this day about how you make cattle breed right you get them to look at sticks and if they look at spotted sticks they'll think about spotted it's that kind of thing right but I think the reason that we're given all of it the writer's intention is to say do you seriously think that that was the thing that was making Jacob prosperous here a few sticks a few peels what's going on here as that summary sentence at verse 43 right at the end of chapter 30 gives us as he increases greatly what it's showing us is that God is making this all happen he's making this all happen so much so that Laban says verse 27 of chapter 30 I see that the Lord has blessed me because of you right he gets that something's up here he's aware that something's going on what's going on there is that God is making good on his covenant promises that through Jacob God will bless the nations of the world it's a little snippet of a glimpse of it there and so when God says to Jacob return home and says I am with you these are not words that come without any backing right in the words of

Corrie ten Boom who was imprisoned in a German concentration camp during World War II and who knew more reasons than I think any of us will ever know to worry she said this she said never be scared to commit an unknown future to a known God too many mistakes in my past too many unknowns about the future and God says Jacob I'm going to deal with both of them and we read of Jacob from verse four he's relaying that to Rachel and Leah and it's amazing isn't it this must be God because it's the first time those two have agreed in this whole incident the writer's telling us that Jacob is beginning to walk once again in light of who Yahweh is and he's beginning to think about the promises that he has made him that are trustworthy and if you think about the original readers of this who are that Israelite generation wandering in the wilderness they read this what a rallying call to do the same because this is if you think about it there's echoes of the exodus all over this right if you think about what's going on in

[25 : 25] Jacob's life here he's kind of in slavery to this man Laban isn't he and God says I am with you God calls him to go does that remind you of anything that's going on for these readers it must have done it must have done that's how God works could it even be that the generation who are wandering in the wilderness could it even be that they're at the 20 year mark in that 40 year journey could it even be that many of them like Jacob here are doubting God's goodness questioning his promises looking at the failure and mistakes in their own life and what they're doing is they're just drifting and they're settling and Moses is saying just like Jacob and just like Isaac and Abraham before him you've got to start thinking about who this God is and taking out his word and getting back into the slipstream of his promises in the future that he's won for you come home return and from Jacob's line dear friends will come another son who left home not because of his mistakes and his sin but out of loving choice the father's choice to send the son is loving choice to save us from our mistakes and sin and his choice to come to bring us home and that son will tell a story about another son who was away from home one of the most famous stories that

Jesus told ever told about another son who left home about another son who was estranged from his father about another son who didn't know about what kind of welcome he would receive as he returned home he didn't want his father in that story of the prodigal son he didn't want his father he wanted his father dead I want your stuff I don't want you and so the son goes and he lives the life of

Riley he goes girls he goes parties he goes clothes but eventually because of the folly he finds himself in the pigsty and when he comes to his senses and remembers his father he thinks I've got to get to him but as he starts making that journey home what I'm sure came to mind too many mistakes in my past and unknown too many unknowns about my future what kind of gods am I going to encounter here and the walking son is met by the running father fattened calf ring on his finger best robe welcome home because this God is a God of compassion and forgiveness and grace but what is so often missed as we tell that story it's where the shame has gone you see the shame that the son deserved because of running away from his father and saying I don't want you father the shame that should have been the sons the father takes on himself no father in the Middle East would run it's not what you do don't humiliate yourself like that no no no but this father was willing to humiliate himself and take the spotlight of shame that his son deserves on himself why so that his son can come home and that is what Jesus does as he goes to the cross to take that from being a nice story to being a stunning reality why does

Jesus go to the cross what is it that's made him leave home in search of rebels like us why does he propitiate turn away God's anger against my sinful creaturely rebellion against this holy God why does Jesus take it on himself why does Jesus take the humiliation and shame that I deserve why does he take the nails that I deserve why will he shed his blood because it should have been my blood that was shed answer he does it so that by his grace I may be forgiven and that I might be adopted into the family of God and that I might love him as he transforms my heart I didn't see these things before but he's on my eyes so that I can see the all surpassing beauty of Jesus and I would live because I know him and I know the future and I know the thing that he's called me to and I know about the new creation that he will return and bring in one day where all wrongs will be right he calls me to live for that future and ultimately he calls me to live for that better city where he is you see friends that is the gospel that I drift from all the time

Jesus has done everything so that I may live for a better city mistakes in my past guys he's dealt with them unknown future he holds me and he says I'm with you to the very end and once we grasp that how could we settle for the stuff down here you know I love the funeral tomorrow looking at the order service the song we're going to finish with tomorrow is because he lives and it goes like this because he lives I can face tomorrow because he lives all fear is gone for I know that he holds the future and life is worth the living just because he lives the answer to settling is not try harder just in case your mind's gone there already it's not be better it's not be a busier and a better Christian it's not serve in more ways it's not fill your calendar because that can drift so easily into legalism and moralism the solution is a heart that's been gripped and transformed by and is swimming in the ocean of the loving grace of Jesus and the new identity that he has given us that he calls us by his grace to live for that better city you know just as we close

I just want to tell you about my friend Kate there was a whatsapp group over the last couple of weeks for her birthday and she invited all of us who kind of were in the same group of friends when we were young hanging out together and so I kind of reconnected with all those guys recently and I remember Kate when Kate was growing up and I remember her becoming a Christian and so she went by the name Kate with a K and all of a sudden when she became a Christian she starts wanting to be known as Kate with a C and I was during the 90s and it was only a few years after that thing when Prince turned his name into a symbol I just thought it was a fad I remember asking her why and she said the meaning of the name Catherine with a C which is my real name the meaning of that name is purity and so having given my life to Jesus having been saved by him [33 : 07] I just want to draw a line in the sand between my old life which was Kate with a K and my new life that Jesus has called me to which is Kate with a C because my previous life was dominated by my mistakes and my folly and it should have been me with shame but Jesus has saved me made me holy and I'm going to live as a daughter of the king now the application of that is not let's all parade down to register's office and change our names the application is because of the gospel in Christ the old has gone and the new has come and that's who you are today in Jesus Christ to celebrate the gospel I love this song we're going to we sang it earlier and we finish with this these are the lyrics and this is what it's all about isn't it I was blinded by my sin

I had no ears to hear your voice did not know your love within had no taste for heaven's joys then your spirit gave me life opened up your word to me through the gospel of your son gave me endless hope in peace and so maybe that's you today mistakes in the past too many unknowns about the future God says because of who he is in Christ he says return so what we're going to do now we're

just going to have a moment of silence and let's just pour out hearts before the Lord wherever you're at this morning whatever God's spirit however he has taken it and apply this to your life let's pause and be quiet reverently before the Lord and so Father we thank you for the truth of Romans 8 chapter 1 that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus and so Father I pray for us this morning Lord many of us will be aware of the mistakes in the past and I pray heavenly father that you would bring that knowledge by your spirit who is dwelling in us he would bring that knowledge of the forgiveness that's found in Jesus and the newness of life that's found in Jesus and the all surpassing beauty of life that's found in Jesus and Father as many of us here as well we think about the unknown future we think about our church family Lord just now and everything that many of us are going through would your spirit also bring that deep conviction of what Jesus has won for us on the cross about how he holds the future about how he is sovereign over everything that happens today

Lord be at work in our hearts we pray oh Lord help us never to settle help us always to be those people who have an eye on the future and so Lord we thank you for your goodness help us to live for your glory this week we pray in Jesus' name Amen Amen