

Going Half and Half

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[0 : 00] Okay, let's pray, will we, as we come to God's word this morning. Heavenly Father, we thank you that your word is living and active. It is sharper than a double-edged sword. And so, Father, thank you so much that you are a God who has revealed yourself.

Lord, we don't need to second guess who you are or what you're like. Father, thank you that we have your inspired word. And so, Father, we pray that your spirit would come this morning and we pray that he would take this word and that he would apply it deep into our hearts and into our lives. Father, may we know something more of your greatness and of your fatherly care for us this morning as we look at your son, Jesus. And it's in his name that we pray. Amen.

So with Genesis 31 open in front of us and with the aim of trying to get us to the heart of the summons that God will make to us through his word today, let me just tell you about one of my, or one of the strangest modern fads in the game of football, which I find really, really strange.

Right? Do you know what it is? It's when supporters purchase and then they wear these things called half-and-half strips. Right? Can't see that catching on in Glasgow anytime soon.

[1 : 18] A half-and-a-half strip. Just to prove the point, and I love seeing this photo this week, here's a picture of a man who wore a half-and-half Rangers and Celtic jersey and walked around the city centre of Glasgow.

And do you not just love the other man's puzzled and slightly angry expression as he reacted to seeing it, which kind of sums up the sentiments of an entire city. But this is a helpful image to have in your mind as we approach Genesis 31 this morning.

This idea of being half-and-half. Right? Being half-and-half. Because Moses is going to challenge the whole idea of trying to support two teams and cover your bases.

I think that's his aim here. To convince us and to convince his readers to ditch the half-and-the-half jersey and go all in with trusting and walking in and loving and obeying the Lord.

So this is a call this morning to put the Lord first in our lives. And believe it or not, this chapter is supposed to read like a bit of slapstick comedy.

[2 : 23] And the key to getting the punchline is seeing what Rachel is sitting on at verse 34. If you've got it there, turn and read it. What is she sitting on at verse 34?

You see, here's the question of the narrative to Nick a line from 90s rapper Eminem. Right? Will the true God please stand up? You see, Jacob at verse 17 has got his family and he's got his possessions together and he's going to follow God's call to go back to the land of Canaan.

And Rachel, if you like, she's done a bit of a last-minute grab like you would do when you go on holiday. You think, have I left anything? Do I need anything? And you make a grab for it, don't you? She's done that. And she's left her father's house. Do you see what she's grabbed? Verse 19, she's grabbed her father's household gods.

Now, we're not told explicitly why she did that. It may well have been a case that this is a one last attempt to get your own back on your dad kind of thing. But another possibility, if you think about her life for a minute, having grown up in and spent her whole life living in Laban's worlds, living according to his customs, adopting his worldview, his way of life, she's likely grabbed them and she's taken them on the journey as a kind of good luck thing.

[3 : 53] Right? I'd imagine this is similar if you want to think about it like many of us did when we were young. Many of you, I imagine, may still do this. You took a lucky mascot into an exam, right? Remember this at school?

People plonked it right there on the desk. It took up like a quarter of the desk. I don't understand why people did it. But they did it. Because this thing was going to try and bring us a little bit of extra luck that we needed to get through the exam.

And that's the kind of thing that Rachel's doing here. It's the kind of thing that Moses is presenting to his readers. Spiritually speaking, she's putting on the half and the half jersey. She's trusting the Lord and she's trusting the gods that she grew up with.

And so here's the question. Will the real God please stand up? Meanwhile, if you go into the narrative, it's reported back to Laban, verse 22, that he's been tricked.

And he goes in hot pursuit of Jacob. Do you see in the narrative here? And you'd be backing Laban to win here, right, for a number of reasons. He's quicker. He's bigger.

[5 : 00] He's more familiar with the terrain. But Laban hasn't counted on the fact of what happens at verse 24. As God meets him on this journey and tells him not to harm Jacob.

So these two, Laban's in hot pursuit, Jacob's running away and they both end up in these mountains. Do you see? And the kinsmen in this scene, the kinsmen that kind of Laban has brought along with him, are almost meant to act like the judge and the jury here.

So Laban has to make a plea before his kinsmen as to why he's in the right. And Jacob is going to make a plea to the kinsmen as to why he's in the right. And these kinsmen will make a decision as to who is right and who is wrong.

So both Laban and Jacob make their pitches. First Laban goes, verse 26. Why have you done this? He says, notice the smooth flattery in his voice.

You, talking about Jacob, you prevented me from kissing and saying goodbye to my daughters that one last time. I would have sent you away with tambourine. Do you know, I love the description.

[6 : 11] Would have sent you away with tambourines, right? Would have thrown you a massive goodbye party. And you think, that's nonsense what we've read of this guy. Right?

At it. But what he's really miffed about, what really ticks him off in this scene, is that somebody's nicked his household gods. And it's like a scene from a movie.

Feel the tension build as he makes his way around the tents trying to find them. Did you sense it? Is Esther ready? Are they in Leah's tent? They're not in Leah's tent.

Are they in Rachel's tent? Goes into Rachel's tent. Yes, but he doesn't find them. Phew. But why doesn't he find them?

And this is the punchline of the gag. Why doesn't he find them? Because Rachel is sitting on them. So, will the real God please stand up? The irony is that Laban's gods can't stand up.

[7 : 09] Why? Because a human being is sitting on them. Not only can Laban's gods be stolen, but they can be sat on too.

And the icing on the cake here, the comedy punchline, is that, do you see how Rachel says, the way of woman is with me. Let the reader understand. Right? Which would have made the Israelite readers who'd be familiar with the sacrificial system and what it is to be the unclean as a person. They would have understood that there's an unclean person sitting on Laban's household gods. Do you see the point? That these gods really are useless and they offer nothing by way of protecting you for this journey.

Whereas Jacob reports verse 42 and take this in I think it's the key. He says, if the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac had not been with me, you would have surely sent me away empty handed.

But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands and last night he rebuked you. So don't skip over the little word that comes before Isaac.

[8 : 25] Not the God of Isaac. I mean, that would have read really nicely, wouldn't it? Slow down. No, what does he say? No, Jacob says the fear of Isaac. He's talking about his dad.

What Isaac had come to learn about this holy, about the omnipotent, right? Just one of these big words, omni, all potent, powerful. This all powerful God. the Lord is the first and foremost, he is exclusively worthy of our worship and trust.

And coupled with that, the fact that by sheer grace, Jacob is saying that I've made it this far, this God is for me, then what on earth could stand against me?

And you see, that's what 20 years in the wilderness have taught Jacob that no one else can save like the Lord can. No one else watches over his people like the Lord.

No one else has a heart for his people like the Lord. No one else can control world events like the Lord. And so, will the real God please stand up?

[9 : 38] And again, understanding the first readers of this Genesis passage is crucial for understanding the message. It's not just one person who's the first reader of this. It's 400,000 odd

people who are the first readers of this.

That generation who are wandering in the wilderness, God has saved them from Egypt. Let my people go, they're out, and he's taking them to the land that he had promised them.

Right? And so, Israelites wandering, thinking, can our God get us home? Thinking, is he worthy of trust? More importantly, thinking about the gods of Egypt that were impressive, that looked great, and thinking about the gods up ahead who will be in the land surrounded by them, the gods of the Canaanites.

Moses is saying loud and clear that as scary as that journey may be, as unknown as that journey will be, the only God, the true God, the one who's worthy of your trust and your worship, he alone is the one that you need to put your full confidence in backing behind.

It's not the Lord plus idols. Ditch the 50-50 scarf. It is put the Lord first. Love him first. Seek his kingdom first. And do you know what?

[10:57] That journey might be scary, and you will likely face opposition, but if the Lord has called you, he'll provide for you. If he's called you, he will fulfill the promises and the plans that he has for you.

Now listen, if you joined the dots, it's exactly the same call to us today. Do you know, I love the fact that as I've been preaching through this, I haven't really seen it before.

How God is just teaching Jacob things about himself and about him, about who he is over the long term. Right, you know, when we first moved into our house, at the bottom of our drive is a bus stop. And what we thought we'd do is when we moved in here, it was completely open. We just planted a hedge. Right, just to give us a bit of privacy to stop people looking in. And we started with that hedge about that size.

And over the four years that we've been in there, this hedge has grown and grown and grown and grown. And the thing is, I see this hedge every day. And to me, it's the same size as it was then. But all it takes is somebody who's not seen us for six months to come to our house and they always say, my, look at the size of that hedge.

[12:13] Look how it's grown. The Lord is teaching us things over the long term. Brothers and sisters, do you see yourself as you look back on yourself five, 10, 15, 20 years ago?

Do you see how patient the Lord is with us? Have you stopped to consider the lessons that he's taught you over the years? It's the same for our character.

God is in this for the long term. If he saved us, he is in this for the long haul. as he weans us off trusting in ourselves and that comes way too naturally to me living in my world.

As he weans us off trusting in ourselves and he weans us on to making much of and trusting in Jesus and who he is. Do you see yourself growing in godly character?

Do you see the lessons that the Lord is teaching you over the years? You know, when we were in the States last summer, we got to know a girl and her family called Jonah. I remember speaking to Jonah on the Sunday at church.

[13:22] I say I spoke to her. It was more like a game of charades because her voice had gone. She just picked up an affection. She couldn't speak and that was the Sunday. We saw her, I think, later in the week as we went to the park with our kids and we saw her on the Wednesday or the Thursday and her voice was back.

And I was just saying, how's your voice? And do you know what she said to me? She said, the first time this happened to me when it initially happened, my first instinct was to pray, Lord, what are you teaching me in this inconvenience?

And I thought to myself, I never asked that question. I never stop in the mundane, everyday things of my life to say, Lord, what might you be teaching me here?

And she proceeded to tell me what the Lord had taught her. She said, as a mom with kids the same age as ours, young kids, she said, what wasn't an option for her was yelling their names.

Right? When it's dinner time, kids come down, she couldn't do it anymore. So she said, what it taught me was that I had to go over to my kids and I had to speak to them really quietly. And she said, I've never had so much eye contact with my kids.

[14:28] I learned what they were doing in their day. I learned what makes them tick. Spent time with them. And she said, how often I just resort to calling names and expecting things to happen. And she said as well, it taught me about my gut instinct just to shout and to react to things.

And she said, the Lord slowed me down and realizing that when I had to take a minute to go and find one of my children, actually how his grace is sufficient in that moment for me. And I thought, I just never asked that question. It's never on my radar. What is the Lord teaching me about himself and about myself in the moment? He is committed to teaching us lessons in the everyday trenches of our lives.

It takes the pressure of us having to be on it all the time because we know the one who is on it all the time. And we know his heart for us.

And we know his love for us. And we know his sovereignty over every single angle of our lives. Can I just give you two quick questions maybe to tease this out? Here's number one.

[15:36] Friends, are we growing in our awareness of his presence? That's what Jacob has increasingly come to see here. Just reflect on what he said there.

Not only his escape from, but his protection in Laban's presence was only possible by the grace of God to him and the presence of God with him.

Now you might be sitting there today and say, that would be great if I was Jacob. God spoke directly to Jacob. I'd love that. But let me just say, if you're a believer here today because of where we stand in history and what God's done for us, the Jesus who came, who lived, who died, who rose, who ascended, because he has sent the Spirit, we can know the presence of God in a more fuller way than Jacob could ever dream of.

Love it in John 14 as Jesus explains to his disciples that he's leaving them. And I cannot think I'm more of a bombshell to drop on his disciples at that point in the game. Jesus says he is leaving them, but he says, he says, I will not leave you as orphans.

I will come to you. Because as he ascends to the Father, he sends the Holy Spirit, he sends the helper to be with his disciples, with his people.

[17:02] That Jesus would send the very Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity, to live in the heart of every single believer.

And because of his indwelling presence, Jesus can say, and we're going to come back to this later in the year when we get back into John's Gospel, he could say that I will be in you and you will be in me.

You know, to say that God is with us, it can so often become a cliché that just trips off our lips, can't it? Like something that Clinton Cards would put in the back of one of their sympathy cards. But it's a wonderful liberating truth.

having the Spirit of God residing in our lives is the greatest gift that the risen Jesus could give to his people. It's that Spirit, he brings a flood of relief and comfort to the souls of his people who are suffering and who are sick and who are struggling by persuading them and reminding them of the unending, unchanging heart and love of God, their Heavenly Father for his people.

And so it's a wonderful thing today, if you are struggling of words to articulate how you want to pray for a brother and sister in the congregation, God, remember that the Holy Spirit is a much better pastor and preacher than anyone who will ever sit up here and stand up here.

[18:33] Pray that the Spirit would be at work bringing the truth of the Gospel to bear on the life of your brother and sister. He knows what you're going through and he really is with you in all your hardships and all your struggles.

What a wonderful thing to be reminded of that that's the reality that each of us have today if our trust is in this Jesus. Here's the second question.

Are we walking with integrity in his presence? Are we aware of his presence? Are we walking with integrity in his presence? You know what really struck me both this week and last week is how often Jacob draws Laban's attention to how he's conducted himself while he's been with him.

Have you noticed that over the last couple of weeks? Do you see it in verse 36? He says, What is my offense? I've looked after your flocks. I haven't stolen anything. Now hang on a minute.

This is the same guy who back at chapter 27 wasn't the slightest bit fussed when he lied to his dad and he cheated his brother. And now all of a sudden just a few chapters later character really matters to Jacob.

[19:50] You know, I heard a quote recently from the atheist philosopher A.C. Grayling once speaking at down at Oxford University and he said, he said, people in the olden days they used to believe in God but now today people don't believe in God.

There's a God that could see everything. And he said, if you want to know the proof of that, the proof of it is that today that we have CCTV cameras everywhere. And it's kind of true, isn't it, if you think about it, our world.

Nobody thinks about that there might be an all-seeing and all-knowing God watching everything and who one day will make every wrong right. People today is thinking, isn't it, as long as it's not hurting anyone, then it's kind of fair game.

But the person who fears the Lord, who loves Him, who wants to serve Him, always behaves like there's a divine CCTV camera who's watching everything.

That there really is a God who sees and who knows and who cares. And do you know what that means? It means that every moment is a worship moment.

[20 : 56] Every moment is a worship moment. changing nappies, trying to get into our weeks, right? Changing nappies, sending emails at work, being hospitable and kind to your fellow road user.

All these little things are chances that we have to worship the living God. Remember when I was a student, I had a friend called Rab.

Rab was slightly younger than me, but he'd been a Christian for way longer than me. Remember having a conversation with him one Friday night and telling him about how many people in my generation that were into this thing, a 90s kid here, this thing called copying CDs, right?

Not just copying them, but sharing them with their friends. Remember telling him about this and thinking, isn't this a great thing that we can do? Never thought anything of it. And he said to me, do you know what, Shanksie? He said, God has called us and saved us to be better than that.

And he was right. The faithfulness on the journey in the smallest little things, it matters to the Lord.

[22 : 06] And we can worship him with every single moment, no matter what's going on in your life, friends, the Lord sees it. He sees it. And it's a challenge, but it's also a comfort that as scary as the journey may be, this God, the only real God, he's with you.

He's with you. So ditch the half and half scarf and go all in with the Lord. This chance to, this call rather, to seek him first.

You know, my favorite promise of Jesus, and we read it earlier, and the thing that I found to be the best bit of life advice when it comes to making decisions is what Jesus says in Matthew 6.

When he says to his disciples, he says, don't worry. Don't worry. And he says, take a look around at nature. Look at the flowers in the fields.

Right? We went to the zoo yesterday as a family, tried to do this. See how God cares for these things. See how God provides for these things. And see how your heavenly Father feeds them.

[23 : 12] You know, someone said to me recently, have you noticed how much of an outdoors book the Bible is? It's true. Read it. That's why famous English pastor John Stott said that bird watching was something that he did that was good for his soul.

Jesus says, don't worry. Don't worry about tomorrow. It's interesting, isn't it? One of the marks of our generation today, and you have to say, is chronic anxiety.

You know, I was hearing on social media recently, and I don't know whether this is true, but this is what the person was reporting, that my generation is almost so scared to have children because they don't want to bring them into this world that's full of crippling anxiety about what the future might hold.

And you have to say, if atheist A.C. Grayling was right, that we don't believe in God, we've got CTV cameras, we've moved on from that, we have to say that the lack of anxiety that's supposed to come with that is not just materializing in our age.

Jesus says, don't worry. He says, don't worry. And he doesn't just say, don't do something. Right?

[24 : 21] Any gardener with their salt will tell you that weeding without seeding is a terrible idea. He doesn't just say, don't do something. He says, do something. He doesn't just say, don't worry.

He says, seek your father. Pray to him. Seek the kingdom first. And the fact that this father is this kind of father who knows us and he knows our needs should free us to be those who seek first the kingdom of God.

Be all in with trust in the Lord. And I love it, dear friends, just to encourage you, I see many of you right now, you're making big decisions about your future. Some of you are at a crossroads in your life.

Some of you are thinking about university. Some of you are thinking about serving different ways. And I see you growing in this area. I see you wanting to make godly decisions. Remember we thought about ages ago the fact that one of our questions when making decisions isn't primarily what should I do? But as Jen Wilkin puts it, rather the question is who should I be? [25 : 26] As we make decisions that glorify the Lord, put him first. Listen, our time is gone but I want to finish with this just to massage home the point. Because it's August in Edinburgh and and I want to tell you about my favourite festival act from the last few years.

Is that okay? Just as we close? Some of you would have seen this guy on the news recently. He is what is called a festival legend. And he'll be loving this bit of free publicity I'm giving him. It's a Scottish comedian called Robin Granger. And he became famous because a number of years ago he did his first ever Friday night gig and he was really nervous and he asked his manager to poke his head out and see how many people had come to his Friday night gig.

Do you know how many people came? One. One person came. And so his manager pokes his head back in and says do you still want to go ahead?

Give the guy a refund if you want. Do you want to still go ahead? And he said no come on if this guy's paid the money if he's shown his face if he's happy to sit in the audience let's go for it. And so here he is this is Mike from Leicester who he performed for but I love that attitude of one person in mind of an audience of one of only having eyes for one person and that is what Jesus is calling us here to today.

[27 : 01] The audience of one living for God's glory alone that is the aftertaste I think Genesis 31 is meant to put in our mouths to ditch in the half and a half jersey and be all in with eyes only trusting and walking with the Lord.

Listen let me pray and let me just encourage you in the quiet as God's word has gone forth this morning whatever is going on in your life friends bring it to him know that he knows know that he cares and know that he loves and then we'll finish in prayer.

And so Father I pray that you would convince us deeply today as we respond to your word that there is truly none like you there is no God as mighty as you there is no God as delightful as you because we see that as we stare at your son Jesus and so Father I pray that your spirit would come the great comforter and would he deeply impress on each of our souls those truths that we've been thinking about today that you are worthy of our first and foremost attention and so Lord I pray that you would help us to live for those words that Jesus said well done good and faithful servant Father thank you for your love for us and we pray these things in Jesus worthy name Amen