

Sketchy Shepherding ▪ Genesis 30:25–43

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Intro: When I meet someone for the first time, it's not too long before I get the question out: "what do you do?"

I am referring to work. What is your vocation? How do you put bread on the table? What are you skilled in?

If we met Jacob and asked, "what do you do?", he would reply, "Shepherding".

...Yet Jacob also worked with another material: trickery, deceit, shrewdness.

Or as my kids say....he was sketchy. It describes a person who is not honest or safe.

That is what we get in this narrative: Sketchy shepherding.

- Yet...sketchy shepherding is not the main idea; it's a catchy title.

The main idea is much bigger and broader.

Main Idea:

Those in covenant with God are lavished with his undeserved grace.

Psalm 103:10 ESV

He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

- One of the things that keeps coming back to me week after week is how *strong*, and *overruling* God's grace really is.
- Now we can come up with a complex outline with the back and forth of Laban and Jacob.

But with two characters, we can look at both and see the Lavish Undeserved Grace at work at both.

Undeserved Grace for Laban (25-36)

- Now according to the math in 31:41, this all happens within the span of 6 years.
- 14 years serving Laban for wives.
- 6 years of the events here.

Following God's call is not microwaved, but slow cooked. Food in the crock pot or slowly smoked tastes so much better.

The slower it takes, the more richness and depth

Contract

- The terms of the first contract of bride price (14 years) is up; womb wars have died down....now it's time to head home.
- As we've seen before, Laban does not see Jacob as family as much.
- Laban tried to extend the contract: Name your wages (28)
- Laban does not want to lose Jacob. He is way too valuable as a shepherd.

This is what we call the "golden handcuffs".

- But we know this is sketchy...since the "wages" were already paid for....Rebecca, who he worked for.

But remember, Jacob has learned to be street smart in dealing with Laban.

The last time Laban said "name your wages" he ended up with an extra wife he did not sign up for!

- Jacob responds (v31) "nothing" ...except to have all the multicolor animals set apart as his own (v32)—which sounds a bit sketchy to me already.

This seems very reasonable...and even gracious of Jacob. Multicolored sheep or goats were very rare.

In the ancient world of shepherding, a shepherd would have normally had a 20 percent of the sheep as his own wages.

The blemished colored sheep he is asking for would probably have fallen way below.

- The follow up is that if Laban ever found normally colored animals with Jacob's flock, he knows that it was stolen (v33).

*The whole contract will have complete integrity written all over it, right?

Contest

(V35-36)

- Now people who are sketchy can live in a constant fear that others are sketchy....

So Laban has his hand in sketchy shepherding.

- He has his son's take the sheep set aside for Jacob and put a great distance so there is no chance at cross breeding or stealing (v35).
- This is already not part of the plan, since Jacob said he wanted to do this (v32)!

Laban is a shrewd man; a guy who can outmaneuver in a business deal.

› *But when you live in deception, your constant fear is that "someone is going to get me."*

*The wisdom of Proverbs gives warnings:

Proverbs 26:27 ESV

Whoever digs a pit will fall into it,
and a stone will come back on him who starts it rolling.

Proverbs 28:10 (ESV)

Whoever misleads the upright into an evil way
will fall into his own pit,

In laymen's terms: If you are sketchy, eventually someone sketchy will get one on you!

› People who live like Laban seem to have a lingering fear: it's coming back at me! I can't imagine living like that.

Just from the outside, what does Laban deserve?

—Well, he is seeking guidance through "divination" (v27). That's pagan.

Imagine someone saying “I’ve been dabbling in the occult.” They don’t deserve to have the true and living God speak, do they?

—He is also a shrewd man who behind the kindness of his words is the heart of a slave driver.

- Laban is something of a foil to Pharaoh and Jacob to the Israelites in Egypt. *This is a mini-exodus story!*
- Yet Laban is lavished upon. And he sees and confesses it comes through the covenant LORD (v27).

*By revelation, Laban knows this lavish blessing came only one way: the LORD. The covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Now on a technical sense, Laban is not in covenant with God. Jacob is.

The point is: *Those in covenant with God are an instrument of grace to others.*

—God has put people in your direct circle of to be a salt and light, an instrument of gospel witness, a prayerful presence.

—Never think things like your neighborhood, job, family is just “ordinary” or secular.

It may be God’s plan to use you to lavish his undeserved grace on another.

But it does take patience, love, and compassion.

Undeserved Grace for Jacob (37-43)

- Jacob has been outwitted by Laban, now he is ready to outdo him this time.

If you are a person who loves revenge, you will like this story...but you may miss the point.

- The sketchy tactics come out in 37-39.

If you are confused by what he does, you are not alone. Even Bible scholars are.

- Jacob’s breeding just sounds superstitious. Put peeled branches in front of sheep when they are breeding and you get desired results.

Superstitions like this still exist today.

I remember someone, who was a Bible believing Christian, telling me and my wife back in the days when she was pregnant: "If you want a boy, leave a pair of shoes under your bed".

If you need to check for shoes...but please don't make main part of sermon!

- It's sketchy since there is no real eye on the sovereignty of God.

Second sketchy shepherding tactic:

(41-42)

- Essentially, he manipulates the animal breeding so that the multicolor sheep of the flock are stronger, and all of Laban's are weaker.

Sketchy, sketchy!

Also, Jacob's mentality is...payback time!

- Scripture is crystal clear: revenge is not your work. Let God lead your enemy to the pit he dug....you don't need to try to lead him or her there.

Romans 12:19 ESV

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

- The conclusion (v43)

That conclusion almost sounds like a vindication for Jacob.

Finally, after two decades of service, Jacob finally got Laban back, right?

But the point is *not vindication*.

- We would totally butcher this application if we thought this was an example of how to repay the swindlers...how to out-sketch the sketchy.

Those in covenant with God are lavished by his unmerited grace

***In fact, God upholding his promises and Word is again at the heart of this.*

Genesis 28:15 ESV

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.”

Reflecting on those words God gave to Jacob....

“I will be with you”those are true and powerful; sounds like Christ’s to his disciples.

“I will be with you” does not mean “an easy path, or a quick journey”.

Friends, discipleship is not easy, quick, or comfortable. It’s hard.

But what we can be assured of is Christ is with you.

The fact is, Jacob came to Laban’s house as one lonely man...but left lavished.

And it was all the grace of God.

- › If we are lavished with blessing...it is only for one reason: The covenant God has met us with undeserved grace!
- › So give him all the thanks and glory....all the days of your life!

Undeserved Grace in Christ

- There are certainly some sketchy characters in the Bible. We’ve spent time with two.

There are quite a few others as the storyline continues.

The Bible does not call us to look to a sketchy shepherd, but instead a good shepherd.

In fact he is spotless, pure, no blemish or defect.

1 Peter 2:22–25 (ESV)

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

- › The portrait of Jesus Christ here is the polar opposite of Jacob.

Friends: This is how God's covenant and grace are lavished on you: through the perfect work and love of the LORD Jesus Christ to be received by faith.

Lavished, undeserved grace was always God's eternal purpose to save.

2 Timothy 1:9 (ESV)

He saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

Finally, those saved by this lavish grace are called to a holy calling.

- › *Jacob is not your moral standard; Jesus Christ is!*

—Let this give you hope if you are not a Christian. The gospel message is not: make yourself deserving.

Come to Christ with your undeserving life...and he will lavish grace!

—Let this humble you. If you for some reason have started to see yourself as deserving grace.

—Let this give you patience towards others...who are also undeserving.

Nothing crushes a critical spirit more than knowing how undeserving you are.

—Let this cause us all to make much of Christ and his Covenant Love toward you.