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GENESIS 31:19-55

Series: Understanding Your Roots

[PRAYER] It's with honor, Father, that we open your word and with anticipation knowing that you speak to us through it. That your word is authoritative. That means we can rely on it for faith, for practice, for our daily lives. We need it. Lord, make our hearts receptive to receive your word today. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.

Jesus told one parable in particular that talked to everyone about their lives, a whole life. I find the parable fascinating because it's very real to us today. That is after Christ lived on the earth it also helps us. But it also helps people before us. In fact Jacob would have benefited from listening to this parable that Jesus told.

Now He told it in two different parts. He described the parable and then he told its meaning. I'm going to bring those two things together first here so that you can understand them and what it looks like.

You see Jesus said this. *There was a sower that went out to sow. And he cast the seed out and it fell onto the soil.* Now the seed He says represents the word of God and as the seed is being cast out, it falls on four different kinds of soil. The soil represents the heart of people.

The first kind of soil that it falls on is the hard soil of the path. This is the person who gets wind of the gospel or hears the message or someone shares a testimony or they hear a sermon or they hear something about, they see a bumper sticker about Christ, whatever it is, and they just turn it off. They're just not interested at all. They're the person who has a hard heart and not open to spiritual things.

The second kind of soil (and this going to be particularly important for Jacob's life) was a soil where the seed was cast and it fell onto the rocky soil. So it grew up quickly. But when the sun came out it was so hot it scorched because it didn't have the roots necessary. When we don't have the roots necessary then the challenges of life cause some problems. In fact let me take you right into the parable and show you that. It says there – *The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and once receives it with joy. (These are Jesus' words here.) But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution come because of the word, they quickly fall away.*

So it's persecution because someone laughs at you because you're a Christian or criticizes you because you have faith. That's one. But the other word is *trouble*. I wanted you to see what the word *trouble* means in the Greek language there. Because the word *trouble* is what Jacob is

going to experience and what we experience in our own lives. It's the word *thlipsis*. It's a fun word to say. Go ahead and say it. *Thlipsis*. Okay, that's the word.

This is copied directly out of the Greek-English dictionary for the Bible so you can see what the words are. Because I want you to see what trouble looks like in our own lives. It says "properly, it means pressure." So when pressures come into our lives, what constricts or rubs together, when you're in friction with someone or you feel constricted, "used of a narrow place that 'hems someone in'." You just kind of feel like you're trapped. You almost feel like you're claustrophobic in your life. That something is wrong here. I don't know how to handle it. Now get this. "Tribulation, especially internal pressure that causes someone to feel confined, (restricted or without options)." You know that feeling that just the pressures of life are creeping in on you and you feel you don't have options, so you exert something. Sometimes it means you're anxious about it. Sometimes it means you just get angry and blow up. You feel like you don't have the options you need. That's because this pressure is like the sun, the scorching heat that comes down on this little plant (you in your heart, that's your faith growing), but it doesn't have enough roots. If it had roots it would be able to endure the pressures, the *thlipsis* of life.

That's going to be our application. When you're done today I hope you'll be constrained or compelled to have your roots go deeper. We're going to see that Jacob lacked that. So when the pressure grew he lost it. That's a good word to describe Jacob. He really lost it in our passage. I'm eager to take you into the passage in Genesis 31. That's our passage today.

But let me bring you up to speed as to where we are already. Remember Jacob had been working for Laban for twenty years. Now he has this impression that it's time for him to leave. Things aren't the same as they have been in the past. It's just time for him to move on. We talked about that desire sometimes that we have. It's time to move on. We talked about that last week. So he takes that desire to the Lord and the Lord affirms that in his heart. Yes, He says, you can go back to your father's country. And He says these five words: *And I will be with you*. We need those words. Because when we know that God is with us it helps us to trust Him. It helps our roots to go deeper into the soil. So that when the problems, the challenges, the *thlipsis* of life come, we know that God is with us, even in the midst of the scorching sun that takes effect on our lives and puts pressure. Pressure that helps us feel hemmed in sometimes.

Well God says *I will be with you*. So that was great. He did the right thing. Now he does another good thing. He goes to his wives and he talks to them and he says, "This is what God's saying to me. What do you think?" They have a great response and they say, "Whatever God is saying to you, do it." Great response from a wife. I love that example there.

That brings us up to the story now because where is Laban during all of this? Because Jacob now has packed up his caravan or camel van or whatever you want to call it. All the camels are packed up now with all of his kids on them and he's got all of the livestock that he's driving back home. So everything is moving along here. Laban has been gone for three days. He's on a trip. And this is where the problem starts.

Let's look at Genesis 31 starting in verse 19. It says this: *Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's household gods*. Oh we got to pause there for a moment. Household

gods. What are we talking about here? Well the household gods were these good luck charms in the form of statues that they put inside their homes. They might be made out of wood or sometimes they were made out of stone. But they sat in their homes and they were household gods. They were not personal gods. But they were like their household, represented their home, and they would hopefully bring good luck to them. That's what they thought. Good luck charms. So Laban had these household gods.

He's not a believer. Because in a believer's home we know in the Ten Commandments it says – *Do not make yourself any graven image.* You do not make for yourself any image that you worship, that you trust in that takes the place of God Himself. That's part of the Ten Commandments. As believers we know that. But even sometimes people today will have some kind of good luck charm that they rely on for luck, as if somehow luck has a factor in life. When we know as Christians God is at work in our lives. It's not work. It's blessing of God that takes place in our lives.

I was walking in a parking lot some time ago and I saw through the dashboard of a guy's car a little statue sitting on his dashboard. So I went over to look at it. It was a little figure that was holding something. When I looked it up I realized that this is the patron Saint Christopher statue that he had on his dashboard. It's designed to keep you lucky when you're driving. We all need a little bit of luck, even when we're driving. But for us it's not lucky. It's God's blessing that protects us. It's angels protecting us. But this guy has this little thing. I'm thinking to myself, if I was relying on that for driving I'd at least turn it around so it was facing to see where it was going! I'm thinking, boy, this is ridiculous. Sometimes people rely on these good luck charms.

That's what's happening in Laban's life. He has these good luck charms in his house and Rachel steals them. I'm going what is she doing? And we aren't told in the Bible why she steals them. Maybe she thought they were pretty. Maybe she thought that she wants to get revenge on her dad. Maybe they represent something in the household with the inheritance or something. I don't know. We aren't told in the Bible. But she takes them and becomes part of the story.

Now verse 20 we get to the place where Jacob makes the mistake. The pressures of life get too much for him. His root isn't deep enough. If his roots were deeper, he wouldn't do what he's about to do. You see he knows the Lord. When he left his home, he had determined that he was going to live for the Lord. He had the special experience with God, with His head on the rock pillow and seeing this stairway with angels ascending and descending. It was this connection with God. It was transformed. Now he's not going to be the guy tricking, like he did his brother and his father and so on. He's not going to do that anymore. Now he's going to go forward and do the right thing. He wants to serve the Lord. And we see God at work in his life for the last twenty years. But now he's under significant pressure. And under the significant pressure when any of us find ourselves hemmed in, we tend to resort to self-defeating, unproductive patterns that maybe we engaged in the past, but we're trying to get rid of. You know you're trying to get a handle on your anger. You're managing that. But then this happens. So you unleash with your anger. That's what Jacob's going to do.

But at first it says in verse 20 – *And Jacob tricked Laban the Aramean.* The word *tricked* is important here. It's going to be mentioned a few times in the passage. Because we know that

Jacob has this tendency in his heart, he has this temptation to trick people. He's done it in the past. When you're intelligent, you're pretty smart, and you're creative, those two things set you up because you think you can get around the rules and so on. You can trick people and that's what's taking place here. *And Jacob tricked Laban the Aramean, by not telling him that he intended to flee. He fled with all that he had and arose and crossed the Euphrates, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead.*

Now Laban is on this trip for three days, so if we go to the next page you'll see that it says – *When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him for seven days and followed close after him into the hill country of Gilead.* So he could catch up with him. Well partly because he didn't have eleven children. I mean Jacob had eleven children. Do you know what traveling with eleven children is like? You've got to stop at every rest stop, every McDonald's to get another hamburger. I mean there's all kinds of reasons why they're slowly going. So it takes Laban seven days, but he catches up to Jacob, and as he does he is hot. He is mad. I'm convinced that Laban wants to kill Jacob. And that's why God steps into the picture.

Notice what He does in verse 24. It says – *But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, "Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad."* In other words, this guy's mine. He's protected. You be careful how you treat him when you arrive there and you talk to him. So Laban has this dream. Laban isn't even a believer.

Does God speak to people who are not believers? Of course He does. He's drawing people. Which makes me think right around your neighborhood, right around your workplace, right around your school, wherever you are, there are people that God is speaking to. You don't know which ones he's speaking to. I mean there are some people God speaks to them and it kind of falls on the hard soil and nobody pays attention to that. Well there's other people who receive it. They receive the message. Can you imagine some of those people you might have written off and say "Well they'll never hear the message of the gospel. They'll never pay attention." Yet we know that God speaks to non-believers and when He does their receptivity is important.

Where are they going to go to learn more about it? Well hopefully they're going to go to you because you're advertising your faith. Right? That's what Jesus says. Don't put your faith under a bushel and hide your light, but put it out on a pedestal so people can see the light and they can be drawn. So we advertise your faith. That doesn't mean you're obnoxious with your faith. But you're just letting people know, "Yep, I went to church yesterday. We had a great sermon." Or "in our church we had this Mother's Day poster and it was kind of cool." And people are going, "Oh you go to church?" "Yeah, I go to church." It doesn't have to be that brash. But when they start hearing from the Lord, they're going to say to themselves, "Wow, I'm going to go talk to that person because he already has some experience with God." So we advertise our faith. God speaks to non-believers. The people right around you. Just know that. He doesn't just speak to people when they come to church. He speaks to people in their lives. When God speaks to people then they want more and they come to get to know God in a very personal way.

Verse 25 – *And Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen pitched tents in the hill country of Gilead. And Laban said to Jacob (here*

we come to the confrontation), *“What have you done, that you have tricked me.”* He’s going to be talking about this tricky thing that he’d done. Of course Laban himself is a rather tricky guy. He’s a trickster. And the thing that a trickster hates the most is being tricked. So he’s going to talk about that.

“What have you done, that you have tricked me and driven away my daughters like captives of the sword? Why did you flee secretly and trick me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre? And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? Now you have done foolishly.” It is always sad when a non-believer has to confront a believer about morality. That’s what’s taking place. *You have done foolishly.* And yes, Jacob has done foolishly. That’s correct.

Well Laban continues on the next page. It says – *“It is in my power to do you harm.”* That’s what he says. *“But the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, ‘Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.’ And now you have gone away because you longed greatly for your father’s house.”* In other words, I understand why you left. You wanted to go, long for being home and with your father. I get that. That’s the empathy, he’s saying. That makes sense. But then he says this: *“But why did you steal my gods?”*

I just got to tell you, you are in trouble if someone can steal your gods. Okay. Nobody can steal my God. My God is so big He can’t be stolen. But even today some people invest, their god is their house. So if something happens to your house, you go, “Oh no. What is happening to my life?” Some people, their god is their family. Oh and something just happens in their family, they’ve just lost it. Or god is their money. So when money starts dissipating they go, “Oh no. What am I going to do?” If your god can be stolen, you’re in trouble. But that’s what he says. *Why did you steal my gods?*

Now Jacob has two problems presented to him. I hope you see that. One is why did you leave so quickly and trick me? And secondly, why did you steal my gods? Those are the two problems he’s got to address now.

So Jacob starts with the first concern. He says this and he says this with some transparency and honesty at first. I really appreciate this. He says – *“Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force.”* I was afraid. Yep, that’s the problem. You see when fear comes into your life it causes you feel hemmed in, then you react. It’s this *thlipsis* that takes place because the pressures are there. You start getting afraid. And if your faith is not strong enough, then you end up in a place you don’t want to be. You start doing the wrong thing. But if your faith is deep and has the roots then you’re able to manage that. When fear increases you’ve got to have enough faith to deal with that. Otherwise if your faith isn’t strong enough to deal with your fear, you end up doing things that are not good. You end up getting yourself into trouble. That’s what happens here. He says – *I was afraid.*

But now we’ve got to deal with the second problem. So this is what he says about the household gods. *Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live.* Well it’s his wife. He does not know that. But he’s making this brash statement (not a good idea), which is going to create some tension in the story. I hope you’re feeling a little tension here as we get going. It says –

“...shall not live. In the presence of our kinsmen point out what I have that is yours, and take it.”
Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.

So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two female servants, but he did not find them. And he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's. Uh oh. Here we go. It's getting tense in this story. What's going to happen? *Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel's saddle and sat on them.* You know Rachel herself has learned a little trickery. I wonder where she got it. I'll let you figure that out. *Laban felt all about the tent, but did not find them. And she said to her father, “Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me.”* I'm having my period so I don't want to get up. That's what she's saying. So that's a good excuse. Most men if you say you're on your period say, “Okay fine. I'll back off.” So she says that and he doesn't want to get near her. *So he searched but did not find the household gods.*

So can't find them. Now Jacob, what is he going to do now that they can't find the gods? Here Jacob is going to enter into his challenge. He says this. Notice verse 36. *Jacob became angry and berated Laban.*

Okay, I'm going to take you through this and I'm going to read it and I want to point out to you almost every kind of bad thing that you can do when you're in conflict. It all happens. If you're in an argument with your husband or your wife, you can engage in these just like Jacob did. He's just going to go right through all the bad things to do. They're all laid out here in this passage. This is what not to do. Okay, here he goes.

So first he *became angry*. That's problem number one. Then notice he *berated Laban*. He's going to pick on him, he's going to put him down, he's going to say all kinds of problems that he has. He's going to berate him. That's the second thing he does.

Jacob said to Laban, “What is my offense? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me? (He's attacking him.) For 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 two.” This is bringing in everyone else. “Everybody agrees with me.” Isn't that what somebody says in a fight? It's your problem. Everybody agrees with me that you have a problem. That's what they're saying here.

Then he says – *“These twenty years I have been with you.”* What are we doing about the twenty years? That's because he's bringing up the past. That's what you do when you're in a fight and you don't know what to do in the fight. Well let me tell you, for the last twenty years... That's what's happening here. *“For the last twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks.”* So he's bringing all of the past into the present.

Let's go to the next page. It says – *“What was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you. I bore the loss of it myself.* This is the victim mentality. You know “oh poor me”. Well he's going to get really hot on this victim thing. Watch what he does. He says – *“From my hand you required it,*

whether stolen by day or stolen by night. There I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes.” I’m such a victim here.

I don’t know how we got on this rabbit trail, but this is what happens in arguments. We’re supposed to be talking about whether the household gods are here and he’s bringing up the past twenty years and all the stuff that’s there. I mean this is what fights look like.

When a couple comes into my office or sometimes it’s a parent and a teenager come in and they’re trying to work things out. We’re talking through it and everything’s going okay, and then somebody sparks something and pretty soon they’re yelling at each other. You’re going whoa, stop for a minute... No, they won’t stop. They just keep yelling back and forth. I go, “Wait a minute. Would you stop for a minute? Let’s talk about this.” No. Because they got to a place where *thlipsis* makes them feel so constrained that they don’t know what to do except go back to old patterns, hurtful patterns, and they start yelling. I can’t even keep track of all the offenses as they start yelling.

That’s what’s taking place. You get to sit in the counselor’s office and watch it all take place right here in the Bible.

He says – *“I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night.”*

So it’s a lot of blaming. A lot of attacking going on in this story. Please do not take this as an example of how to have a fair fight in your own relationships that you find yourself in.

Well Laban is going to step into the picture in verse 43 and he says this. *Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, “The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine.”* In other words, just look at all the things you have, Jacob. Because all these things you have there came from me. Don’t forget where you got all this stuff, is what he’s saying. *“But what can I do this day for these my daughters or for their children whom they have borne? Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I. And let it be a witness between you and me.”*

So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. We get a little insight here into the cultural ways that people handled contracts. They would build a pillar or pile up a bunch of rocks and that would be a memorial to their commitment. We see it all over in the Bible that that is a sign of our commitment. That’s what’s taking place there.

And Jacob said to his kinsmen, “Gather stones.” And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. Laban said, “This heap is a witness.” Because those words means the heap is a witness. In other words, this pile of stones is a witness before us, before God. *Laban said, “This heap is a witness between you and me today.” Therefore he named it Galeed, and Mizpah, for he said, “The Lord watch between you and me, when we are out of one another’s sight. If you oppress my daughters,*

or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no one is with us, see, God is witness between you and me.”

Then Laban said to Jacob, “See this heap and 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 over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, to do harm.” In other words, we’re not going to harm each other. This is the line, this is the contract we’ve agreed upon. “The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.” So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac, and Jacob offered a sacrifice in the hill country and called his kinsmen to eat bread. They ate bread and spent the night in the hill country.

Early in the morning Laban arose and kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Nothing said about any greetings for Jacob here. Then Laban departed and returned home. This is the end for Jacob of this part of his life. He’s gone. He’s able to put this behind him and he moves on.

But I want to draw some applications we go back to Jesus’ parable. Because see the real challenge for all of us is that when we face trials, when we face pressures in our lives, what are we going to do with them? Do we just start yelling at people and we start berating people? Are we going to experience a lot of anxiety?

In the parable Jesus is saying look, the person receives the word with joy, but these rocks represent the challenges that they need to get those roots through. What do the rocks represent in your life? Maybe you grew up in a home where there was some real dysfunction and because of that dysfunction those rocks get in the way of the roots going deep inside of your heart. Maybe you’ve got some habits or challenges that are rocks in your life and that prevent you from going deep. We’ve got to get rid of the rocks and deal with them and allow the roots to go deep.

That was just the second soil. The third soil in Jesus’ parable is the one with the thorny soil. So the seed lands there and it’s welcomed. “Oh I love this church. Oh I love the Lord. This is great.” But the thorns represent the pleasures of this world. If my goal is pleasure, the end result is addiction. Pleasure isn’t bad, but if the goal is pleasure, the end result is addiction. So what happens is the pleasures of this world choke out the faith of this person so that they wither.

But the fourth soil (the soil that we all want to be) is this soil that has the tilled-up soil. It’s the soil that welcomes the word, is able to receive it, and the roots go deep. When the roots go deep then we’re able to handle the challenges of life, the storms that come by, the scorching sun, the *thlipsis* of our life.

How do you make those roots go deep? It’s a great question. I want to speak to you young people in particular today. I want you to understand how you can draw those roots really deep by asking yourself four questions. These are the four questions. Number one, is God real? Ask yourself that question. Do you believe that God is real? Because if you believe that God is real, it’s going to change the way you interact every day. You’re going to pray more. Your prayers aren’t just going to be, “God, give me this. God, give me good luck. God, do this for me.” It’s not just about

me. It's about, "Lord, how can I fit into your plans today? I know you have a plan here. How can I fit into that?" Is God real? That's your first question.

The second question is this: Is Jesus Christ really who He said He was? Was He just a historical figure? Was He just a good teacher, a moral person, a good example for us? Or was He really who He said He was? He says – *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* Now if you believe that Jesus Christ is really who He said He was, it's going to change the way you act, the way you interact with other people. It's going to change you. When Jesus called those disciples by the sea, He says – "*Leave your nets and follow me.*" I don't know what you have to leave in order to follow Christ, but it's going to change your life. If you believe that Jesus Christ is really who He said He was.

The third question you must ask is this: Is the Bible really the word of God? Because if the Bible is really the word of God, that means when you look at it, you're actually reading God's word for you. When you read those words and you see God is speaking to you through His word, you go whoa. It's going to make you more hungry to read God's word. You're going to say, "I can hardly wait to get into my devotions this morning or this evening. I'm looking to get into that Bible to see what God has to say to me. I can hardly wait to read the whole thing through. I want to know what God is saying to me." Because yes, God's word is God's word.

If you say yes to those questions (yes, God is real; yes, Jesus Christ is who He said He was; and yes, the Bible is the word of God) then you have one more question. That question is, so what are you going to do about it? Because if you believe those things are true, then you want to jump on that last question. It's going to change your life. You're going to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. You're going to love the Lord your God with all your heart. It's going to change the way you interact, the way you live, and what you do every day of your life. It's going to be an amazing transformation inside of you. And then what happens? The roots go deep. And as the roots go deeper in your life, you're able to deal with the challenges that life poses.

You're going to experience problems in this world. We all do. Jesus told us that. You're going to experience problems in this world. The question is, will you be able to deal with them? The most effective way to deal with the challenges we experience in this world is to go deep with your faith so you can understand how God permeates everything in our lives and He gives us the strength to deal with the challenges of the sun or the rocky soil or the thorns because our faith is deep and we can trust the Lord and allow Him to work in our lives.

I trust that God will use that in your heart, that you'll allow Him to grow those roots so deep. Sometimes the roots grow deep because of problems. We experience challenges and it grows our faith. But I would suggest you want to grow your faith before the challenges come if you can. Now is the time to strengthen your faith, to make it so strong that when the winds of adversity come you're able to handle them and be able to address them in the way that God would have you to do.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, we do thank you for your love for us and the way you care for us. We thank you that you say, "I will be with you." We need those words in our hearts. Lord, I know you're going to do some greater work in Jacob's life as we go forward. His faith is going to grow, he's going to do well in a lot of areas. So we don't want to judge him too harshly here. We thank you that your word shares the reality of people's lives and I pray that you'd motivate us to feel this compelling sense that we need to grow deeper in our faith. Teach us what that looks like. Lord, I pray that you'd give us the ability to advertise our faith to others so that they'll know where to go when you speak to them. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.