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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

Today we are continuing our Old Testament study as we look at the life of Jacob one more time. We’ve been talking about “Jacob, the Grabber.” The last half of the book of Genesis is taken up by two characters: Jacob and his son Joseph. Last week we talked about how Jacob was born grabbing onto the heel of his twin brother Esau and throughout his life he was grabbing for things. He grabbed for the birthright by selling a bowl of chili. He grabbed for the blessing by putting goat hair on his arms and on his neck and he even put on Esau’s clothes so he would smell like Esau so his father Isaac would bless him. We pick up tonight with the episode that begins right after he deceived Isaac. Esau has learned of the deception, despises his brother and threatens to kill him. Jacob knows he is being chased and he is a fugitive so he runs away and as far as we know he never sees his mother again. He’s going to have some experiences that are going to shape and change his life.

Jacob was not the finest character you could ever meet. He was a liar, a cheat, and a swindler. His very name means “grabber.” But Jacob was a part of God’s plan. I had a seminary professor who said, “God can strike a mighty lick with a crooked stick!” God can take failures and change them and then use them. For anybody who has ever made a mistake, God can still use you. For anybody who is not absolutely perfect, God can still use you, because God always saw what he knew Jacob could *become* rather than who Jacob was. Aren’t you glad Jesus Christ can look at you and know who you can become, not necessarily who you are right now? That’s the great thing about God’s grace.

I. JACOB WORSHIPPING

Let’s look at three episodes in Jacob’s life. First, let’s talk about Jacob worshipping.

Genesis 28:10-15. “Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway [literally a ladder] resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: ‘I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.’ When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it. He was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.’ Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, [*beth* meaning “house;” *el* meaning “God”] though the city used to be called Luz. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me and watch over me in this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father’s house, then the Lord will be my God and this stone that I

have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.””

1. Worship involves a vision of God

This is a worship experience, because as far as we know, this is the first time Jacob ever encountered God. Maybe he had heard about God from Isaac and maybe he had heard about God from his grandfather Abraham, but this is the first time he had ever heard from God. He said, “This is an awesome place and I’ve had an awesome experience with an awesome God!” Worship always involves two things. Number one, worship always involves a vision of God. He saw God. You say, “Well, I thought the Bible says no man has ever seen God.” He saw the glory of God and he heard the voice of God. You can come to church, sit in the choir loft or in a pew, or you can sit in the balcony or anywhere you want. You can come to a worship service, but unless you see God, you haven’t worshiped. You must be aware that God is present or you don’t. It breaks my heart to think about how many times people have come into a worship service and just sit there. They stand up, sit down, read the words, sing the songs, and leave and they were never once were aware of the fact that God was there. You haven’t worshiped when that happens. You might have been to a worship service, but you never worshiped because it always involves a vision of God.

In Jacob’s vision he saw a ladder. When I was in Sunday School, we learned a little song that went like this. We are climbing Jacob’s ladder / We are climbing Jacob’s ladder, / Children of the Lord. The only thing wrong with that is you and I are not supposed to climb Jacob’s ladder. That ladder is for angels only. You can’t get into heaven by climbing Jacob’s ladder. On that ladder there were angels who were going up and down. That is a picture of how God sends and dispatches angels to earth from heaven and how angels go back into heaven. I have done a study on angels and you need to remember angels are not omnipresent. Angels cannot be everywhere at one time; they are either here or they are in heaven, but they can’t be in both places at the same time. God sends angels back and forth.

There is a New Testament reference to angels ascending and descending in John 1:47. Jesus is just beginning his ministry and he meets Nathaniel. “When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, ‘Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.’” Jesus uses that name Israelite, because as we’ll see later, Jacob’s name is going to be changed to Israel. He said, “Here’s an Israelite who has no Jacob in him, in whom there is no deceit.” Then in verse 51 Jesus said to Nathanael, “You shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” That stairway is not a picture of Jacob’s ladder; it’s a beautiful picture of Jesus, because Jesus is the only stairway that will get you into heaven. Jacob said, “This is the gate to heaven.” Do you remember the Heaven’s Gate cult who committed mass suicide on the west coast a few months ago? The only gate into heaven is the Lord Jesus Christ and the only ladder into heaven is the Lord Jesus Christ. The problem here is sinful mankind and here is a holy God and man tries to build a whole bunch of homemade ladders to get themselves into heaven. They try to construct a stairway or a ladder of “good works.” They try to construct the ladder of “giving money.” They try to construct the ladder of “self-righteousness.” They construct the ladder of “religion.” They all try to build their stairway into heaven. There is only one stairway into heaven and it’s the old rugged cross of Jesus Christ. That is the only way you

can get into heaven. The first thing Jacob did in worship is he had a vision of God. You never worship until you have a vision of God.

2. Worship involves a vow to God

The second thing worship involves is a vow to God. Worship is when you are aware God is present. You see a vision of God, high and lifted up, but once you encounter God, you respond in some way: praise, worship, adoration but it also *always* leads you to make some kind of commitment to God. You haven't truly worshiped if you just come in and sing songs of praise to Jesus. Worship involves making a deeper commitment to God. That's what Jacob did. He said, “Okay, God. I've heard what you've had to say. You said that you would be with me. You said my descendants would populate the entire earth. You said ‘Your descendants are going to fill up the north, the south, the east and the west.’” That promise has been fulfilled. You find Jewish people on every continent and every nation on earth. Jacob said, “God, because of your promise I'm going to give you one tenth, a tithe.”

There are some people who say, “Tithing is only Old Testament. Tithing is part of the Law it's not under grace.” I've heard all of those arguments. The only thing wrong with that is it's wrong! Abraham, Jacob's grandfather, paid a tithe to Melchizedek, a priest of God Most High. Jacob here at Bethel gives a tithe to the Lord. This is not a one-time tithe. He says, “Everything I'm ever to get, I'm going to give you a tenth, Lord.” This is hundreds of years before God gave the Law to Moses. It's part of the principle of God and this was Jacob's way of saying, “God, I love you so much, I'm going to give something to you.”

Now there is Jacob sorry, old, lying, cheating, scheming Jacob. God appeared to him and said, “Jacob, I have plans for you.” Jacob is far from perfect. He is still going to make a lot of big mistakes in the rest of Genesis, but God at least revealed himself to him so the first scene is “Jacob worshipping.”

II. JACOB WORKING

Number two is Jacob working. Chapter 29 is a great chapter and it's too long for us to read so let me tell you the story. Jacob—who was a fine, good-looking, single guy—keeps on traveling until he finds the area where his uncle Laban lived. Laban was Rebekah's brother. Isaac's servant found Rebekah and took her back to marry Isaac. Rebekah had said. “Run and find my brother, Laban, and he'll take care of you so that Esau won't kill you.” Jacob is trying to find Laban and stops at a well. This was an interesting well, because they covered it up with a rock so their enemies couldn't mess it up. Jacob waited until that time during the day that they removed the stone so everybody could get some water. Jacob was hanging around and he says, “Where are you guys from?” They say, “We're from this area 'round here.” So he asks them, “Do you know Laban?” They said, “We sure do. We work for him.” Jacob says, “I am Laban's nephew.” They said, “You're not!” “Yeah, I am.” They said, “Well, here comes one of Laban's young'uns. Her name is Rachel.” When Jacob looked at Rachel, his mouth fell open and he said, “Wow! I like this idea of ‘kissing cousins,’ because that's exactly what he did. He went to Rachael, his cousin whom he had never met, and the Bible says he planted a big cousin kiss on her right there. “Cousin Rachel. I'm so glad to meet you. I'm your cousin.” She said, “Oh, we're glad you're

here. I want to take you and tell my daddy that you’re here.” So they run back to her home. “Daddy, daddy! You’ll never believe who’s here. It’s my cousin, Jacob, Rebekah’s boy. He’s here to visit with us.” Laban said, “Hey, I’m glad to have you!” Laban had two daughters, as is often the case.

Genesis 29:16-20. “Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes [mean “droopy-eyed,” or “less than beautiful”] but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful. Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, ‘I’ll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.’ Laban said, ‘It’s better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me. So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.’”

Those of you who love your wives know you could work for seven years for that woman and it would just seem like a few days because you love her so much. You can’t put a time on how long and how hard you’d work for that wife of yours. That’s the way Jacob felt. Those seven years went by in a flash. They had some interesting wedding celebrations back in those days. There was an awful lot of dancing, a lot of singing, celebrating and quite a bit of drinking too. We have plenty of evidence of that. So, here they are on that wedding night. It is the Jewish custom during this time to keep the bride and the groom separated until they go into their tent late at night. I can just imagine Jacob, who by this time is still mighty rough around the edges, was rather unsteady as he staggered into his tent later that night. He went in and they didn’t have electric lights back then. It was real dark. Remember how Jacob deceived people so many times? He was a cheat, a liar and a deceiver. He reaps what he sows. Laban is outside the tent and he doesn’t take Rachel, he takes weak-eyed Leah and puts her in the tent. It’s dark so Jacob thinks it’s Rachel and he and Leah sleep together and consummate the marriage.

Early the next morning as the sun is rising Jacob rolls over to say, “Good morning, Rachel!” and he looks over there and he says, “Leah what are you doing here?” Then he realized he had been cheated. Laban switched sisters on him and he is outraged. He said, “I worked seven years for Rachel and you gave me Leah?!” When he comes to Laban, you can imagine Jacob’s pretty angry. Jacob said, “Laban, you shouldn’t have done that!” Laban said, “Oh, it’s our tradition that the older sister must marry first. Sorry we didn’t tell you that, but that’s the way it is around here. So you have her whether you want her or not.” Jacob said, “Well, I know I can’t do anything about it, but I really would like to have Rachel. I’ll tell you what I will do, Laban. I will work seven more years to get Rachel. Laban says, “Okay. I have a good deal here. I have the seven years you have already worked. I’ll tell you what I will do. After you complete your wedding week with Leah, I’ll go ahead and give you Rachel right then and you can go ahead and work for the next seven years for me. So Jacob did. He was married to these two sisters, Leah and Rachel. You can figure it was not a happy home, because he really loved Rachel and he didn’t care much for Leah. In fact, he spurned Leah. But God has a way of kind of evening things out in life. Rachel couldn’t get pregnant, but Leah got pregnant and then got pregnant again, and again, and again. She is having baby boys all the time and Rachel is not having any.

Jacob worked a total of twenty years for Laban before he finally decided to set back for his own territory. All of this is going to work out in the end, but you can imagine how difficult it was

living with both of those wives. There is a spiritual lesson here I want you to learn and it's very simple. I think Leah represents the Law, the Old Testament tradition, because the Old Testament says, "You work and then you'll receive." The Law says, "If you keep the Law and obey the rules then you receive God's favor." Jacob worked seven years first and then he got Leah but Leah never really satisfied him and the Law can never really satisfy you. Rachel, on the other hand, is a picture of grace in the New Testament, because for New Testament believers it is totally opposite. Grace says, "You receive the gift of eternal life and then you work." Don't try working for your salvation; you'll never earn it. That's the Law, but Grace, the New Testament teaching, says, "Eternal life is a free gift and you receive it by faith, but once you receive it, then you work willingly." The Law is drudgery and never satisfies, but when you are truly in love with Jesus just like Jacob was in love with Rachel, serving the Lord doesn't seem like work at all! It's a joy to serve when you love.

If you want to get into some interesting material, study all the children of Jacob he had through Leah, and the children he had through Rachel, and the children he had through the two maids of Leah and Rachel, because it gets very, very interesting when it comes to how God divided up the Promised Land generations later.

III. JACOB WRESTLING

The third episode is Jacob wrestling. Jacob is on his way back to his home but knows Esau is waiting for him. Esau said, "Jacob, if I ever lay eyes on you again, the first thing I am going to do is kill you! I'm going to slit your throat! I'm going to take a sword and run it through your heart! I'm going to take a knife and I'm going to cut off your head!" But Jacob said, "I'm going to go back anyway!" In chapter 32:7, we see how scared Jacob was. "In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well."

Genesis 32:22-32. "That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.' "But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go until you bless me.' The man asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Jacob,' he answered. Then the man said, 'Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.' Jacob said, 'Please tell me your name.' But he replied, 'Why do you ask my name?' Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.' The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. Therefore, to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon."

1. Who he wrestled

First let's answer the question, "Who was it he wrestled with?" This is the first wrestling match

in history. Some say he wrestled against God, because that’s what he said. “I saw God face to face.” Others say you can’t wrestle with God, because the Bible says it was a man. Very often in the Old Testament the word *man* is used to describe an angel. It could have been an angel of the Lord. Some say that it was what is often called, “a pre-incarnate visit of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.” When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were walking in the fiery furnace and there was a fourth walking in there and he was like the Son of Man. Some say that was the pre-incarnate (which means *prior to Bethlehem*) Jesus, second person of the Godhead coming down to earth. We don’t know exactly for sure who it was. All we know is it was a representative of God. Whether it was a pre-incarnate Jesus whether it was an angel of the Lord, we just know it was a representative of God and he spoke for God and he had the authority to bless from God. Who he was is not nearly as important as what took place.

(1) Jacob was afraid

I want you to see a process of what Jacob went through. First of all Jacob was a man of fear. He was afraid because he or Rachael had stolen some of Laban’s things Laban was chasing them. Although he had caught up and they had somewhat settled it, here he was running from Laban running toward Esau. He was a man running from one danger toward another. He was afraid. Here’s a lesson you and I can learn. God meets us at our desperation. Is there anybody in this room tonight who is approaching desperation? You’re at a point where you say, “I don’t know what in the world I’m going to be able to do. I’m being chased from behind and I have an enemy in front of me.” When you are at a point of desperation, congratulations! Because that’s an excellent time for God to come to your aid. The problem is sometimes you are not desperate enough. Sometimes the situation is desperate, but you’re not desperate. Jacob was desperate! When you are desperate God comes. We see that in Jacob.

(2) Jacob was flesh and blood

Number two he was a man of flesh. He thought he could fight God. He said, “I’ll deal with this messenger from God the same way I’ve dealt with everybody else. I’ve always been a grabber. I’ve always been a manipulator. I’ve always been a fixer so I know what I’ll do. I’ll just grab hold of this guy. I’ll manipulate him. I’ll wrestle him. I’ll fix him.” He’s always fixed problems with the flesh and here’s the lesson we learn: We often struggle against God. We don’t struggle with him physically. We don’t struggle against him literally but sometimes God tells you, “This is what I want you to do. This is what I want you to say. This is how I want you to act.” We wrestle against that. We fight against it. We say, “No, God. I want to do it my way.”

(3) Jacob was a failure

He was a man of failure. He lost the wrestling match. This is really the first big failure in Jacob’s life. This is the first time Jacob grabbed hold of something he couldn’t control. The lesson we learn there is we may struggle with God, but God is undefeated! He has never been beaten. He is totally, absolutely undefeated. He’s never been beaten, never been tied. You may struggle against God, but you won’t whip him.

(4) Jacob became a man of faith

Number four Jacob became a man of faith, because as he is wrestling he realizes, "I can't win! I've grabbed hold of something I can't control." So he says, "I've failed. Finally I have failed." So he puts his faith in God and says, "God, whoever you are, I'm not going to let you go until you bless me." Here's the lesson that we learn from that. When you are in trouble just hang on to God. Sometimes you don't have anything else to do except hang on to God. Hang on to the promises of God hang, on to the word of God, hang on to the people of God, hang on in prayer. When you get to the end of your rope sometimes, just hang on Say, "God, I'm not going to let go until you bless me!"

(5) Jacob became a man of forgiveness

Number five, he became a man of forgiveness. This is the key. He said to this angel, "I'm not going to let you go until you bless me." The angel touched his hip and somehow just by touching it, he knocked it out of place. If any of you have ever broken your hip or you know someone who has fallen and broken their hip, you know that it's a terribly painful injury. You say, "Wow! If God's going to bless me that way, I don't know that I want to be blessed!" Sometimes God's blessings come disguised as pain. Sometimes God's blessings come disguised as injury. That's what God did to him.

The next morning as the sun was rising, Esau was out there waiting for him. Jacob can't run from him anymore. He has been running from him for twenty years. This proud, arrogant grabber who has always gotten everything he wanted had changed. This proud, strong man who grabbed everything he always wanted in life has a new nature. When God touches you, you always end up with a new nature. He used to walk proudly and arrogantly but now he's limping. He's been humbled. He has literally been broken. When God touches you, he breaks you. David says, "A broken and a contrite heart, Oh God, you will not despise." God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. He had a new nature a broken-ness.

2. Jacob's new name

The second thing is Jacob had a new name. God said, "Your name is not Jacob anymore. Your name is Israel," which means someone who struggles with God, and literally who prevails *with* God, not prevails *over* God. I challenge you to watch the news. Every time you read the name of the nation Israel, you know God is a God who keeps his promise.

When God touches you, you'll have a new nature. Your sins will be forgiven and you'll have a spirit of forgiveness. You'll have a new name. He'll change your whole personality. We're not going to talk about Jacob anymore, but I want to tell you what happened. I believe had he never wrestled with God and never been broken, I believe the next day he probably would have walked out there and said, "Esau, here I am. What are you going to do about it?" He had even divided up his people so they could outflank him in a military strategy. But the next day when Jacob walks out, he is limping. He is a different man. He has a different name and when he sees Esau, he bows down not once, not twice, but seven times. In those days to bow before another person was saying, "I'm your servant and I'm at your service. Will you forgive me for what I've done to

you?”

Esau probably got up that morning fully intending to kill his rotten, stinking, lying brother. But when he saw his brother walking differently and saw him broken and bowing down, humbly apologizing and asking for forgiveness, Esau ran to him and embraced his brother and they hugged and they loved each other. When God touches you, it’s very easy for you to go to those you’ve hurt and wronged and bow down before them and say, “I was wrong. Will you forgive me?” because that is the nature of Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

I always look for some kind of symmetry in the word of God. To me it’s almost like the way the Old Testament does things the New Testament reverses it. Genesis was paradise lost, the cross was paradise restored. Do you see Jacob? Do you see the sequence? Worshiping, working, wrestling; for us it’s just the opposite. God calls us to follow him, to serve him and to obey him and maybe we wrestle with him for a while and struggle with that but then finally we give in and we start serving God. We serve him because we love him. Then, as we serve him we come to a point where we say, “God, I love you and I worship you because I believe for a New Testament Christian worship is the highest gift we can give to God.

OUTLINE

I. JACOB WORSHIPING

Worship involves a:

1. Vision of God
2. Vow to God

II. JACOB WORKING

III. JACOB WRESTLING

1. Who he wrestled

Jacob was:

- (1) Afraid
- (2) Flesh and blood
- (3) A failure

Jacob became a man of:

- (4) Faith
- (5) Forgiveness

2. Jacob's new name