

GENESIS: THE BEGINNING IS NOT THE END

Jacob - A Picture of Change

TEXT: Genesis 28-35; Psalm 119:9; John 17:17-19; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

INTRODUCTION: The man called Jacob is not the best known of the people whose life stories are recounted in the book of Genesis. Other names are far more recognizable than his; people like Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, Abraham, and Joseph.

But Jacob is among the most interesting, and the story of his life can also be one of the most helpful to us who live some 3700 years after he did. In fact, more than people remember Jacob's name, they remember the stories about him.

Jacob was the second born of twins, but was chosen by God before he was born to be the son through which God's promise to Abraham would be continued. We noted last week that Jacob was certainly glad for God's choice, but as a young man, he did not trust God to fulfill what He had promised.

In the land of the Canaanites in which Isaac, Jacob's father, was dwelling, the birthright and the blessing of the father always went to the firstborn. Jacob figured that if he was to be what God promised he would be, Jacob himself would have to do some finagling to make things happen. So as a young man in his twenties he tricked his brother Esau into selling his birthright for a bowl of stew.

Later Jacob deceives his nearly blind father into thinking Esau is standing before him, and Isaac pronounces his blessing on the second born by mistake. Just as I shared with you that we often misunderstand the age of Isaac at certain points in his life, the same is true of Jacob. Jacob was 26 when he swindled the birthright from Esau. He was 77 when he stole his brother's blessing.

If you are wondering how that could be or how we could know that, I have printed a summary of the calculations done by my favorite chronologer, and have copies of that report at the Welcome Center. They are normally \$10 each, but today they are on sale for free!

Due to the wrath of his brother, Jacob has to flee to the ancient family homeland of Padan-aram. On the way he stops at a place to rest and in a dream saw the angels of heaven going up and down a ladder or a staircase that stretched from heaven to earth. At the top of the stairs stood God Himself, who extended the promise God made to Abraham to Jacob. When he awoke he set up a pillar to mark the place, anointed it with oil to indicate it was holy, and named the site Bethel, which means "The House of God," for he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place."

Jacob departed the next day, still headed toward Padan-aram, where at the still spry young age of 77 he is planning to find a wife. He finds the one he wants, but her father Laban makes Jacob work for him for seven years before he will permit the marriage. (Dads, you might keep that in mind if a young man starts getting too serious with your daughter too quickly!)

Many of you probably also remember that at the end of the seven years, daddy-in-law Laban does not give Jacob his beautiful Rachel but substitutes her older sister Leah. Then, still determined to have Rachel as his wife, he has to agree to work seven more years. So Jacob gets two wives, each with her own handmaid, and all four women start living in the household of a man who just a month before had been a bachelor for 77 years! Don't you imagine that was fun. Well, it wasn't. There was envy and jealousy thick enough to paint the walls green. The result was feuding and fighting, deception and trickery, and in general a household at war with each other.

After a stay in Padan-aram for twenty years, God tells Jacob to get himself back home where he belongs. On the return, Jacob has another personal encounter with God. God changes Jacob's name to Israel; but that is not all God changes. God changes Jacob on the inside as well. Jacob's name literally meant in Hebrew "The Supplanter" but had been interpreted by those who knew him as "The Deceiver." God changed his name to Israel. "Israel" means one who rules with God or one who is ruled by God.

And it is this part of the story that makes the life of Jacob so very significant to each of us. Not just that we understand the origin of the name Israel, although Israel is becoming more significant every day to each one of us whether we know it or not. But the significance I am referring to is the significance of change.

Jacob went from a self-centered, lying, deceiving, conniving man for more than half of his life to become a man whose heart was ruled by God and who would have a very special place of ruling with God.

God changed him, and that is why we need to consider the life of Jacob. Because folks,

I. EVERYONE IS BROKEN AND NEEDS TO BE FIXED - CHANGED.

Travis Cottrell got it right in the new chorus he wrote for the old hymn, Just As I Am.

**I come broken to be mended
I come wounded to be healed
I come desperate to be rescued
I come empty to be filled
I come guilty to be pardoned**

A. We are all broken by the effect of the sin of our ancestors.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they then passed their sin nature to every one of their children, and those children passed it on to theirs, and so on all the way to Noah. When Noah got on the ark, he took it with him, and so did his sons and daughters-in-law.

We have all inherited Adam's sin nature, and we are born sinners into this world. Little babies are beautiful, cute, and precious; but they are not innocent.

- They are the epitome of selfishness.
- They cry when they are hungry, uncomfortable, or irritated.
- They do not care in the least whether you are hungry, uncomfortable, or irritated.
- Two babies can be rolling around in the playpen together, and the big one will steal the pacifier out of the little one's mouth.

We are all broken because we inherited the sin nature of our ancestors, but that is not all.

B. We are all broken by the effect of our own personal sin.

While it is true that we are not to blame for inheriting a sin nature from our ancestors, the sin nature causes us to lean toward sin; it does not force us to do it. There remains a choice for each of us in what we do or do not do.

Ultimately, we all sin, and that is why the Word of God says plainly

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

And this sin causes brokenness in our lives. Listen to how specific Paul gets in writing to the church in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 6:9–11 ... Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 **And such were some of you.** ...

C. We are all broken by the effect of sin in the lives of people around us.

We see this clearly in the life of Jacob.

- He inherited a sin nature from Adam and all of his other ancestors.
- He himself was a sinner. He chose to lie, manipulate, and deceive.
- But he also was raised in a family where his father deceived others and he, Isaac, steadfastly refused to obey the expressed will of God.

But folks, this story of Jacob is good news. It is a story filled with hope for all of us. Jacob could be changed! Jacob was changed! We can be changed also! And those

changes can help us not only with the effects of our own sin but in dealing with the impact of sin that comes from others.

II. THE BEGINNING OF HEALING AND THE BEGINNING OF CHANGE COME THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST.

When Jacob awoke at Bethel after God spoke to him, the God of his father Isaac became Jacob's God. Jacob took a vow that day saying:

- **Yahweh shall be my God.**
- **I shall surely give the tenth to God.**

Declaring his trust in God and showing his commitment in action was the beginning of change in Jacob's life. So also, for us to experience change there must be a new beginning. Jesus called it the new birth.

Let me take you back to the plain-spoken passage written by Paul to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 6:9–11 ... Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you.

- **But you were washed,**
- **but you were sanctified,**
- **but you were justified**
in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Jesus died on the cross

- **to pay the penalty for our sin and offer us forgiveness.**
- **to purchase eternal life that He might offer it to us as a gift.**
- **to make transformation – change possible in the lives of those who trust Him.**

When we trust Jesus as our Savior and Lord,

- we are immediately forgiven.
- we go to heaven when we die.
- sanctification – God changing us to be like Jesus begins in our lives.

This

III. PROGRESSIVE HEALING AND CHANGE TAKE PLACE AS WE SURRENDER TO THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN MAKING US MORE LIKE JESUS.

John 17:17,19b **"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.... that they also may be sanctified by the truth."**

Sanctify – to make holy – to make us like Christ

A. We are sanctified through the sufficiency of the Word of God.

1. Not only is the Bible the inerrant Word of God, it is also the sufficient Word of God for all matters pertaining to the spirit and soul.

Sufficiency means that it is enough. If the Bible is sufficient for all matters pertaining to the spirit and the soul, then we do not have to add other methodologies or philosophies to its instructions to live full and complete lives in harmony with God's purposes for us. If the Bible is truly sufficient, it should answer these questions:

a. How can we have our life cleansed of destructive patterns?

Psalm 119:9 **How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.**

b. Where can we receive trustworthy counsel that we know will be right?

Psalm 119:24 **Your testimonies** also are my delight And my counselors.

c. How can we grow wise in dealing with life's problems and issues?

Psalm 119:98-100 **98 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me. 99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. 100 I understand more than the ancients, Because I keep Your precepts.**

d. How can we penetrate the surface and get to the heart of the problems and issues we face in life?

Hebrews 4:12 **For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.**

e. How can I receive complete counsel to grow to be all God wants me to be?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 **16 All Scripture** is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, **17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

The answer to every question is "The Word of God." That is because the Bible is sufficient!

B. We are sanctified by means of the discipline of applying the Word.

Although we are sanctified through the sufficiency of God's Word,

- just having a Bible,
- carrying a Bible,
- saying we believe the Bible, is not enough.

We must apply the truths of the Scripture to our lives.

Let me revisit the same questions and the same answers in the Scripture we just examined to see another dimension. Notice what we must do with the inerrant, all sufficient Word of God.

1. How can we have our life cleansed of destructive patterns?

Psalm 119:9 How can a young man cleanse his way? **By taking heed according to Your word.**

In other words, we must do what God's Word tells us to do. James says for us to be doers of the Word and not just hearers of the Word.

2. Where can we receive trustworthy counsel that we know will be right?

Psalm 119:24 Your testimonies also are **my delight** And **my counselors.**

I am encouraged to see a strengthening of the field of biblical counseling in our SBC seminaries and in the U.S. in general. Only the Word of God has the counsel we need. But it will only help us as we delight in its counsel and do it.

3. How can we grow wise in dealing with life's problems and issues?

Psalm 119:98-100 98 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For **they are ever with me.** 99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are **my meditation.** 100 I understand more than the ancients, Because **I keep Your precepts.**

4. How can we penetrate the surface and get to the heart of the problems and issues we face in life?

Hebrews 4:12 For the **word of God** is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and **is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.**

The Word of God will offer the answer that goes to the heart of the problem, but we must do something with it. Go back up one verse to **Hebrews 4:11** Let us therefore **be diligent** to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of **disobedience.** To get to the heart of the problem we must be diligent about obeying the instruction of the Lord.

5. How can I receive complete counsel to grow to be all God wants me to be?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be **complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

Again go up to the verses preceding this one to 2 Timothy 3:14 **But you must continue in the things which you have learned** and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them,

Folks, as I look back on every major change in my life across the years, every one of them has come in this way.

This is how the Holy Spirit

- turned me from liberalism to inerrancy.
- changed me from being apathetic about abortion to being staunchly pro-life.
- cured me of being short sighted concerning evangelism and made me an Acts 1:8 Christian and pastor.

In each case,

- I saw and acknowledged what the Word of God says.
- I committed myself to practice it.

As Jacob wrestled with God when he returned to the Promised Land and came out different and better, so it often is when we struggle through accepting what God says in His Word and then labor to apply it to our lives. Each of these changes came to my life with pain, requiring me to humble myself, confess sin and failure, and struggle to change things that had become patterns in my life.

But the Holy Spirit caused change to happen as I stuck by the Word of God and continued to do what it says.

CONCLUSION: Do you already know of an area God wants to change in your life? If not, ask the Lord if there is something He desires.

If you do already know, or if the Lord brings something to mind, would you commit to the Lord that you will search out what His Word says you should do and pledge yourself to obedience as you discover God's truth?

This is the way the old chains can be broken and taken away.

- Trusting Christ
- Learning what His Word says to do
- Faithfully practicing what God says