



The Sermon

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Genesis 35:1-29

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"Walking with God"

TRANSCRIPT

It is so good to be back home and to be where I belong, and so I'm grateful to be able to step back into the book of Genesis. But before I do I want to bring some clarity to something. The last time I was here I preached on God wrestling with Jacob, and that led to me teaching on, really, the doctrine of conversion. And I want to be very clear in what I was not saying and what I am saying; and for any further questions that anyone has, I will be here after church; and please come up and give me opportunity to address that any further.

Conversion is the turning of the soul away from sin and away from the world to God; and theologically, regeneration and conversion are the heads and tails of the same coin. Regeneration is the new birth, and that is exclusively a work of God in the spiritually dead soul. There's nothing that we can do to cause ourselves to be born again, and it is what God does in His elect at His appointed time. The immediate and instantaneous result of regeneration is conversion, and conversion is man's response. Conversion is calling upon the name of the Lord, to believe in Jesus Christ. And so these two happen at exactly the same time. It's like when you strike a match, there's both light and heat that are both suddenly emitted. And in regeneration and conversion, they both take place at the same time. There's no one walking around regenerated who is not converted, OK; and there's no one who's converted who's not regenerated.

So, in conversion, many people, I would say most people, can identify when that took place in their life. That is the most important thing that has ever happened in their life. It's more important than the day they were born physically. It's more important than the day they were married. It's more

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important than the day they graduated from college. It's more important than the day they received a promotion at work. It's the most important event to ever take place in your life, and it brings about a greater change than the day that you die and go to heaven. When you die and go to heaven, you'll just go from life to life. But in regeneration, you go from death to life; and it brings about a far greater change from the inside out than even the day you step into heaven is the day you stepped into the kingdom of God.

Now what I did not say is that you must know that day, because not everyone knows that moment. There are reasons for that, and time really does not permit me to walk through all those reasons why some people do not know that moment, where other people do know that moment. But I would put it to you this way: it's not necessary that you know. In order to be truly saved it's not necessarily that you know, what's important is that you know the Lord right now. That's what's important, that this very moment you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. However, you should know the most important event to ever take place in your life. That's number one. I want clarity on that. So if you don't know when, I'm not saying you're not converted, I'm just saying you should know; but not everyone does know.

The second thing that I want to bring clarity to is I said that there should be a crisis in your conversion, and that is true. Conversion does bring about a crisis. No one casually enters the kingdom of God. No one strolls through the narrow gate. No one is yawning as they step into the kingdom of God. There is a great disturbance that takes place in the soul, and it is the pains of conviction of sin, John 16:8, "The Holy Spirit has come into the world to convict men of sin and righteousness and judgment." That's not a casual thing. That's not a light matter, to be convicted of sin and righteousness and judgment. And so that brings about a crisis within the heart, that I need a Savior, I need the forgiveness of sin, I need to be clothed in the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

On top of that, regeneration produces repentance; and repentance involves the mind, the emotions, and the will. It is a comprehensive repentance, and it does involve the emotions, and there is a grief over one's sin that the Holy Spirit brings about, such that as we take that decisive step to enter into the kingdom, we do step in limping, not skipping, but limping into the kingdom. And I want to give you two verses just to bring some clarity to this, and the first is Luke 13:24, where Jesus Himself says, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate."

Whenever you go through the narrow gate it's so narrow that you have to strive to enter through it. It's not so wide that a semi truck can just weave its way through. No, it's striving to enter through the narrow gate. And what you need to know about the word "strive" - and again, this is from the lips of Jesus - is that it's the Greek word *agōnizomai*. It's a verb, which means - comes into the English language as "agonize." Agonize to enter through the narrow gate. There's no easy believism. There's no cheap grace. It is the most monumental experience of a person's life, and you must agonize to enter into the kingdom of God, shedding self-righteousness, shedding the allure of the world and living for the now and throwing off the old man to enter through the kingdom. So there is a crisis that's involved. With some people, it's more of a crisis; with other people, it's less of a crisis; but it is a crisis nonetheless.

The third thing that I want to clarify is child evangelism; and because of the first two things that I said, child evangelism can be a tricky thing. I am not saying that a child cannot be converted, I am saying that it is difficult to know if a child has truly been converted, because what are they repenting of, that they ate an extra dessert, that they didn't pick up their room? I mean, what is the sin that they are abandoning in order to have Christ?

And I've been a pastor for now basically 40 years, and I've been privileged to see hundreds of people come to faith in Christ under my preaching, and I've been privileged to talk to most of them and have them relay their testimony to me. Vast, vast numbers of those hundreds told me that they walked an aisle when they were a little child, they prayed a prayer at VBS, but their life never changed, and they went through college sowing their wild oats and praying for crop failure, and then were single, and then got married, and finally got serious about God, and by their own testimony they came to know Christ, not when they first took a step towards God, but when they came to the decisive moment later in life.

And I've had to redefine my own testimony. For years I said that I was converted at age six. But the more I study the Bible, the more I preach the Bible, the more I write books about the Bible and use that as the grid and the template to place over my own life and say, "Steve Lawson, when were you converted?" the answer is not age six, the answer is age seventeen, and I can take you to the place and to the time when that occurred. And so even with myself, I've had to readjust my understanding of when it is that I entered the kingdom, when I was converted, simply on the basis of reading the Bible, what in my life matches up with what I read in the Bible; because

my experience is not the determinative factor, the Bible is the determinative factor.

So I don't have to have the Bible match up with me, I must match up with the Bible. And when I pick up this Book and look through the lens of Scripture, it has become very clear to me that I was converted at a later time, at age seventeen. That in no way is to discount what took place in my life when I was six years of age, it was simply an initial step toward understanding the gospel. It was an initial step towards understanding my need for the grace of God.

If you had asked me at that time, "Steve Lawson, do you want to go to hell?" at age six, I would have said, "No, I don't want to go to hell." "Do you want to be with mommy and daddy in heaven for the rest of your life?" "Yes, I want to be with mommy and daddy in heaven for the rest of my life." Well then, just pray this prayer, then just repeat after me." I mean, it's very easy to get a child to repeat a prayer to escape hell to be with mom and dad in heaven when there is not the sufficient understanding of really why this is so necessary.

Can it happen at age six? Absolutely; please hear me when I say that. Is every child at age six who prays a prayer to enter the kingdom, are they converted? The answer is no, just like everyone who prays a prayer at age thirty is not automatically entering into the kingdom of heaven. That's why I never, when I'm talking with someone after the service like this and they want to talk about where they are with the Lord and they want to know what they must do to enter into the kingdom, I never say something like this: "Well pray this prayer with me: I'm a sinner, I'm a sinner - just repeat this after me - I need grace, I need grace. Forgive me of my sin. Forgive me of my sin," and they just parrot. No, that that would be to mislead someone.

When God brings you to the point of conversion, you must do business with God, not through a priest or through a preacher; you must do business with God directly, between your soul and God. And I can't put those words into your mouth. And if you don't have those words, you may not know enough yet to be saved, because you have to know certain things in order to be converted; and specifically, you have to know that you're a great sinner, and that Christ is an even greater Savior, and that you're on the broad road headed for destruction, and you must enter through the narrow gate that alone leads to life. And to enter through that narrow gate, you must strive to enter through the narrow gate. You must agonize with repentance, under

conviction of sin, to find the relief from the guilt and the burden of sin to be rolled off your back, and for you to enter into the rest of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, that's what I was saying, or trying to say, a couple of weeks ago. And if you have any further questions, I am more than happy to be able to visit with you about that.

Let me add one more footnote. I cannot tell anyone in this world that they're saved. Assurance of salvation does not come from a preacher, it does not come from a parent, it does not come from any person. There's only one person who can give you assurance of salvation and that is the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:16 tells us, and later in 1 John chapter 3, that the Holy Spirit – it's an inside job. I don't know anyone's heart; and if I had been one of the disciples, I might have said Peter is lost and Judas is saved; I mean, they all had their moments. Only God knows your heart, and only the Holy Spirit can bring assurance of salvation to your heart; that's nothing that any person can give to you.

So, I can't tell you if you're saved or not saved. If you tell me you've believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ, I can tell you on the basis of your faith in Christ you are saved, but I don't know if that's true saving faith or if that's a faith that's less than saving. So, 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, "Examine yourself whether you be in the faith."

Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say unto Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name? Did we not cast out demons in Your name? Did we not perform many wondrous works in Your name?' And I will say unto them in that day, 'Depart from Me, you who work iniquity.' He who hears these words of Mine and acts upon them as like a wise man who built his house upon the rock. And when the rains came and the winds blew and beat against the house, it did not fall, because it was built upon the rock. He who hears these words of Mine and does not act upon them is like a very foolish man who built his house upon the sand."

He went through all the motions of building a house, it was just built upon a faulty foundation. It looked like the house next door, it's just the foundation was the total opposite of the house next door. In essence, both people went to church both people sat under the Word of God, it's just that one built upon the rock, the other built upon the sand. "He who hears these words of Mine and does not act upon them is like a very foolish man who built his

house upon the sand. And when the rains came and the winds blew and beat against the house, great was its fall, because it was built upon the sand."

So, I guess just one more comment before I look at our text. In my now some 40 years of pastoral ministry and seeing hundreds of people come to faith in Christ, probably 90 percent of those were church members who sat under my preaching, who grew up in church, who married a Christian, but there had never really been the soul-searching to take place on the inside. And countless numbers have been converted, as I observed with my own eyes and as they have sat under my preaching. They were unconverted church members who were lost.

So, that's why I stressed what I said, because I don't want that to be true in your life. There's no way we could get this many people in one building and every one of us is converted, that's just impossible. Jesus had only twelve, and one of them was unconverted. I couldn't get this many preachers, I couldn't get this many missionaries in one room, and in reality they're all converted. There are always tears sown among the wheat. There are always those who just go along with the crowd but have never had a personal, individual encounter with God through His Son Jesus Christ, whereby they have come to a defining moment in their life and took that decisive step of faith to enter into the kingdom. So I want you to be sure that you're saved. It would be the kindest thing I would desire for your life, it would be the most loving thing that I would want for you, is that you are converted, and that you, second, know that you're converted, that if you died this moment that you would know that you would wake up in heaven and see the smile of God to receive you home.

So, the matter is so important and so critical that at times maybe I as a preacher stress the point with such firmness that it may seem that I'm exaggerating the point; and at times, maybe I do exaggerate; but it's to be provocative intentionally, to make you think about where you are. I would rather disturb you and you end up in heaven than let you sleep through these services and end up in hell. So, examine yourself whether you be in the faith. Have you had a personal encounter with the risen, living Christ? "Except you be converted," - Jesus said in Luke 18 - "you shall likewise perish." So, that's the sermon before the sermon, all right. And I would just simply say this with all humility, I desire to say it with all humility: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

All right, because of time - and I'm looking at my friend the clock - I'm just going to pray and we're going to step into this chapter immediately, because I have 29 verses and it'll take a while to read this.

[Prayer] So, Father, as we look now into Your Word, I pray that You will give us understanding, give us clarity. I pray that You will help us assimilate the relevance of this passage to our daily Christian lives. And for anyone here today who is yet outside the kingdom, I pray that You will draw them to faith in Christ. May they be born again even today, in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

Well, we find ourselves in Genesis chapter , and I invite you to take your Bible and be turning there - and it sounds like most of you are already there, as I don't hear the normal pages being turned. And the title of this message is "Walking with God." And in these verses we gain an insight from the life of Jacob what it looks like to walk with God, because to walk with God begins at a point in time. No one enters this world out of their mother's womb walking with God, everyone enters this world separated from God and walking according to the course of this world, Ephesians 2 verse 2. And so there must come a defining moment in a person's life when they begin to walk with God.

Previous, they've been going their own way. Previous, they've been doing their own thing. Previous, they've been following their own desires. But to walk with God, a person must do a complete 180 turnaround and no longer go according to the course of this world and now begin to follow God and to follow Christ. And that's exactly where Jacob is. He now is one who is walking with God, sometimes closer than at other times, sometimes further away and lagging behind; but nevertheless, following God.

As we look at this chapter in Genesis 35 it really is a collection of, I would call it, an odd collection of episodes in the life of Jacob. There's not one narrative that really just stands out like we have seen in previous chapters in Genesis. It's like a series of box cars behind an engine, and smaller episodes that are just kind of pushed together. But that's the way life normally is. Life isn't going from one gigantic episode to the next gigantic episode to the next; but life is, as we walk with God, generally has a series of smaller episodes, though they are very determinative and very important in our life.

And in this chapter we'll see Jacob walking with God from Shechem to Bethel to Mamre. We will see Jacob involved in the birth of a son and the death of a wife at the same time, as he will lose his wife and child as she delivers a child to him. We will see Jacob suffer the death of his mother's nurse. We will see Jacob suffer the death of his own father and have to bury his own father and be reunited with his once estranged brother Esau. I mean, this is a collage of many different episodes in the life of Jacob. And so it is in our life as well. There's many ups and downs, and peaks and valleys; but through it all, we just continue to follow the Lord.

So, I want to walk us through this chapter; and as I do, I have several headings that are simply footprints to help us move through this passage in some linear fashion. And the first thing I want you to note is "the command." That's in verse 1: God issues a command to Jacob. And in verse 1, "God said to Jacob, 'Arise, go up to Bethel and live there.'" Presently Jacob is some 30 to 50 miles away, and he is to get up, pull up tent pegs and to travel to Bethel. He's to "go up," meaning up in elevation, up in topography. He's to go up a thousand feet, which is quite an ascent.

And please note what he is to do once he arrives in Bethel. It is what is most important to God, and it is what must be most important to Jacob, and it is what must be important to your life and to my life. He says, "and make an altar there to God." We see here the priority of worship, do we not? Before he is to dig a well, he must build an altar. Before he is to pitch his tent, he is to build an altar. Before he is to establish his business, he is to build an altar. And this reminds us that what is Job Number One in our Christian lives is to live for the glory of God and to be worshipers of God, which is what we will do in heaven forever and ever and ever. And Jacob here is instructed by God to make worship number one in his life. He says, "Make an altar there to God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau."

So what you're doing this morning is Job Number One for your life. This is how the week starts. We gathered together as the people of God on a Sunday morning, which is the day Jesus was raised from the dead, and we come together corporately to build an altar, to worship God that will carry us into the week ahead of us. Every moment of every day we are to be living worshipers of God. Romans 12:1 says, "to present your body as a living and holy sacrifice, which is your acceptable service of worship."

We are to live on the altar. Our lives are to be presented as a living and holy sacrifice to God, every moment of every day, as we give glory to God in everything that we do. First Corinthians 10:31 says, "Whatsoever you do, whether you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God." And I can hear Jesus say in Matthew 6:33, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these other things shall be added unto you."

As you're here today, maybe you're new to Dallas, maybe you've just moved here to Dallas; and I want to tell you what's Job Number One for you. It's to find a church where you can worship God in spirit and in truth. It's not to find an apartment, it's not to get a job. What is number one in your life is that you find an altar where you can worship God, and then trust God to move you to live where you should live, to move you into the job that you should have. But what is Job Number One is to be a worshiper of God.

So, that's the command in verse 1. I want you to note, second, "the cleansing," in verses 2-4. In order to rightly worship God there must be the cleansing of the lives of the people of God. And so in verse 2, "So Jacob said to his household," - in response to what God had just said to him, he's got to gather up his whole family, he's got to gather up all of his servants and go to Bethel and build an altar. "So Jacob said" - verse 2 - "to his household" - that would include his two wives and his two ladies who were concubines; and he adds - "and to all who were with him," - all of his servants; so it's an entourage, if you will - "He says to them, 'Put away the foreign gods which were among you, and purify yourselves and change your garments.'"

If we're going to worship God, if we're going to build an altar, and if we are going to come into the presence of Holy God and to worship Him in the beauty of His pristine, perfect holiness, then we cannot come just as we are, that we must put away false gods. And this tells us what had crept into this entourage of people under Jacob's leadership were idols, foreign gods of the of the Canaanites. And God is intolerant of any other gods. He is a jealous God and says, "You shall have no other gods before Me." And in order to worship God, you must put away all of the other gods. There is an exclusive claim and demand that God makes upon every worshiper, "that you have both eyes on Me, and that your heart is fixed upon Me."

So, "Put away the foreign gods," - and for us to put away worldliness, idols in this world, anything that's more important than God is to us must be put away. And then He says - "and purify yourselves." That that means to

sanctify your hearts, to set your heart apart, away from the pursuit of sin and separate your heart from the allurements of this world and come with a pure heart to worship God. "Do not come with an impure heart. Do not come with foreign gods under your arms."

And then He says, "and change your garments - take off your old, dirty garments, and put on new clean garments." Why? Because you have an audience with the King. You're coming into the very presence of God. This is not a time to dress down, this is a time to dress up. This is not a time to fall out of bed and come with just casual clothes, this is a time to recognize you're entering into the palace of the King. And you need to show respect to the King of kings and to the Lord of lords, and so change your garments. Take off what you've been wearing all week, and put on the best that you have, because you are coming to worship God. This should be an extraordinary thing.

I know as a young boy growing up, Sunday morning began on Saturday night. My dad would come into the bedroom. I would go over the closet, get out my suitcoat, my pants, my shirt, my tie. It was a Saturday night ritual to be ready for church on Sunday morning. My dad would put my tie around my neck, he would tie it looking into the mirror. He would then loosen it, put it on the other bed. We'd walk down the hall, get my shoes. I would polish my shoes. I would make sure the laces were just right, that the edges of the shoes had the sole guard on it. I understood as a young boy that Sunday was the most special day of the week, and it wasn't the day to show up looking like I was going to ball practice or that I was going to be riding my bicycle around the neighborhood, but that I had an audience with the King of heaven, and that this was the most important event of the week, and that I need to present myself to God. The Bible says, "Man looks on the outward appearance." Well that's the whole point. They must present themselves to God that this is a worship service of utmost importance.

And so, verse 3, "and let us arise and go up to Bethel, and I will make an altar there to God ,who answered me in the day of distress" - just as God has commanded - "and has been with me wherever I have gone. This is why we're going to worship God, because He will never leave me, nor forsake me; because He is there for me in my times of greatest need; because He has provided for me faithfully; that He has never deserted me, that He has never left me on my own, that I am walking with Him and He is walking with me. Yes, we will build an altar; and, yes, we will worship this God."

Verse 4, "So they" - Jacob and his household - "gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which they which they had in the rings which were in their ears," - and that's referring to rings that were in the idols' ears, not the ladies ears, in the rings ears. I don't want to have to make another announcement next time, what I'm saying, what I'm not saying. These rings are in the idols' ears, and it was a cultic practice. "And Jacob" - at the end of verse 4 - "hid them under the oak which was near Shechem." He just buried this stuff. There's no going back to this stuff. They are gone, they're out of sight, they're out of mind. They are hidden, they are buried. "You're not going to be wearing this or carrying this around the rest of the week."

And there's an important point here for us to make before we move on, and that is very simply this, that we must prepare ourselves to worship, and we must purify ourselves before we enter into the presence of God. Let us not lose sight of Who it is that we are worshiping, and let us not come glibly to worship. I've got some verses for you and I want you to listen to these verses.

Psalm 24:3-4, "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy presence?" In other words, "Who may come into the palace of God and worship Him?" Verse 4, "He who has clean hands and a pure heart." Psalm 15:1, "O Lord, who may abide in Your tent? And who may dwell on Your holy hill? Who may fellowship with You? Who may have time with You? Who may have access into Your throne room and to be well-received? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness."

In fact, I want you to turn with me the book of Isaiah just for a moment, to the book of Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 1 - and these verses just flash to the forefront of my mind. And in Isaiah chapter 1, Isaiah addresses the nation of Israel, which had declined into apostasy, but were going through just the empty motions of worship. They were still worshiping God, but they were coming with a cavalier spirit, they were coming with a carnal heart.

And so in Isaiah 1:4, "Alas, sinful nation, people weighed down with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away from Him." Sounds like America. Sounds like churches in America.

Now look at verse 10: "Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom." Well, He's not addressing Sodom, He's addressing rulers in Israel who are acting like Sodom, and who are even sodomites. "Give to give ear to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah. What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" These are sacrifices brought to God in corporate worship, and God is turning His nose up at it and says, "What are these sacrifices to Me? I've commanded that you bring sacrifices, and you are bringing them; these mean nothing to Me," and He will tell them why. He says, "I've had enough" - verse 11 - "of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle; and I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats." They were doing what God had required, and God says, "I take no pleasure in it whatsoever," and He will tell us why in a moment.

Verse 12, "When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer, incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies - I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them." God is saying, "You are just wearing Me out in worship." Verse 15, "So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood."

Verse 16, "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil." That's exactly what Jacob is saying to his whole household, that "we've got to get rid of these foreign gods, we've got to throw all this off. We must purify ourselves. We must take off our old dirty garments as we come to the altar to worship God." And the message is the same for you and me as well, it is a timeless message, that when we come to worship God we must purify ourselves, for we are stepping into the very household of the presence of God. So, how have you come this morning? Have you purified yourself? Have you put away idols? Have you washed your hands of sinful attitudes?

We used to live in Mobile, Alabama, and we had a house that was lower than the street, and it would rain three out of every four days - the build up in the Gulf of Mexico, and then the clouds - and just dump the Gulf of Mexico on top of Mobile, Alabama; and the rain would just come gushing down the slope of our front yard and just push all the dirt down to the front sidewalk. So I would come home from church, I would have the kids with me, and we would come walking up the front sidewalk, the only way to get into the house, and walking through all of the mud, and come to the front

door; and there is Anne saying, "Stop in the name of love. Stop and take off those shoes before you come into my clean house." And we had white carpet in the living room and white carpet in the dining room, and you can imagine the mess that we have made. We must put away and purify before we can enter into the house. And so it is in worship with God. We must confess our sins, we must repent of known sin before we just begin to lift our voice and worship God. We must pursue holiness as we worship a holy God.

Well, please come back to Genesis, Genesis chapter 35. And so we've seen the command, "You go build an altar," and the cleansing, "to put away all these things." Now I want you to see "the caravan." That begins in verse 5, as Jacob and his household now travel to Bethel as God has required, and they proceed now as a caravan. And in verse 5, "As they" – referring to this entourage of people surrounding Jacob – "as they journeyed, there was great there was great terror upon the cities which were around them." And the reason for the terror is that earlier Simeon and Levi had led a massacre of the **Sheminites**. And so as Jacob is coming through, they're all fearful, these cities, that the same will happen to them. And so we read at the end of verse 5, "and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob." They were terror struck to cause any more trouble to the people of God.

And so, in verse 6, "So Jacob came to Luz," – which is the Canaanite name for Bethel; Moses adds – "(that is Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, and he and all the people who were with him," the whole traveling caravan. And notice what he does in verse 7. Once these arrive, "He built an altar there." He is obedient to God, he is following through with what God has required of him, and prioritizes the worship of God before he does anything else, as he comes now to this place.

"And he called the place El-bethel." Now, "El" is the name for God, and it means "the Mighty One." Bethel: "beth" means "house." "El" is at the end of Bethel; it means "the house of God." And what's interesting here is he calls this place "the God of the house of God." And what is worth our attention is that Jacob is focused not on the place, but on the person of God. "I'm going to call this place not Bethel, I'm going to call this place El-bethel. I'm going to call this place the God of the house of God. I'm not worshiping the house of God, I'm worshiping the person of God."

And I think there's something for us to draw from this, that whatever the future is for this church, whether we stay in this little place that is busting at the seams, whether we knock out walls, whether we move down the

street, whether we go someplace else: the place is not important most of all, it is the person of God that is most of all important. We could worship God in the catacombs of Rome. We could worship God in the hull of the Mayflower. We could worship God in whatever facility that God provides for us. And we want it to be clean, we want it to be nice; but stained glass windows will not bring us closer to God; a big steeple on top of this building will not work to bring us closer to God. I don't mind if we have those things; I like beauty and art and architecture just like anybody else. But what we need in worship is to have the knowledge of the true God of heaven and earth, and that we are locked in on Him no matter where we find ourselves, no matter what the address of this church is, we will worship the God of the house of God; that's what we will do.

And then in verse 8, "Now Deborah,, Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried below Bethel under the oak; and it was named Allon-bacuth," which means "oak of weeping." I need to move on, I can't linger here. I hear that laughter of support.

So the next thing I want you to see in verse 9 is "the covenant, the covenant," because God now appears to Jacob again to confirm the Abrahamic covenant and to confirm the patriarchal promises. So in verse 9, "Then God appeared to Jacob" - how He did this we are not told. The reality is what's important, not the how. The reality is is that God intervened in a very direct and personal and intimate way and showed Himself to Jacob - "again when he came from Paddan-aram," - which means field of Aram, meaning, really, "flatlands." And at the end of verse 9, "and He" - God - "blessed him" - Jacob.

Now I want to draw to your attention the word "blessed." I mean, what does that mean? I remember the day in class R. C. Sproul scolded us as a class and said, "If I hear you use the word 'bless' one more time I'm going to scream." I mean, what does that mean? The word literally in the Hebrew means "to kneel" or "to bow down," and the image here of what is being portrayed is that God is coming down all the way to Jacob to bestow favor and to bestow greater grace upon Jacob, because Jacob cannot elevate himself up, God must come down.

"And He blessed him," right where he was, just like God will bless you right where you are, right where you sit. "And God said to him, 'Your name is Jacob,' - which means deceiver, as you know - 'you shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.' - and "Israel" means "God

prevails," not Jacob prevails, but God prevails. You see the "el" at the end of Israel. "El" means "God"; the main root, "prevails." God prevails. That's what "Israel" means - 'Israel shall be your name' thus He called him Israel." And the reason He changed his name is because He changed his life. It's like Simon going from Simon to Peter; it marked his conversion. "You're now a new man with a new life, and you now have a new name." That's how dramatic conversion is, you're not the same person anymore. "I'm giving you a new name, because you have separated from your past."

Verse 11, "I am God Almighty." It's literally "El Shaddai," and it means "the All-Powerful One," "the Almighty One," "the All-Sufficient One." And the reason God says this is because anything that He calls Jacob to do, El Shaddai is with him, and will move heaven and earth to bring it about. As Jacob will walk with God and obey God, El Shaddai will be with him and make come to pass whatever needs to come to pass.

He says, "Be fruitful and multiply," which is an echo of Genesis 1:28, the creation mandate. "A nation and a company of nations shall come from you." "Company of nations" could be translated "tribes," and I think really the reference here is to a tribe and many tribes, and I think it's a foreshadowing of his twelve sons that will become the twelve tribes of Israel. And then He adds, "and kings shall come from you." Yes, kings: David, Solomon, and ultimately the greater Son of David and a greater than Solomon. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself will come from the loins of Jacob.

Verse 12, "The land in which I gave to Abraham and Isaac. I will give it to you," - that's a reference to the Holy Land - "and I will give the land to your descendants after you." In other words, "After you die it's not going to go back to the government, after you die this land will stay in the family and it'll be passed down to your descendants."

Verse 13, "Then God went up from him in that place where He had spoken with him," which goes back to the word "bless," that God had come down to Jacob to meet Jacob exactly where he is to bestow favor and promises upon him. And now verse 13 says, "God then went up." God ascended back to glory after He had spoken to Jacob.

Here's the take home for us from this, before we move on. Whatever God calls you and me to do, God will provide all that is necessary wherever He sends you. He will be with you. He will bear you up. He will sustain you,

even in your most difficult places. He is El Shaddai. You will never face a challenge, but that the grace of God is greater. Your problems will be bigger than you, but they are infinitely smaller than God; and God will enable you to do everything that He calls you to do.

This leads, fifth, to "the consecration"; it's in verses 14 and 15. So as a result of God confirming the covenant with Abraham and Isaac, Jacob sets a memorial to mark the place. In verse 14, "Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He had spoken with him," – and this pillar is like a monument, and it is to mark the place where God has appeared to him, to be a reminder to him of all that God has said to him. He says – "it's a pillar of stone, and he poured out a drink offering on it." And he also poured oil on it, and it was to consecrate not just this place, but it was for Jacob to consecrate himself to walk with God and to move forward in the will of God for everything that God has called him to do.

And you and I need to be reminded of this. Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Whatever it is that God calls you to do, God will give you the grace and the strength to be able to do it, as you would humble yourself, and trust Him, and submit your life to Him, and be immersed in His Word, and to live a pure and godly life. God will be with you. And you need to remember that; whether you raise a pillar of stone or not, it should be just as real of a defining mark in your life.

But I must come now to the last heading, "the crisis," beginning in verse 16, and it will extend to the end of the chapter. There are three crises through which Jacob must now walk. And what I want to say before we look at this is in walking with God, He often leads us through the storms of life. We're not immune, we're not exempt from the troubles and the trials and the tribulations of life.

And so Jacob has just had this experience with God; we could call it something of a mountaintop experience. I mean, God has come down and blessed him and spoken to him and then ascended back up. And you would think from this point on, he'd be walking on the sunny side of Hallelujah Avenue. I mean, there'd be no problems whatsoever. The sun will be shining, the wind will be at my back, everything will just be falling into place – you would think. But remember, after Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan, He was led immediately into the wilderness to be tested for forty days and forty nights. And after this extraordinary experience with

God, the very next step is a series of crises as he's walking with God. The same will be true in our life at times as well.

And so in verse 16, "Then they" - this whole caravan - "journeyed from Bethel; and when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath," - which is a more ancient name for "Bethlehem," notice - "Rachel began to give birth and she suffered severe labor." I looked up the word "severe"; it means "fierce" and "harsh" and "hard" and "difficult." I mean, she was going down into the valley of death, and she gave labor. In verse 17, "When she was in severe labor the midwife said to her, 'Do not fear, for now you have another son.'" And she pulled through this excruciating experience.

But notice verse 18, "It came about as her soul was departing (for she died)." And that's what happens when you die, your soul departs from your body. And if you're a believer, your soul goes immediately into the presence of God and the body remains here on the earth, and the body is placed into a grave, or a cave, or whatever; but the real person that marks who they really are is not the body, it's what's inside the body: it's a living soul that is created in the image of God. Second Corinthians 5:8 says, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." And so one second after a person dies, that soul goes immediately either to heaven or to hell.

And so we read that "she named him Ben-oni," - which means "son of my sorrow" - "but his father" - at the universe 18 - "called him Benjamin" - which means "son of my right hand," which is a place of honor. And so Jacob had great expectations for his son, that he would be elevated and raised up within the family to have a position of great leadership, and from him would come many great men and women of God.

Verse 19, "So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). Jacob set up a pillar over her grave," - which would be like a tombstone - "that is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day." Moses is the one recording this, and it was there even to the day of Moses. That's the first crisis. What a crisis. He lost his wife as he gained a son. He's now empty without her.

Verse 21, "Israel" - Jacob - "journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder." "Tower" here is "a tall watchtower." "Eder" means "flock" or "herd," and it's a tall watchtower that shepherds would watch over their flocks, they'd be elevated to see if any wolves or wild animals are

approaching. And at the beginning of verse 21 it says, "Israel journeyed on." I mean, life moves on, life goes on. You shed the tears, you feel the emptiness, but now you have a son: "We've got to journey on, we've got to press on," and that's what Jacob is doing here.

But then verse 22 comes the second crisis: "It came about while Israel was dwelling in that land, that Reuben went" - Reuben, his first son through her - "and lay with Bilhah" - meaning had a physical relationship with her - "his father's concubine, and Israel heard of it." Now there's incest taking place in the family, and it's a second dagger into Jacob's heart, and reminds us that no family is perfect, and no family is without incidences of sin; and if that's true of your family and if you've been carrying that, maybe even something as gross as incest or physical abuse, just know that that has been taking place for many years, and there is really no family without some issue.

"Now there were twelve sons of Jacob," - at the end of verse 22 - "the sons of Leah: Reuben - Jacob's firstborn - then Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun." So that's who came from Leah. "Then the sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. And then the sons of Bilhah" - she is an attendant to the wives - "and she bore Dan and Naphtali. And then the sons of Zilpah," - she's another attendant within the family, like a servant; she's Leah's maid - "Gad and Asher. These are the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram."

Verse 27, "Jacob came to his father." Now let me just pause for a moment. That's the second crisis. Now there's not just the loss of a wife, but now in-house sin. This is just piling up on Jacob. And so now we read in verse 27, "Jacob came to his father Isaac of Mamre of Kiriath-arba," - which means "town of four." It's like a cluster of four little towns merged together. It's kind of like Dallas, and then there's Garland, there's Richardson and Plano, and it's just all jammed together.

Verse 28, "Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years." Verse 29, here's the last crisis: "Isaac breathed his last and died." So now Jacob suffers the loss not only of his wife, but now his father. It's just all compounding at once. This is almost like Job, who just lost it all in rapid-fire succession - "and was gathered to his people, an old man of ripe age." And then on top of that, "His sons Esau and Jacob buried him." We know from later in Genesis he was buried in a cave. And so there's this somewhat

awkward reunion, which funerals bring about, of estranged family members that now must come together in a time of great sorrow.

So what's the point of this chapter? As I said at the beginning, it's an odd collection of different episodes strung together, almost like pearls on a strand to form a necklace; but it's filled with heartache, it's filled with death, it's filled with misery, it's filled with sin; and yet all of this while Jacob is receiving a new name because he has a new life. He now has new problems. He now has new trials to walk through. And the fact that God has wrestled with him and he's been converted does not dispel the storms of life from gathering around him.

No, the difference now is as he walks through these storms, El Shaddai is with him. God Almighty is there to uphold him, to be the foundation and the pillars upholding his life. And that is true for you as well, if you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior; then you never walk through the storms of life alone, that "the Lord is with you," Hebrews 13:8. "I will never, never leave you nor forsake you." "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." And all that you need you find in God who is El Shaddai.

So as I close this, my question is, "Are you walking with God or are you walking away from God?" Have you ever been converted? Have you ever come to that point in your life where you realize that "I'm walking away from God, I'm walking according to the course of this world, and I must repent and turn around, and I must now turn to God and turn to Him through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ" and commit your life to Him?

If you've never taken that decisive step of faith to commit your life to Christ, I invite you to do so this very moment right where you sit. You must make the choice to begin to walk with God; and a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step, and the first step is to turn away from a life of sin and to turn away from this world in selfish pursuits and to take that first step to enter through the narrow gate. And it will lead down a narrow path, and it will lead to most probably a thousand more steps, ten thousand more steps, a million more steps. But that journey begins with the first step.

And so I invite you this morning to take that step of faith and entrust your life, your soul, the real you on the inside, to entrust your heart, your innermost being into the saving hands of Jesus Christ. And if you will do that, I promise you, He will receive you, and He will embrace you, and you

will begin to walk with Him, and He will walk with you; and He will be inside of you, and you will be in Him; and you will go throughout the rest of your life in partnership with the One who created your life. And one day this walk with God, it will take you home, all the way home to heaven, where the Lord Jesus is preparing a place for every believer. And so may that journey begin today for you to begin to walk with God. Let us pray.

[Prayer] Father, thank You for this chapter with the ups and downs of Jacob's life, so much like our lives – mountaintops and valleys; prosperity, adversity; triumphs and trials. It's all intermeshed together into one life. And, Lord, how much better it is for us to walk with You and never be alone again. Bless Your people who have gathered here today. May this message have great influence and impact upon our lives, in Jesus' name. Amen.