

Jacob's Ladder

Genesis 28

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

One of the blessings that I think a number of us have had this week is the realization that it is possible to strengthen our own spirits. I think many of us have felt the need for that but we have never really known how to do it. And I suppose all of us who have been here for years know we've often talked about doing it, and we've often talked about the way to do it but it's like some of those things that I suppose, partly, Satan keeps from us and partly we ourselves miss and the result is loved ones, that I think many of us have believed that we are raised to the right hand of God and we are in Jesus above all the power of the enemy and yet as we've tried to exercise faith in that we've found that it's kind of an effort.

We've been trying to lift ourselves up into it and often when we're together we find it's possible to lift ourselves up into it but then when we're on our own, especially in a work situation or a problem situation at home, we can't quite get there and we find it's like trying to exercise faith but it just won't rise within us. Many of us I think, have been blessed by some of the truth that John Larson of Mexico reminded us of again and brought home to us, that this is often because our heads are fat and our spirits are skinny and that's about it.

Our bodies we can see, our minds and emotions we know of, we can think and we can feel, but our spirit is inside that and we're never very sure how to strengthen our spirits. Many of us have had real trouble coming into that position at the right hand of God to exercise faith the way the saints did in the Old Testament because our heads are fat with knowledge; we know what we should do, and we know all about our position in Christ at the right hand of God, but our spirits are thin, and skinny, and weak, and even almost sick, so our spirits do not rise up to the truth that is in scripture. And I think many of us have known that and we've known that we should do something about it but we've never really known how to do it.

So I'll share a little and then I hope any of you who have come into the reality of this during this week will feel free to share too. The truth of it is found in Ephesians 3:16, and it's Paul's prayer for the Ephesians and for all of us also. Ephesians 3:16, "That according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." And that's it in verse 16, "That according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man." And we've often I think, read that and are still as bewildered about it as when we first read it because we see that it is necessary that God may grant us to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, but we really aren't too sure how to do that. Many of us have read about speaking in tongues, and many of us know the strengthening that takes place when we worship at times with others and we sense that we're kind of lifted on the strength of the Spirit, but we really don't know how to do it ourselves in our own prayer times.

We know words that Jesus spoke to Satan, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." We know that and we sense there's something there. Somehow we're strengthened and we live in our spirits by the words that proceed out of God's mouth. We sense that there's some way in which the word of God is to strengthen our spirits, and indeed we know that the Bible is talked about as a sword of the Spirit and that it is living and active and

that in some way is meant to be a feeding and a strengthening of our spirits to us, but yet we really don't know how to do it.

And then I think some of us at times have come upon bewildering verses like those in Ezekiel 2:8, "But you, son of man, hear what I say to you; be not rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth, and eat what I give you." And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and lo, a written scroll was in it; and he spread it before me," it was part of the law, "And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe. And he said to me, 'Son of man, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.' So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. And he said to me, 'Son of man, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.' Then I ate it; and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey."

We read that and we sense there's some deep meaning in it but we don't know what it is. Surely Ezekiel cannot actually have eaten that scroll? And yet we sense that we are meant to feed on God's word and that has something to do with strengthening our spirits. Still, most of us approach God's word in the same way. We get down to it at the beginning of the day when we're going to have our quiet time and we take a piece of scripture, say Psalms 103 where it says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." And then we're taught through the Bible study courses to divide that up into paragraphs, and into sentences, so we take the whole Psalms and we divide it up.

We often follow the divisions in the Revised Version because it kind of divides it up into paragraphs and you can see that one through five is a paragraph and then six through fourteen is a paragraph, and fifteen through eighteen, and then nineteen through twenty. And then we divide the paragraphs up and give them each a title, and then we look at the general thought in each paragraph and see the benefits. And we see, "Forget not his benefits. Now what are his benefits? Well, he forgives our iniquity that's one of his benefits. He heals our diseases, that's another of our benefits. He redeems my life from the Pit, that's another. He crowns me with steadfast love and mercy. He satisfies me with good as long as I live so that my youth is renewed like the eagle's."

Then we go onto the second one, "The Lord works vindication," and we see he vindicates us and we go on through the Bible like that. And often we actually have questions in our Bible study courses that ask us things about the context and ask us what the meaning of this word is and what the meaning of that word is, and then maybe refers to other pieces of the Bible and we look up those. Really, it's good, it does give us a great knowledge and a clearer understanding of what that word says about God and about us, but that tends to be our emphasis doesn't it, in Bible study? We study God's word to see what it's saying about God and to see what it's saying about us. And we'll often even title that second one it's what God is saying to us. We'll say that because it's what God is saying about us and we'll ask ourselves, "Now is this word saying anything about my life?" And often the Bible study courses say that, "Find out what this word is saying about your life." So we study that and then we lay that aside and go to prayer and begin to pray for other people and we begin to pray for ourselves, and for missionaries, and then we complete our prayer time and that's our Bible study and our prayer, our quiet time completed.

And I do think that we miss the whole purpose of this dear word because the purpose of this word is not to give us more knowledge about God, or more knowledge about ourselves, though those things are useful. But the purpose of God's word is to strengthen our own spirits, to feed our spirits. This word was written by the Holy Spirit, that's why it's called the sword of the Spirit. This word is living and active. It is alive. The Holy Spirit breathes in these words and in these verses and indeed, you know that you've found that at times; at times this word has come alive to you and it has become a "rema" word, it has become not a "logos" word, a written word, but it has become a "rema" word, it has become a word of God's Spirit to your spirit and there have been moments when it's lifted you up and you've felt that it was God speaking directly to you.

But it's only been once in a while because the rest of the time we regard God's word as something that he's saying about himself or about us. And in actual fact loved ones, this word is God's own life to us and we are able to feed on this word in our spirits. Not just feed on it in our minds, but we are able to feed on it in our spirits. We're able actually to receive from this word strength from God's own spirit and we're able to do it in a very simple way. Instead of using our minds simply to study the context of the word and to study what it's saying about God, we can use our minds to aid our spirits. We can use our minds the same way as we used to prime pumps in the old days. You used to put some water down it and pump the old thing and hope that it would gradually take hold and come up; you aided the pump by priming it with some water.

You are able to aid your spirits in that same way because the problem with many of us is we get down to prayer, and we close our eyes, and we try to think of something uplifting, something that will lift us up to God, and we try to think about God and what he is doing at this moment, and what is he like, and then we try to say some of those things to him. But very, very often many of us remain in the doldrums. We close our eyes and we try to think of something but we can't and all we can think of is all the things we should pray for so we start praying for those things and the more we pray about those problems the more we pray ourselves down into our boots and finally down into the ground and prayer becomes a heavy, heavy thing that does not lift us up very much.

Now there is a different way to seek God. It is possible to go to a verse like Ephesians, Ephesians 2:1, you can do it with any verse of scripture, but Ephesians 2:10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." And the first simple step that I know was shared with many of us this week is use your mind first of all to aid your spirit by applying that word directly to yourself. And the way you do that is to put yourself into that verse. That is, in place of "we" to say "I" so start by saying, "For I am his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that I should walk in them." Say that to yourself first. Put yourself into the verse -- it doesn't matter what verse that you have, you can put "I" right in there and take it away from the realm of all the people in the world, or take it away from the realm of Abraham and apply it to your very own self "For I am his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for God works which he has prepared beforehand that I should walk in them." That's the first step, just do that.

Now if you repeat that several times and that's all you do then, really, you're engaged in the same thing as the Hindus or any of the eastern religion practitioners who practice transcendental meditation or practice the repetition of mantras. All you're involved in is the power of auto suggestion if that's all you do. All you're trying to do is brainwash your own mind into believing that, but loved ones, that's just the first step; that's your mind aiding your spirit and that's where you start.

Most of us come to God with spirits that are tired and weak. We've been dealing in our souls and we've been dealing in our bodies with outside people and people at work so our bodies and souls are alive and active, but our spirits are dead, asleep, so that's why we have to start, often, with our minds. "I am God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which he has prepared beforehand that I should walk in them." First, we have to get our minds going along the lines of what God has said. And then the second step is beginning to look up to God's Spirit and asking him, "Holy Spirit, would you put this into my spirit? Will you feed my spirit with this? Will you strengthen my spirit with this? Will you make this real to me in a way that my mind is not able to make it real? Holy Spirit will you put it into me that I am God's workmanship. I am your workmanship Lord. Thank you. I am your workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which you have prepared beforehand that I shall walk in them. Lord, will you put that now into my spirit? Strengthen my spirit with it; make this part of my spirit in a way that my mind cannot make it a part of my spirit. Will you put it into my spirit by miraculous power? You, Holy Spirit, who wrote this word in the Bible, will you now write it in my heart as God promised he would write his laws in our inward parts, Lord will you write this now in my heart and in my spirit?"

Loved ones, if you do that and as you begin to pray-read it up to God, then there is a great confidence that comes to you in that because, often we say we're praying, but we don't know whether the thing is God's will or not, but this we know is God's will. This we can pray up to him and we know we're praying his will and we pray it to him and say, "Father, I thank you that I am your workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which you have prepared beforehand that I shall walk in them. I thank you for that Lord, put that deeply into my spirit now, breathe it into my spirit and let me breath it up to you."

Then loved ones, as you do that God's Spirit begins to plant that in your spirit through your faith in a way that even you can't understand. Then simply and gently go onto the next verse. Often you'll find that as you do this more and more maybe one verse will give you half an hour or 15 minutes of feeding and strengthening. But that will take a little while, it will be like at the beginning of anything, you'll do three or four verses. But as you begin to do this, your own spirit will begin to be strengthened and will begin to be fattened with the Spirit of God's word and he will miraculously put his word into your spirit and strengthen it. And what many of us have found is that through the day it's possible to continue to do this.

I think it was John who said to those of us who listened to him this past week, that many of us have spirits that are so weak and sick that it'll take some little while doing this.

Maybe it will take a couple of weeks of doing this through the days until your spirit begins to be strengthened, but soon you'll begin to find your spirit is strong and it's rising up within you, and it's beginning to go out, and you're beginning to find that your faith is rising in situations and you're not having to strengthen yourself at that moment and say, "I believe Lord, I believe you're in charge of this situation." But your spirit is so strong with God's Spirit and his word that you begin to sense there's victory in this immediately when the opportunity occurs. So it may take a couple of weeks before you begin to see your spirit strengthened, but if you'll continue to do this and feed your spirit with God's word in this way, you'll find it strengthening.

Now you remember how he said that many of us during the day while at work find that there are natural breaks. Even those of us who are working on construction, or working on some kind of manufacturing line, there come natural times when you can pause for a moment and before going straight onto the next job, you have a moment, and that's a time when you can feed your spirit. And you can do it; you can write these things yourself out of God's word, or you can pick a booklet of

them up from the reception office, but they're simply verses of scripture and on one side you see the verse as it appears in the Bible. Protection, the angel of the Lord is encamped round about them that fear him and delivereth them. And then it says, "Read the other side." And of course the other side say, "The Angel of the Lord camps round about me and delivers me." So just sitting at that bench in the manufacturing shop, or sitting at your desk in the office you can just say, "The angel of the Lord camps round about me and delivers me. Lord, I thank you that the angel of the Lord camps around about me at this moment and delivers me. I don't need to ask him to deliver me. I don't need to ask him to help me, this is your word Lord, it says, 'The angel of the Lord camps round about me and delivers me.' Lord, I thank you that your angel is delivering me at this very moment. I thank you that he's delivering me and I ask you to put this deeply into my spirit so that my spirit will grow strong with that confidence that the angel is delivering me."

And loved ones, it's amazing, but as you do that God puts that into your spirit and the very strengthening of the angel delivering you begins to feed your own spirit and lifts you up into the presence of God and begins to feed you inside even in the midst of the busy day. And really, what you need to do especially at the beginning is about every two or three hours do that, because all the time the outside soul of the world is pressing in upon you; somebody is asking you for another paper, or more figures, or another number, or somebody's telling you to do something and your mind, emotions, and body are being exercised, but your dear spirit is being pressed down by all those things. That's why it's important to feed your spirit through the day so that your spirit can more and more rise up.

That's what happened with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration you remember. There his own spirit was so strong that it blossomed out and blasted through his physical body and transfigured it for a moment so that they were able to see him as he was really in his heavenly body. God is able to bring such a strengthening to our inner man that it begins to take over even our physical bodies and of course enables us to do feats that we could not do by our own strength at all.

But loved ones, for many of us during this past week, this whole truth has been a revelation to us. Many of us have had real difficulties with our spirits being very, very weak and not knowing how to pray and indeed often reading the Bible every day became a burden to us. Now it's a delight and a joy to us because we can see how you can take any piece of scripture and inject your own self into it by saying with a verse for example like, "I am come that they might have life and might have it more abundantly. 'Lord, you are come that I might have life and that I might have it more abundantly. That's why you came, that I might have life. Lord that was the only reason you came. Lord, I thank you for that; that you came that I might have life and I might have it more abundantly. Oh Lord, will you put that into my spirit and will you implant that within me and feed it into my spirit now Lord? I don't know how you're going to do it but you are able to do it. You're able to send that spirit into my spirit and strengthen me with it. Lord, I thank you for that.'" And as you believe that he does that loved ones, he puts that into your spirit and strengthens you.

Some of you might wonder if it's really important to speak those things. Well the word that is spoken has power in it. It just has. All these dear men, it doesn't matter whether you take Pastor Cho, the Pastor who has been used by God to build that church of 150,000 members in Korea, it doesn't matter whether you take him, it doesn't matter whether you take [Smith] Wigglesworth, who was used by God to do mighty healings through faith, it doesn't matter if you take [Kenneth] Hagen who has told us some of those mighty things that are done in the power of Jesus' name, they all say the same thing: there is a power and there is a might in God's word and that is in God's word

spoken, that is in nothing else.

Here's the way Pastor Cho says it, "There are certain steps we must follow for faith to be really exercised in us. There is also a basic principle about the spoken word that we need to understand. So I want to speak to you about the creative power of the spoken word and the reasons why the usage of it is of such importance. One morning I was eating breakfast with one of Korea's leading neurosurgeons who was telling me about various medical findings on the operation of the brain. He asked, 'Dr. Cho did you know that the speech center in the brain rules over all the nerves? You ministers really have power because according to our recent findings in neurology, the speech center in the brain has total dominion over all the other nerves.' Cho says, 'I've known that for a long time.' 'How did you know that,' he asked? 'In the world of neurology these are new findings.' I replied that I learned it from Dr. James. 'Who is this Dr. James,' he asked? 'He was one of those famous doctors in biblical times nearly 2,000 years ago,' I replied, 'And in his book Chapter 3, the first few verses, Dr. James clearly defines the activity and importance of the tongue and the speech center.' The neurosurgeon was completely amazed, 'Does the Bible really teach about this?' 'Yes,' I answered, 'The tongue is the least member of our body but can bridle the whole body.'

Then this neurosurgeon began to expand their findings. He said that the speech nerve center had such power over all of the body that simply speaking can give one control over his body to manipulate it in the way he wishes. He said if someone keeps on saying, 'I'm going to become weak,' then right away all the nerves receive that message and they say, 'Oh let's prepare to become weak for we've received instructions from our central communication that we should become weak.' Then they in natural sequence adjust their physical attitudes to weakness. If someone says, 'Well, I have no ability, I can't do this job' then right away all the nerves begin to declare the same thing. 'Yes,' they respond, 'We received instruction from the central nervous system saying that we have no abilities, to give up striving to develop any capacity for capability. We must prepare ourselves to be part of an incapable person.'

If someone keeps saying, 'I'm very old. I'm so very old, and I'm tired and can't do anything.' Then right away the speech center control responds giving our orders to that effect and the nerves respond, 'Yes, we are old. We are ready for the grave. Let's be ready to disintegrate.' If someone keeps saying he is old then that person is soon going to die." But you know, it's amazing that Jesus said that that isn't just true in the physical realm or the psychological realm. Jesus said, "Speak to this mountain be removed and cast into the sea." He said, "Speak." He emphasized that we must speak.

And loved ones, there is creative power in speaking and you are able to speak not only to the spirit of Satan but you're able to speak to your own spirit. So yes, if you ask me if it's really important to say it -- yes, at least to mouth it and you can do that. I remember teaching school and while the happy little souls are writing their essay or something you can do all kinds of things up at your desk that they don't know you're doing. It's possible to sit at your desk and work and to have a book up so that nobody can say whether your lips are moving or not.

It is possible in all kinds of situations during the day to actually mouth the words of scripture to yourself, and loved ones; yes there is power in that. There is power in speaking that word and it is important to do it. It is important actually to do these things. It's important to take a verse of scripture like "No weapon that is formed against me shall prosper for I'm a servant of the Lord and my righteousness is of him." That's the other side of that, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their righteousness is of

me sayeth the Lord.” “No weapon that is formed against me shall prosper for I am a servant of the Lord and my righteousness is of him. Lord, I thank you for that. I thank you that no weapon that is formed against me shall prosper for I am a servant of the Lord and my righteousness is of him. Lord, I thank you that that’s true, your word says it. It’s not that I ask that that should be true, it’s not that I hope it’ll be true, it’s not that I pray that you’ll make it be true, Lord this is your word, ‘No weapon that is formed against me by whoever it is shall prosper, for I am a servant of the Lord and my righteousness is of him.’ Lord, I ask you to put that into my spirit and strengthen my spirit with that so that that becomes part of my spiritual health and strength.”

It won’t be long before your own dear spirit is free from fear because you’re beginning to feed it with the strength of God’s own Spirit. And gradually your own spirit becomes an epistle that is written by the same Spirit that wrote this word, except that this epistle is seen and read by all men because your life begins to be a picture of this book. If you ask me if it happens just through my thinking the things, no. that’s just your mind aiding your spirit. No, it’s not the thinking, it’s not the autosuggestion, it’s not the mantra, it’s the second part where you ask the Holy Spirit and you open yourself to the Spirit of God and you say, “Holy Spirit, no weapon that is formed against me shall prosper. Holy Spirit I thank you for putting that into me and for making that part of my spirit, that no weapon formed against me shall prosper.”

And loved ones, as you do that, and as you open your spirit to these words, so they begin to be planted within you. And it’s true, you know; it will become real in your life and it’ll be something precious to you. As you begin to do it you’ll find that God’s Spirit grows stronger and stronger within you and that your spirit begins to burst out to others and begins to live. And it is by faith that this dear word is more than printed word and thoughts. That’s it, you see; it’s faith that this is God’s life to me. This is a magic book. This is a miraculous life you see, and when you take that attitude of faith to it, then this becomes life to you and becomes health to you, and strength.

One of the things that I think all of us realize is, it is good to teach one another about these things, but if you don’t go and drink you’re really just learning about drinking but you’re never drinking, or you’re learning about God but you’re never knowing God, or you’re learning about food, or you’re watching somebody who is eating and drinking and you’re saying, “Oh, that’s great,” and then if you don’t eat and drink yourself all you can do is follow that guy. That’s what I think a lot of us do who are young; instead of taking leaders and teachers as simply sign posts, we keep looking at them instead of going on to Jesus and beginning to live off him. One of the things that enables a body to explode into burgeoning blossoming life is for each person to go individually to God every day and get new life from him and then the body of Jesus begins to grow and blossom and multiply and I think that is what God is reminding us of again.

Back in the days when we were a more Pentecostal church than we are now, we all realized that unless the Holy Spirit was burgeoning and blossoming inside you, you were just following the techniques or the methods of men. There’s nothing wrong with methods or techniques, that’s how God operates, but it seems to me we need to realize that it’s the Spirit of God that brings us life beyond the technique and beyond the method. So it doesn’t matter which method or which technique you use to get the Holy Spirit moving within you, but it’s the Holy Spirit that gives the life and the strength. And loved ones, he’s waiting for you tonight right there.

Let us pray. Dear Father, we thank you for your dear and living word, strong and active like a two edged sword. We thank you that it is both an aggressive and a defensive weapon. We thank you Lord,

that that's the way this dear word will work within us and that we will find within this written word the living word and we will find you beyond the sacred page. You will come out from that page and you will feed us with your own dear life from the tree of life in the midst of the garden. Lord, we would now begin to eat and drink and repent of trying for so long to make do with the knowledge of good and evil instead of eating of the tree of life. Lord, we will begin to eat of this tree every two or three hours in the beginning through the end of the day until our spirits begin to rise within us. And then we thank you Lord that you will use this word to enable us to move out in ministry for you, for your glory.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and ever more. Amen.