

## The Way of Faith

### Genesis 31

#### Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

It really felt to me as if Dave was speaking for us all that there's just a change and a readiness to be changed in all of us, and a desire to be changed and transformed. It's exciting. It's just good. It's a new era really and I look forward to what you'll be. You'll be just different from what you are. And I sympathize with you because I can beat you by 10 years, but I feel the same. I don't think it matters what age we are, I don't think it matters what the difficulties have been. I think Jesus has a new creation for us --absolutely new and filled with purity and power. So believe it and see it and that's part of what we'll talk about tonight because it comes through faith.

Would you like to turn, loved ones, to Genesis 31? We're talking about faith and integrity. If you look at it there and just read the first verse. Genesis 31:1, "Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, 'Jacob has taken all that was our father's; and from what was our father's he has gained all this wealth.'" I don't know if you remember the situation but Jacob had bluffed his father to give him the birth right instead of Esau. So he was afraid of Esau so he escaped as fast as he could. And his mom said, "Go to my brother, your uncle, Laban," and that's exactly what Jacob did. And there he met a guy who was a greater manipulator than even Jacob was. Jacob had a name that meant striver or usurper. That's the way he bluffed his old dad to give him the blessing, he put the hair of animals on his hands, and that kind of thing so that when the old father felt him he thought it was Esau.

Well, when Jacob met his uncle Laban he met a man exactly like himself only worse because Laban said to him, "Okay, I have two beautiful daughters, if you serve me for seven years I'll give you the most beautiful one." So Jacob looked at Rachel and he said, "Great," and he served Laban for seven years. And then on the wedding night, how he managed it I don't know, but Laban pawned off on him the other daughter and he ended up married to Leah instead. And then of course, Laban was really a great salesman, he said, "Well, don't worry you've got one. Now, you can have a second one for another seven years." So, poor old Jacob ended up serving another seven years for the second daughter.

Then, if you remember, he came to Laban and he said, "I've served you 14 years. I've ended up with two of your daughters as my wives and I have no possessions at all. Now, can I serve you another six years and will you give me all the cattle that are speckled and spotted. I'm looking after all your cattle and you know that you've prospered during that time. Will you give me all the speckled and spotted cattle?" And Laban said, "Sure." Then you read what he did there in Genesis 30, if you look at it. Genesis 30:35, "But that day Laban removed the he-goats that were striped and spotted, and all the she-goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white on it, and every lamb that was black, and put them in charge of his sons; and he set a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob; and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flock."

So Laban said, "Sure, you can have all the spotted and speckled ones," the next day he went and took all the spotted and speckled ones out of the flock and left Jacob of course, with nothing but solid colors. And out of that Jacob was supposed to breed speckled and spotted cattle which Laban reckoned was an impossibility. But do you remember that that's when the miracle took place that God worked? Laban actually was overwhelmed not by Jacob and just his cleverness but by the power of God

because Jacob actually began to believe that God would enable the solid color cattle to breed speckled and spotted cattle. And he arranged sticks in certain ways and of course sometimes people have said, “Oh well, when cattle breed in front of speckled and spotted sticks their eyes are on that and they transfer those very qualities to their offspring.” But really that’s a lot to believe.

In actual fact, Jacob put those up for a reason that we’ll see in a moment in connection with his faith. God enables spotted and speckled cattle to be born so that actually there were more of them than there were solid color. And that’s how Jacob found himself being accused by the sons of Laban. “Now, Jacob heard the sons of Laban were saying, ‘Jacob has taken all that was our father’s; and from what was our father’s he has gained all this wealth.’” Well, they knew their father out well and they knew it took a cleverer man than even Jacob to get anything from Laban and they were just offended that now Jacob seemed to have more cattle than Laban had through the miracle of God.

It ties up a bit even with what David testified. You see that last line there, “He has gained all this wealth,” Jacob had nothing and through faith God gave him more wealth than even Laban had. Now, loved ones, the issue isn’t that God wants all of us to be millionaires but the issue is that God wants us to succeed. It’s not just Jacob that he wanted to prosper. What he did to the patriarchs he did to them as representatives of all of us. God put us here on earth to do well. Not to be the most brilliant singers, not to be the cleverest students, but to have good satisfying, successful, fulfilling lives.

Now, where do you get it? Well, if you look at it, it’s in several places but the Savior loved John, is one of those. And God’s truth is freeing if we will let it free us. 3 John 1:2, it is the third letter of John. 3 John 1:2, “Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in health.” That’s what God wants. If John prayed that he prayed only because he knew that was God’s will and he says, “Beloved,” and he’s just speaking to all of them that he’s writing too. So, he’s not speaking to a specific person, he’s speaking to all of them, “I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in health.” That’s God’s will for us.

Now you know it’s not a question of are you going to hit some rocks? Sure, God is going to allow some rocks to come in because that’s how he makes you like Jesus. But the heart of it is that God wants your life to be fulfilling and to be successful, and to fulfil what he made you to do. Loved ones, I really think a lot of us are in the same spot that I was and I don’t know Sanford & Sons I think too. I mean, I can identify with what Dave Johnson said. I think a lot of us have a kind of mediocre feeling about what God wants for our lives and we’re right in rebelling against the idea that God wants everyone of us to be a millionaire. You know, I agree with that fully. God doesn’t – Jesus wasn’t a millionaire. Being a millionaire isn’t the height of success. But do you not think that we go a way down to the other end of the street and we have the attitude, “Well, we’ve got the Lord, you know, and that’s the important thing? My job life isn’t too good at the moment, and my career isn’t going too well, and my money is a bit of a mess, and I’m not feeling too well physically. But, I’ve got the Lord.”

If you have the Lord, you have all things because Jesus contains everything and the Bible says that. If you have Jesus you have everything. And indeed, the Bible says at one point, “You have all things. In Jesus you have all things.” I do think that if you’re going to experience faith in your life, you have to start thinking differently. You have to start thinking that your dear Father loves you and he has given you certain abilities and certain characteristics, and he has something for you to do that is utterly fulfilling and utterly satisfying for you, and that looks even

successful, and has a feel of success for yourselves.

Loved ones, I don't think it's only the northern Irish people that think, "Well, things probably won't go right." I think there are a lot of us in America that think, "Well, as long as we have the Lord it doesn't matter if we're not feeling up to par physically. It doesn't matter too much if our career isn't going to well. It doesn't matter if we feel good about ourselves. Christians aren't expected to experience those things." You are. You are. It's an insult to the Father. The Father doesn't put you here just to suffer. Yeah, there will be suffering and there will be hardships, but it's in order to bring you through to a place where things go well with you. That's God's will for each of us.

I think a lot of us suffer because we believe suffering down upon ourselves. We have a down at the mouth kind of attitude about ourselves. I don't know how many of you know that we're involved in businesses. I think a lot of the businesses go less well than God intends because we kind of think, "Oh well, we're not really supposed to do exceedingly well in business. We just struggle along and after all we're ministering Jesus' life." That's terrible. It's God's will to prosper us in our businesses so that we're successful financially, so that we're successful professionally, so that in every way the thing looks like the temple of God, a beautiful place that is attractive.

It's the same with our houses. I don't know what your house is like or, what your apartment is like but God wants it to look well. He wants it to be a shining brilliant pearl that he can look down upon and see everything working right. I think I've shared with some of you that when we first came to the states, the thing that amazed me was in America things worked the way they were supposed to. We lived in several parsonages in Britain and in Ireland and they were all the same, I don't want to expand any toes here, your bath may be exactly like this, but they were all the same. We had baths with originally those levers that lifted the little plug up and down. Of course, they had stopped working years ago and we had one of those rubber stoppers that we kind of stuck in if we could find it, wherever it was, or we had one of those big flat rubber ones that go over the top. And I couldn't believe it when I came to the states, you pulled the lever up and then the drain opened. It worked. I couldn't believe it. I thought those stopped working 50 years ago.

That's what God wants for our lives. He wants them to work well that all may go well with you and that you may be in health. Oh, do receive that into your heart and do think that, and begin to think that way. God wants you to think that way. He wants you to renew your mind so that you can begin to exercise faith.

Now, lest you think, "Oh look, that would make life too easy," let's go back to 31 and you'll see no it doesn't. It really doesn't. It gives you plenty of opportunities for exercising faith because Genesis 31, "Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, 'Jacob has taken all that was our father's; and from what was our father's he has gained all this wealth.' And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him with favor as before." So there'll be envy that will come to your fort so there will be plenty of opportunity to exercise faith in Jesus' ability to stop people's envy hurting you.

There will be envy that will come and that's of course what came to Jacob, "Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him with favor as before." And yet God always has a next step, you know, in Verse 3, "Then the Lord said to Jacob, 'Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you.'" God always has that for you, he has the next step for you and he'll show you what the guidance is.

Now then the next verses, loved ones, they are important verses because they show you how the

miracle of the spotted and speckled cattle took place and they follow along with what we've been sharing so far. In Verse 4, "So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was, and said to them, 'I see that your father does not regard me with favor as he did before.

But the God of my father has been with me. You know that I have served your father with all my strength; yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not permit him to harm me. If he said, 'The spotted shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore spotted; and if he said, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore striped. Thus God has taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me."

So what Jacob said will be your experience too. Your life is not in the hands of me, remember that. Your life isn't in the hands of the Laban's, or your employers, or the people that do dirty tricks, or the people that take advantage of you. Your life is not in their hands. Your life is in the hands of God. God is able to overrule all of that. And now Jacob explains how the miracle took place. "In the mating season of the flock I lifted up my eyes, and saw in a dream that the he-goats which leaped upon the flock were striped, spotted, and mottled." "I lifted up my eyes, and saw in a dream," and the Holy Spirit, you remember, in the Old Testament often speaks to people through dreams and visions.

But Jacob is saying here, "Even while I am looking after goats and sheep that were solid colors, I saw in my dream goats that were speckled and spotted. I saw them with the eyes of my faith. I saw them. I envisioned them. I could see them as clearly as if they were in front of my very eyes." That's what faith is. Do you see that? Faith isn't, "Lord, I believe you're going to heal this tired, worn, sick body of my friend that is so shot through with cancer that her bones are breaking with the metastasis." That isn't faith. Because, your eyes are filled, filled to full, and to overflowing with the sickness, and the metastasis, and the broken bones, and the weariness, and the tiredness of your dear friend's body and that isn't faith.

If you say to me, "You mean, faith is changing your whole thinking so that you're actually thinking the person is whole and well?" That's right. Faith is not praying, "Lord, will you please meet the debts that I have? There's this debt, and that debt, and the other debt, and there's this bill that I'm worried about and I can't see how I'm possibly going to meet that debt this date next month, and there's this problem and that problem." That isn't faith. Faith is seeing those things already done and already completed. Faith is your whole thinking accepting that God has done all this in Jesus that it is all already accomplished. That's what faith is.

Faith changes your thinking so that you would be the most surprised person in the world if it didn't happen. That's it. Faith is not praying, "I believe you, Lord, that you'll do this," and then coming to the thing and saying, "Well, I didn't think he'd do it anyway." That's not faith. Faith is changing your whole thinking so that you see the whole thing as already done. That's what Jacob said. See how he went on? "Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am!' And he said, "Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that leap upon the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you." And so even the angel of God came and said the same thing, "Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that leap upon the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you."

You walk in the midst of the reality of the thing before it occurs. That's what happens. You walk in the middle of it, that's what it means. Faith is the substance of things unseen. It's the very substance. You have the thing before it is manifested outwardly so that somebody comes and says, "You know that's happened?" You say, "Well, it's already happened for me. I know it. My heart has

lifted. All the joy is in my heart.” See what a difference it is? Your heart lifts with the thing. You don’t go on fearing the thing that’s coming. You’ve already seen the thing as completed and your heart lifts with it and for you it’s already done. And you see, loved ones, when you hear that in the past you said, “Yeah, yeah, it’s already done because I have a tricky little idea in my mind. Yeah, yeah, I know I believe it; we’ll all accept the bluff. Yes.”

It’s not a tricky little mental juggling. For you, your whole being has adapted to the reality of this thing is already done. That’s it. Your eyes, your ears, your heart, your mind, your pulse, your emotions, your whole body lives in the reality of this thing is done so that you walk with a light step and a happy tone in your voice. That’s it. Everything changes. That is what faith is. Faith is an absolute confidence that the thing has already been done. It’s seeing the thing as already done.

Oh, I don’t need to really emphasis it much more except this dear old guy, of course, does it here in this book, old Cho. “God’s commandment of Abraham was three-fold: one, he was to see the land; two, Abraham was told to look up to the stars; three, his name was changed from Abram to Abraham.” One, by looking out in every direction he filled his imagination in a concrete way with God’s promise. He was not told to close his eyes when God spoke to him. He was told to look at something concrete and substantive. So often when we are believing for something from God, we tend to neglect the role God expects us to play in the fulfillment of his promise.”

I think we do. We neglect the role that he expects us to play in the fulfillment of his promise. “We are not to be idle or passive. God expects our faith to a form and substance.” He expects you to see the thing, to live in the reality and the completeness of it. To live in happiness of it and then he manifests it.

Just the second one, “When God focused Abraham’s attention on his future seed, he was told to look at the stars. God wanted the sense of his heart to capture not only the magnitude of the picture but the lens of his eyes to capture each individual star in its individual beauty. Every one of his children were to be important to him therefore, he was told to try to number each of them.” And so God said, “Look at the stars because he wanted Abrahams mind to be filled with the numbers that he was going to give to him of children.” So loved ones, it’s with us.

If you say, “Oh, it is in the imagination that faith works.” Yeah, sure God gave us imagination. He’s asking us to image what he’s already done in Jesus. Why should we just use imagination to imagine the lies of Satan? Why not use our imagination to bring before the image of our minds the things that God has already done in Jesus? Faith is envisioning the thing, seeing it in your imagination as already done and complete. That’s why a person with faith is as happy as a person who has seen the thing done in reality because, for this person with faith it is already done and that’s maybe just the second message. You have to change your thinking about the fact that God wants you to be well, and he wants you to be successful, and then you do need to envision the thing and see it in the imagination.

Now, let’s go on just a little further. Verse 13, “I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go forth from this land, and return to the land of your birth.” And you do need a Bethel, a “beth el”, “beth” is house, “el” is of God -- a house of God. You do need a Bethel experience. You remember the Bethel experience was back in Genesis 28:10. “Jacob left Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place, and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his

head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, 'I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants; and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you.' Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it.' And he was afraid, and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'"

You need that. Get together with the Lord and he can tell you what he has for your life. He can. He can tell you what he has for your life. It may take some prolonged prayer. You might have to pray not just for an hour or two hours, maybe three hours or four hours, maybe for a few days. But I know what I see happening too many of us, our lives are going by default. Our lives are going by default. We're just drifting along. I feel so much for you who are students because, I want to warn you, some of us who haven't been students for a long time, we were drifting when we were students and we're still adrift. It's easy to keep drifting. It's easy to keep saying, "Well yeah, I'm sure my life will sort itself out somehow. I'm sure one of these days the thing is going to break into some kind of direction." Stop that. Nothing breaks into direction just by chance, or just by drifting. Your God knows you. He put you here to fulfill a purpose. He can let you know what that purpose is and then you go for it and you begin to exercise faith for it, and you begin to see it before your very eyes, and then the thing becomes real.

See, loved ones. it's so different from the way we're so often going. We're fiddling along, drifting along, doing a little praying, a little of this, a little of that, working a little at our jobs and we're hopeful that somehow this will break. Well, God doesn't want us to go through life under anesthesia. He doesn't. He doesn't want us to end up at the end of our life thinking, "Oh, I'm 75, how did I get here?" He doesn't. He wants you to see what he had for you to do and then to exercise faith and to see it as already done and then to see it manifested in your life. That's it.

God has a definite purpose for each one of us and it is that we will do well and that we will do well what he gave us to do. Do you realize what a precious thing even you are? I mean, you're a person but do you realize even if you were a thing, what a precious thing you are? Do you realize that you're more complex than Steve Jobs can make any computer? Do you realize that you're more precious and unique than anything any biochemist can produce? You're dear, you're unique, there's nobody like you, and you're a treasure in the universe. You are, you yourself, you're a treasure. There's nobody like you. Each one, each man, each woman here, there's nobody like you, you're one original, you're the only one of you that God has made. He made you for a definite purpose and he wants you to know it and he will tell you it if you'll seek him and ask him.

And then he wants you to grasp it and begin to believe for it, and to begin to see it as real and accomplished. And then, by the same power by which he prospered Jacob, he will bring that about in your life. That's it, loved ones. I'd encourage you, I'd encourage you to stand up, stop drifting, and begin to see what God has for you.

Let us pray. Dear Father, we thank you for these men in the Old Testament who seemed to live such

definite lives with clear results. Lord, we confess that we are so often filled with halfhearted uncertain hopes. We are so often filled with compromises, so often filled with things we think might be answers to prayer but we're not really sure. Things that we think we maybe should do but we're not sure.

Father, we see that we're exactly the same as these dear patriarchs. We're just as unique as they are. We're just as original as they are and you have just a definite purpose and a plan for us as you have for them.

Lord, we see that it's not going to come about by default. It's not going to come about by our indifference. It's going to come about by us seeking you at our Bethel and finding out what you want us to do, then beginning to exercise our faith. Beginning to change our thinking and see that you did not put such a precious thing as us on the world surface and then have no definite plan for its success.

Lord, you put us complex beings as we are here because you have a very definite purpose for us to fulfill. You plan that we will fulfill it well. So, Lord, we would change our thinking and we would see that you have definite plans for us to do well, whatever we do. Then, Lord, we thank you that we can begin to envision that, to see it before our eyes, to see the spotted and speckled cattle before our eyes. To see that spotted and speckled cross of Calvary at which we were changed and we were made new and where the old passed away forever and we were completely recreated on that spotted and speckled tree.

Lord, we thank you. Thank you. We would fill our eyes, and our thoughts, and our imagination with what you show us we are to do in this life and we would begin to live in it so really that when it is manifested we will take it as normal and natural and be as little surprised as you are. Thank you Father. Thank you that this coming week we can be an active part in the fulfillment of your dream for us as we fill our minds, and our thoughts, and our imaginations with the answers to the prayers that you have told us to pray.

Thank you Lord. We'd see Susan in Switzerland whole and well, shining, healthy, whole, beautiful, with all the body well and the muscles strong, with the blood pulsing through her veins and with brightness in her eyes and with health in her cheeks. Lord, we'd see here now whole and complete. Every bone healthy and intact. We see her now Lord Jesus, in you, raised and made whole. We would do the same Lord, with the things in our lives that you intend us now to begin to tackle and put right this coming week for Jesus' sake.

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.