

Faith's Achievement

Genesis 34:18-35:1

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Jacob and his large family come across a group of people at a city called Shechem. In fact, Shechem was the son of the person who really ruled that part of the land. The son called Shechem actually came across Dinah who was one of Jacob's daughter and really just had intercourse with her. Of course, it was such an insult to the Israelites and it was such an insult against God because the man wasn't circumcised, wasn't an Israelite himself.

You remember that Dinah's brothers, that is Jacob's sons, decided they would take vengeance. They made some kind of deception to Shechem and his family and said, "Oh, if you will get circumcised then you'll be able to marry Dinah." In fact, they got circumcised and while they were sore from the circumcision, the brothers just roamed right in and massacred them.

Well really, it was a bit with Jacob at that point what I think it is in our own lives. Can I just point you to it and then I think it'll come home to your own hearts? It was in Genesis 34:30 immediately after that massacre. Genesis 34:30, "Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi," [the two brothers who had massacred Shechem and the rest of his people] "You have brought trouble on me by making me odious to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household."

Jacob realized that during the 10 years that he had been in Canaan he had got far away from God's will for him and he realized it through this kind of adversary. He suddenly saw the danger that he was in, that now all the people on whom he was so dependent for his very survival, all the people through whose country he was passing were now out to get him and were out to destroy him and that made him stop and think.

I didn't really understand much about adversity. I knew about adversities and I knew you were to rejoice in adversities but I didn't realize to what extent God uses adversities. It probably is very important, loved ones, that we see that adversity is actually not God's norm for us. I think you know coming from Ireland, it's easy to get that idea. You, in America, have a tendency to think that happiness is the norm, even in this fallen world. In Europe we have a tendency to think gloom and unhappiness is the norm and really we're both really wrong in a sense.

In a fallen world there will be adversities but God's norm for us is stated in 2 Corinthians 2:14 and we need to see that. Otherwise, I think we won't receive the messages that God is giving us through our experiences. 2 Corinthians 2:14, "But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere." That's the norm. God normally leads us in triumph in Christ Jesus. Jesus has overcome the world and normally God leads us in triumph. And whenever you hit adversity you need to be like Jacob, look up and say, "Wait a minute Lord, what has gone wrong here? Is there some way in which I've missed my way with you?"

And that's what old Jacob did when he at last saw that all the people around about him were now out for his blood due to the activity of his sons killing the men of the land. He began to realize,

“There’s something gone wrong in my life.” And I think that’s reasonable to do that, loved ones. Don’t just go blindly on through saying, “Well, you know it comes to us all and it’s just come to me. Something has happened that happens to all people.” Yes, that’s true but it seems that God uses those things in order to bring us either into new beauty of himself or into an awareness of our disobedience to him. And I don’t think it’s just fate. You remember the blind Cyclops who Odysseus defeated? Isn’t it in classical mythology? It’s blind fate that the old Romans and Greeks always blamed for their hardships.

Well, we’re not in that position. Certainly Satan is one who hates it when God keeps a hedge round about us and only lets Satan through when he wants to tap us on the shoulder and say, “Wait a minute, there’s something missing here. You’re missing something that I have for you.” So if things go wrong in your life, or if you hit adversity, don’t either say, “Oh, it’s just blind fate coming at me, it’s just Satan who is mowing me down.” Or, don’t on the other hand say, “Well, this happens to everybody and this is just one of those things and I’ll eventually win through it.” Really, the thing is to do what Jacob did, begin to make that a reason for seeking God and saying, “Lord, are you trying to say something to me through this?” That’s really what Jacob did you know.

He began to realize that something is not right and so in 35:1, “God said to Jacob, ‘Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.’” Now actually, God was reminding Jacob, “Do you remember at Bethel you made an altar to me and actually you did something else back then.” That was 30 years ago that that happened and maybe you’d like to look at it 31:13. It was 30 years before that God said this to Jacob, ‘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.’” God reminded Jacob, “Back then I told you that I was the God of Bethel where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me years ago.” And where he originally made it 30 years before was 28:18, and so already God has reminded Jacob once, “You made a vow to me here,” and here he is again giving him a reminder.

And this is the time in Genesis 28:18, “So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone which he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house; and of all that thou givest me I will give the tenth to thee.’” And this was what God was saying. He said, “You wonder why I’ve allowed these things to come upon you? Well, I want to remind you that 30 years ago you made a vow to me at Bethel and you promised me something. You said when you returned to your father’s land that you would keep that promise.”

Loved ones, if you make a vow to God, keep it. I think I was the worst in this regard. I think I would often think of a vow to God or a promise as some determination that I had made in my own mind. A kind of personal private thing. I don’t know why I thought it, it was probably the upbringing or the way that I was educated but I thought, “Well, I’ve thought of doing that to God. I’ve thought of doing this. Well yeah, it would be good to get up at six every morning for prayer. Well Lord, I’m going to promise to get up at six every morning.” But in my own head I would think well that was between me and God but really it was mean. Nobody else knows about it and I’m not going to spoil anybody’s witness or impression of God.”

But loved ones, when you make a vow to God keep it. Now I’ll tell you where that is, it’s

Deuteronomy 23:21. Deuteronomy 23:21, “When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not be slack to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin in you. But if you refrain from vowing, it shall be no sin in you. You shall be careful to perform what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth.” That’s a spiritual law, God holds you to it.

Now if you say to me, “Why does he hold you to it?” It must surely be because it’s connected up with your sense of his reality. I mean presumably the more you make private vows, mental vows, and don’t keep them the more actually you learn to ignore God. Isn’t that true? The more you make a vow, “Lord, I’ll do this, I really will do it.” And you don’t do it, the more that becomes meaningless to you and the more actually you’re taking the name of the Lord your God in vain. I think, loved ones, our powerlessness in our lives, the fact that we don’t see mighty miracles done through our hands is because we do not take our Lord seriously, we do not take our God seriously. We make vows about our prayer times, about getting up for prayer, we make our vows about – I don’t want to touch this one too much because Satan can get in on it, but we make vows about eating, and about drinking, and we make vows about getting up early in the morning, and we make vows about things we’re going to do for the Lord and I think we just more and more grieve the spirit and make God more and more unreal in our lives because we don’t keep our vows. Then God has to allow adversities to come into our lives.

Really, we should praise him that he does allow the adversities to come in rather than let us just drift away into hell. But brothers and sisters, if you make a vow to God keep the vow. It’s a spiritual law that governs your relationship with God. If you don’t keep your vow, God marks that and God will eventually, 30 years later, bring you back to that same place and remind you of that vow. So do it. Don’t be light in vows you make to God about prayer times, or about eating, or drinking, or about tithing, or about things you’re going to do for him. Hold to the vow, whatever it costs.

It’s amazing. The Father looks down upon you and recognizes that you respect him. It’s like that to talk about respect – every time you think of old Eric Liddell, [Olympic 400 meter gold medalist in 1924 and missionary to China] you feel your heart beat. I don’t think that guy actually did it, apparently. I mean, he’s still alive. You remember, because Liddell refused to run on a Sunday, Jackson Scholz, the American runner, handed the little slip of paper to Liddell as he was about to begin the 400 meter race. Liddell opened it and read, “Him that honors me I will honor.” [1 Samuel 2:30] It’s true, if you honor God, he will honor you and if you do not honor God, he will not honor you.

It’s really important. It doesn’t matter if nobody knows about your vow -- if you honor God with your vow -- in keeping it he will assuredly honor you. It comes clearer and clearer as the years go by, it’s not brilliance, it’s not greatness, it’s not cleverness, it’s not all that stuff. You have to get that clear in your hearts. It’s not preaching, or it’s not even with due respect to the singers, it’s not singing, it’s not these great things -- it’s a meek man or woman who is honest with God. That’s the man or woman that God blesses and that God will save millions through. It really is.

So that’s what God brought Jacob back to. Then in Verse 2, “So Jacob said to his household,” because then light and revelation comes. Then you see where the mess is. If you get into one of those dark areas where you think, “Life is pretty boring. There’s nothing happening and I don’t feel very close to God -- I don’t understand why, and I don’t know what it is about.” Always

there's some sin, or some failure to keep a vow. Or, something which you have promised to God and you have not done and then when you do that thing that lifts the cap off and light and revelation comes. God shows you the other things that have been taking place in your life and that's what happened with Jacob.

"So Jacob said to his household," he knew it right away, "And to all who were with him, 'Put away the foreign gods that are among you,'" because actually they were there. You remember, I think it's 31:34 these dear wives of his that he had married had brought their own gods with them. Genesis 31:34, "Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel's saddle, and sat upon them. Laban felt all about the tent, but did not find them." So actually Rachel and Leah had brought their own gods with them. Jacob, I suppose from affection, affection for his wives, he allowed that to continue in his home. So he knew right away here it was the gods that he had to deal with. And so he said, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments."

I think we're often a little naïve about the foreign gods. I think we have an idea, "Thank goodness I don't have the 'Lares.'" Aren't they the ones the Romans had, the household gods? "Thank goodness I don't have any household gods, I have no idols." We tend to think of it in the same way that I thought of it when I went to James' fashion jewelry factory in Taiwan [Lucktie]. It is the company that produces the cloisonné jewelry that we sell in England. James is a dear guy who just is in the old Buddhist tradition of Taiwan. He is a very open fellow now and is very close increasingly to Dan, our director in Taiwan and has come to church with him. I remember I wrote James a letter from us all when his sister was killed and told him we were praying for him. So there is great openness.

But old James, if you go into the workshop, there's a little Buddha sitting up with a kind of light in the corner. It's tradition. You know he isn't really serious about it. But I used to think, "Oh yeah, well thank goodness I don't have any trouble with foreign gods." But it really is vital for us to see that the gods of the Old Testament were not what the people actually worshipped. I mean, they're no dumber than we are. They don't think that this Baal is actually God. They know what the prophets have said; God can't be made of stone or metal. Baal, in Hebrew is "master" and it's the verb for own or possess. What they were worshipping in Baal was not this entity that was just an external expression of the whole elemental spirit of the universe that is connected with security that comes through possessions.

It's the depending on what you own for your sense of security. You must admit, it is kind of naïve to think that humanity has changed that much. Here you can go back two or three thousand years and despite the fact that you find among these people some of the most complex mathematics that you can discover on earth and some of the deepest philosophies, yet we also like to believe they're so dumb and stupid that they think this stone idol is a god. It's not that. This stone idol stands for that whole spirit within themselves that they know they depend on instead of God. It's really that dependence on Baal -- it's that dependence on what I own, what I possess.

If you'd like to put it in modern terms, God plus my bank account. The Holy Spirit knows when we are worshipping a foreign or a strange god. He knows it. That god of Baal always pays you back in the same coin. He pays you back in anxiety. When the bank account goes down, he pays you in worry and in sleeplessness. He pays you back in covetousness, in envy, and in jealousy. He always pays you back in the same coin. The elemental spirits that lay behind the god of Baal always creates the same terrible retribution in your own heart.

Whenever you come into adversity like that, I would honestly say, whenever you come into any worry or anxiety, seek the Lord honestly. Get back to him and say, "Lord, am I worshipping Baal in any way in my life?" And oh, whatever it costs you throw it away. I'll tell you actually, if you don't throw it away in order to get into heaven, God will have to throw it away and he'll bring you right round the whole route. I know a number of you, I think, are in the same spot I was in. I was saying to Carmen, "You know we're all the same." Especially, it seems to me I've always – it seems being on a fixed salary, you've always been on a fixed salary whether you were a school teacher, a minister, we're always on fixed salaries and we always have the idea, "Well, we're on fixed salaries so save a little bit, a little bit, a little bit. We can't make tremendous profits the way businessman can."

So we try to keep building up the equity and it's so easy to get into that little squirrely attitude of gathering in the nuts for the rainy day, or for the rainy day when we get old. And don't; don't come under that miserable god Baal. You are not at his mercy. You are not at his mercy for the rainy day. You are not at his mercy for the day of age. You are in the hands of your God who will be faithful. Actually, the truth I've found out is you can squirrel and squirrel away and in a week he can take it all away from you and you've lost everything. And it's just not worth it. Don't get under that god Baal. If you see any of the signs of it through little adversities coming to you, such as, "Boy, I got a little too upset when that car dented my front end." Then get to God and say, "Lord, is there something that's getting a grip? Is there something that is less than perfect freedom?" That is the god of Baal.

Actually, the god Moloch was the god that demanded that they throw their children through the fire, if you remember. That was the sacrifice they demanded, that they throw the children through the fire, right through it to the other side. Moloch, actually the MLK are the three Hebrew letters that make the word Malik, and that's the word for king. Moloch was the god of the elemental spirits who gives you the sense, "I want to rule over things. I want to control things. That's the only way to get in my life what I need, I have to control everything, keep it exactly right and manipulate it just in the way that will keep me in the right position in regard to all my friends and all my colleagues." It's that desire to rule, or to manipulate, or to keep yourself somehow on top of the heap by your own manipulation.

Loved ones, God alone is your God. He alone will take care of your status, and take care of your importance, and take care of your position in society. If you find yourself getting out worshipping Moloch then turn back. And if you say, "What brings you to it?" Usually pride, either that you've managed to do it, or a sense of strain that other people aren't doing what you want them to do so that you get irritated with them. A dear guy was saying to me, he's a young man, he came to me today and God is teaching him to begin to learn to manage. And he says, "Well, you know, Pastor, I'm doing okay but boy it's hard to keep your cool when people don't do what you tell them to do." And really, I know it so well; it's hard to keep your cool while you're in charge. It's not hard to keep your cool while God is in charge.

Those of you who are school teachers know it; it's hard to keep your cool if you're in charge of the classroom, because there are so many miserable little elemental spirits of the universe working on those characters that you haven't a chance. But if God is in charge of the classroom, then there is that place of faith that you can stand in when that little guy has actually got out beyond where you can control him. And there's a place of peace and trust there that you know, "Yeah, there's somebody still has their hand on them." Loved ones, it's the same in our own job situations and

it's the same in the restaurant, or whatever business we're in, there comes a time when you get out beyond where you can control it and it's vital at that time that you are not worshipping the god Moloch because if you are, he says to you, "If you can't control this buddy nobody can." And that's where the strain comes.

But if you're worshipping the God of the whole universe at that moment it's, "Father, into your hands I commit this whole situation. Lord, if you want me to lose my reputation, if you want them to trample over the top of me, I've taken my place in Jesus and that's where I'm satisfied to be." God will allow adversity to come to you if you're worshipping a little of the god Moloch. He will. He'll allow things to get out of hand. He'll allow things to get out of control and when adversity comes get the message from it, you know, don't keep fighting to overcome it. Get the message and get back to the Father.

There was another god Ashtaroth. It's the god of lust, or the god of enjoyment and that is what they meant when they worshiped the god Ashtaroth. It was, "I have the right to be happy, happy, happy and I just want happiness, and I'm going to get happiness, and I hate anything that is unhappiness." Loved ones, if you find yourself worshipping that god, the Father will allow all kinds of unhappiness and sadness to come to you, and all kinds of miserable experiences so that he can wean you away from this desire for happy, happy, happiness all the time. Because you are useless to the Father while you're straining after happiness at all costs.

I know the constitution guarantees that we pursue happiness. That's our right but really it's not. God will often ask us to come into places where there is great unhappiness and where he'll ask us to obey him whether it makes us happy or not. It is a creeping kind of thing inside us where we end up yearning after happiness and wondering if we go to a place will it make us feel good. It prevents us worshipping the God of the world who wants obedience. That's what our Father wants, absolute obedience whether it brings us happiness, whether it brings us enjoyment or not -- just obedience.

So, really if you find yourself sitting at home some night and thinking, "Oh, I'm miserable -- this is a terrible life." It's probably that God has allowed that adversity to come to you to waken you up and see, "Look that's always what the god Ashtaroth will give you. He'll give you not happiness; he'll give you eventually misery. Come back and seek me."

There's only one thing to do and that's what Jacob did you remember, Verse 2, "So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, 'Put away the foreign gods that are among you,'" Just put them right away. Get rid of depending on your bank account. Just say, "No, Lord." And when the bank account goes down, "Thank you Father. I praise you. I thank you that I'm not depending on that." When things are unhappy and not pleasant, "Lord, I thank you that you are my happiness, you're my joy." When things get to the place where they're getting out of control completely, "Father, I praise you for this." Old Carrouthers, the preacher who wrote, 'Power in Praise' would say, "I praise you Lord, I praise you that this thing is under your control. I cannot understand where on earth it is going but I thank you that you're in control." Put away the foreign gods just put them from you. Stop worshipping them.

Then you see what it says, "And purify yourselves," purify your heart from all idolatry. Get it out of your heart. I don't know how much you hedge your bets but I've found myself at different times in my life hedging my bets. You depend on God but you kind of hedge it a little just in case he should maybe run it a little too close, and you just pop a little away here, or you plan a little

there. Don't hedge your bets. Don't hedge your bets. Don't keep it in your heart at all. Purify your heart completely and absolutely. If you say to me, "Brother, if God doesn't come through I'm ruined." That's right and that's the only position to be in with God. "Lord, if you don't come through I have no chance, I have no other arrangements."

See, you think of it, is God going to come through for you if you have other arrangements? He's not because if he's not Lord of all, he's not Lord at all. He knows that so if you won't give your whole self to him he doesn't give his whole self to you. So you only see God coming through strong for you if you have no other arrangements. That's it. We can't get God to act on our behalf if he's just one of many options. It's only when he alone is our answer. I think it's the same, loved ones, I think it's the same with marriage, it's the same with jobs, it's the same with money, it's the same with loneliness, it's the same with all those things if God alone is our source of supply, then God comes through magnificently. But if we have other arrangements God is not able to come through.

So, purify your hearts from all idolatry, from looking to anything that will supply you with what God himself said he will supply, and purify your hearts, "And change your garments." Changing your garments meant put on the kinds of activity in your own life that express your faith. Do that -- begin to go out on limbs for God. Begin to act in dependence on him and not on the foreign gods. "Then let us arise and go up to Bethel that I may make there an altar to the God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone." It's all been done away with. All the old gods that we depended on are gone and this is a completely new life and we go out in absolute complete faith and confidence. We make no other provision, and we make no provision for the flesh. We make provision only for the spirit and we just go on that. It's what we shared this morning through old Hagin, you don't let any other consideration come into your mind, you just go flat out for God and you never let any other thought or doubt, or suggestion of something else come in.

I used to think, "Well, I have no idolatry in me as long as I'm not bowing down to a stone idol." Don't think it for a minute. You have no idolatry in you when there isn't another thought of depending on anything else but God. That's it. When you have no thought of self in your heart, you have no idolatry in you. That's what God wants for us. Idolatry is an attitude in the heart that depends either on self or on something else instead of on God. The only thing to do is bury that whole thing, bury it completely. If anything comes through to you and says, "Well, well, I mean can you depend on this?" If you can't depend on this there's nothing else to depend on. I mean, if you can't depend on God we've got nothing anyway. It's going to be a miserable, miserable experience at the end of his life. We're all just going to get such a surprise.

So, it's either completely true or it's not true at all. If it's completely true then there's no point in making all these other silly little arrangements that creep into our minds. Then of course, when you do that God's blessing comes back in Verse 5, "And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were round about them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob."

It's always that whether it's with our old businesses, or your profession, or your career, or your marriage, the terror comes down upon your enemies and God drives them back. God makes a way for you in the wilderness. As soon as we get rid of our foreign gods, God comes through and he'll do it for you and he'll do it for me.

Let us pray. Dear Father, we thank you for how clear you make things in the Old Testament. Lord, we thank you for the plain way in which you dealt with Jacob. You reminded him of the vow that he

had made to you and you required him to keep that vow and then you gave him light, flooded light in upon his spirit so that he saw what foreign gods were still among his own home and his own household. Lord, we thank you that the further we are from those foreign gods, and the closer we are to you, the more your favor comes upon us.

So Father, we would bow down before you this evening, and dear Holy Spirit, we would ask you to search the deep parts of our hearts and of our motive life. If you, Holy Spirit, see any dependence on what we possess and what we own, or what we can get our hands on for our security and Lord, if there's any of our happiness that comes from that, will you reveal it to us? We don't want any Lord. It's unreal happiness. If we get any happiness from the fact that our bank account is at this level, or our salary is at this level, or we have at least gathered these possessions around us, Holy Spirit, bring home to us what a pitiful thing we're depending on -- treasure that will rust and that is of no value.

So Lord, convict us of that so that we can get clear of it and get clear of the bondage that it brings us into. Convict us of the bondage of worry and anxiety how to preserve it and how to keep it, and how to increase it. Oh Father, we would ask you to do the same through the Holy Spirit, if you see in us any dependence on ourselves somehow manipulating things, managing the circumstances so they go right. Lord, if you see us in our faculty meetings, or if you see us in our school situations, or our job situations, depending on our own clever manipulation of this situation or that. Lord, if you see us at night turning over in our minds what we can do to make this situation better, convict us of our sin and deliver us from the worry and the strain that that brings us as we worship that god Moloch.

Oh Father, if you see in us any slavery to happy happiness, any slavery to feelings, if you see us Lord doing anything for an extra little thrill, will you through the Holy Spirit, bring us to see that the glory that you receive is the glory that comes from naked obedience that comes from a heart that is not necessarily filled with wonderful feelings but from a will that is submissive? Lord, show us again that naked obedience is what brings you the greatest glory and the greatest of pleasure. So Lord, we would come to you, the God of Jacob, and we know Lord that Jacob is sitting with you in heaven and that we will be called to sit right beside him and we will only sit there if we've done what he did, put away our foreign gods, purified ourselves, and put on clean garments.

So we would this evening, we would now put on clean garments, we would bury our foreign gods, and we would purify our hearts from every dependence upon them, and Lord we would walk out into freedom tonight and tomorrow. Lord, when Satan tempts us with a little dependence on one of these gods, we will rebuke him in Jesus' name and we will remind him that that person that worshipped that god is no more. That person has been buried and there is only Jesus here and he worships only his Father.

Lord, we thank you.

And 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 through this week. Amen.