

In God is our Victory

Genesis 35

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

There are two ways to live this present life. One is the way most people live it by their own effort, by manipulating their way around circumstances and around things and people by the power of their own wills and their minds. And the other way is to recognize that the problems we come up against in our lives, difficulties in our jobs, difficulties with our money, and the difficulties with our personal relationships are due not just to human error but are due to principalities and powers that operate behind the scene. And the only way to deal with those principalities and powers is through faith in Jesus and in his death on Calvary, and in his victory over those powers.

Now I don't know where you stand in regard to all that. I frankly, used to think it's mumbo jumbo and I used to think, "Oh for goodness sake forget all that stuff. I'll just tackle life with my own will power, and my own mind and cleverness." Until I began to come up against some of those things that just don't yield to your own mind and to cleverness, and they just don't seem to work. You come up against chronic problems that will not yield to all your efforts.

It's very interesting, but as life goes on as the years past you get more and more of those things so that your life becomes filled with things that are entangled that you have not been able to disentangle. And so your life goes on and on with many more of those unresolved issues and eventually of course, it overwhelms you and you begin to settle for just creeping along as best you can.

Now loved ones, the other way is entirely different. The other way is the way of complete victory and that's the way that God wants us and has called us to. He has called us to complete victory in every situation. Not to yielding in anything whether it be sickness, whether it be a problem in our home or our family situations, or in our careers, or in our futures. It is God's will that we would go in triumph and in victory the whole way. And he has ensured that we will do that because of what Jesus has done on Calvary.

God took all the spirits and the forces that operate in your life to make your life a failure and he destroyed them in Jesus on Calvary and he has recreated your life so that there is a version of your life that goes perfectly as he planned it. You can experience that perfect life simply by faith in him and by moving hand-in-hand with him. Now that's what we're study here in this book. This book is an account of men and women who operated by faith and men and woman who operated at times just by sight. One of them is Jacob and maybe you'd turn to Genesis 35 and you'll see it there. Genesis 35 is a continuation of the life story of Jacob.

You might remember that he was born really a twin. Esau was his brother. Esau was maybe half a second older than him. Therefore Esau was really the older brother and was the one that ought to have inherited his father's place as leader of the chosen people of the Israelites. Of course, that was what would normally happen but God gave a promise to Esau and Jacob's mother. He said, "Look, I want to tell you this and I want you to tell your husband that in this case the older brother Esau will not be the one that inherits the leadership of the Israelites but in fact, Jacob the younger one, half a second younger, but he will inherit that position."

God had determined that and actually God would have brought it about in his own way but Jacob had the attitude that you and I often had an old grasping attitude. That's the meaning of the word Jacob, it means a striver. I don't know if you remember the story of his birth but the story is told that Esau just popped out of his mother and there holding onto his heel is Jacob, anxious to get out if possible first. That was Jacob's whole life, he was a manipulator.

Do you remember that he determined that he would try to get the blessing as the older son from his father who was very old and half blind? You remember Isaac had said, "Look Esau I want to give you the blessing and I want to give you the leadership of my people the Israelites and so I want you to go out and get some animals, and make a nice soup for me, and then give it to me and I'll give you the blessing." And of course, Isaac's wife Rebekah heard that and she told Jacob about it and said, "Look, I have some beautiful soup here, you go in and give it to your father and put hair on your hands to make you feel like Esau your brother, and then he'll give you the blessing." That's exactly what happened. So Jacob was always a manipulator.

I don't know how you are, but I think for years I tried to manipulate things and to make things turn out the way I wanted them to and it's such a wearing game. I mean, it just wears you down. You're always trying to work angles; you're trying to work out what would forward you, what would improve you materially, what would improve your chances of promotion or your chances of success. Loved ones, it's just a slavery and yet that's what Jacob was doing. If you do that, you'll never find God's perfect plan for your life, you'll end up with something second best. That's exactly what Jacob did.

Of course, when Esau found out that his brother had stolen the birthright he got mad and determined to kill Jacob. Rebekah said, "Look, go away I have a brother of mine who lives miles away, go and stay with him until this blows over." Well in fact, Rebekah never did see Jacob alive again because Jacob had to stay away for about 20 years before it was possible for him ever to go back and before it was possible for him, in fact, ever to face Esau. During that time you may remember he married two women. Actually, he found that he was more manipulated than he was able to manipulate because old Laban was as shrewd as he was.

He was Rebekah's brother and Laban said, "Okay, serve me seven years and I'll give you the good looking daughter." Well, old Jacob served seven years and he gave him the bad looking daughter. And then Laban said, "Okay, serve me another seven years and I'll give you the good looking daughter." So he was bluffed time and time again by Laban. It's the same with ourselves. If you manipulate, you'll be manipulated. If you work angles, somebody else will come along and work angles on you far better. You'll really get back what you give, loved ones. That's not the way God has for us to live.

Eventually of course, God allowed Jacob to go back to the Promised Land because that's where he wanted him to lead his own people and where he wanted, in fact, to give him the name Israel so that he would be the father of the children of Israel. Eventually, 20 years later, it was about the year 1732 B.C., Jacob was permitted to return to Canaan. He had promised God, "If I ever get back there I will do everything right. I'll make vows to you, I'll give you sacrifices, I'll give a tithe of all my goods to you, just get me back there."

Well, he got back there and he started his own manipulating game again. He started to buy land, started to try to use the fact that his wives had brought some of their pagan gods with them. Jacob was still playing both ends against the middle. He knew fine well that God was real but he was

always trying to get the angles worked along with God. I don't know how you are, but I found myself doing that for a long time. You come to the conclusion that God is trustworthy and you can trust him but boy, we are chancers, aren't we? We keep on helping God a little, let me just help him a little, help him along.

Loved ones, God doesn't need our help he needs our faith and our trust. He needs us to trust him and nobody else. Well, eventually, of course, Jacob wakened up to that and he told his wives to put away their pagan gods. That came about this way, instead of getting back to the center of the Promised Land where God wanted him too, he fiddled along on his way and he made some friends, and one of the friends had a group of sons and one of these sons took Jacob's daughter, Dinah and raped her virtually in the field.

Of course, Jacob's sons were mad at him and they decided they would take vengeance. Jacob had so lost his position of leadership by this kind of trusting himself and trusting of God -- manipulating part of the way and believing God part of the way that he has lost his leadership so much in his family that the sons just took the law into their own hands and they went and slaughtered the people that had violated their sister Dinah. Of course, this at last brought Jacob to his senses because all these people determined they would avenge themselves on this tribe that was just traveling through. It was then that Jacob saw, "Wait, I'm going to die. This is what has happened to me by my lack of trust in God."

That God often does with us. If you have missed the way with God again, and again, and again, and you've kept on working angles and manipulating your way, God loves you so much that he will allow tragedies to come to you and adversities to come to you to bring you to your senses. Loved ones, what you need to do when that happens is come to your senses and say, "Lord God, wait a minute what am I doing wrong? What am I trusting instead of you?" And that's what Jacob did and he determined to put away the foreign gods.

Now you get this in Genesis 35, "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.' So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, 'Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments; 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.' So they gave to Jacob all of the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem."

Loved ones, immediately he did that God began to deal with the people round about him who were going to avenge themselves by destroying him. You get it 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." That happens.

There's an amazing spiritual world that we can't see in this room and it has a whole series of causes and effects that work completely differently and above the "cause and effect" world that we know. In the "cause and effect" world, you drop that and it floats to the ground. The law of gravity takes it there and the cause -- letting go of it -- brings the affect that it falls to the ground. There's a whole series of spiritual causes and effects that operate in this room at this moment and that operate around your life. So there was a cause and effect that took place here when Jacob determined, "I will stop trusting anybody but God and I will put my trust in you, Lord and do what you tell me." There was a spiritual cause that entered the minds of those who were going to

destroy Jacob. And that's what it means, a terror you see 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."

Loved ones, it's so. If you come to a place where you put your whole faith and trust in the Father, God sends out spiritual powers that can actually affect the people that owe money to you. He can send out spiritual powers to people that are demanding money from you. He can actually change things materially through the power of his Spirit in response to your actions. That is true. So God can change the things that happen in your life according to your attitude to him.

You get it there in Daniel 6:22. You remember, Daniel, of course, was thrown into the lion arena. Daniel 6:21 would give you the continuity of the sentence, "Then Daniel said to the king, 'O king, live for ever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not hurt me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no wrong.'" That's it. God is able to shut lions' mouths and he's able to change material circumstances to protect you and to make things possible in your life, if you will act in obedience to him and trust him.

In other words, your spiritual trust releases powers that he has to affect the material things in this universe. You know fine well that this is not as solid as it looks. I mean, we now know that from the physicists. This is full of neutrons and protons all together, the whole thing is moving. Even we, it seems to me, have ways now of splitting the atom of matter and of releasing all that. In other words, the final reality in the universe is energy. Of course, obviously that's what God has told us about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the final energy behind the universe. God is able to change this as he was able to change his Son's body so that his Son's body could go through walls and could go fast over miles and miles of terrain without any effort from jet propulsion or anything like that.

So God is able to change material things in response to our changes in our attitude towards him. Loved ones, never limit the Father. Never think that God cannot touch the automobile, or he cannot touch the car, or he cannot touch your clothes, or he cannot change the attitude of your boss. He can do that in a moment. He shut the lions' mouths here in the arenas to protect Daniel.

You get it again in Acts 28:3-6. They were shipwrecked, you remember, "Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, when a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, 'No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.' He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. They waited, expecting him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead; but when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god."

It was Jesus' promise, you remember, "Behold I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall hurt you." Loved ones, it's true God's spiritual power can protect you materially and can change things materially. It's very important that we don't get into just a mystical frame of mind that God can only change things by affecting people's lives. No, he can act directly upon matter, he can act directly on the things that physically surround your life. And it all depends on your attitude to him and he has promised the same protection to you.

You get it there in Psalms 34. Psalms 34:7, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear

him, and delivers them.” It’s good to really memorize that verse and apply it to yourself. “The angel of the Lord encamps around me who fear him, and he delivers me.” If you get into situations where you tend to panic, or worry, or get anxious, you really need to say that to yourself, and you need to take it to your own heart, “The angel of the Lord encamps round about me and delivers me who fears him.” Allow that to come into your heart and your spirit.

Brothers and sisters, there’s no reason for us ever to be afraid or to be anxious about anything. Really, that’s true. It doesn’t matter how bad your situation is. It doesn’t matter how impossible the difficulties are that you face -- they’re no more difficult than lions in an arena. They’re no more difficult than a viper fastening on to your arm or your hand -- they’re no more difficult than the things God has delivered his people from down through the years. And he promises you and me that same deliverance.

It’s in Isaiah 43:2 also, and they’re just good verses to memorize and to repeat to yourself. Isaiah 43:2, “When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.” Loved ones, that’s God’s promise. “When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.”

We are all with each other tonight but I’d remind you of the fact that you know there’ll come a moment in every one of our lives when there’ll be nobody near us and you know that. There’ll come a time when Carmen is on her death bed, or I’m on my death bed, or John is on his death bed, or Neil is on his death bed. It’s interesting it doesn’t matter how close your dear one is to you the hand seems a million miles away because you’re moving into a new world. Loved ones, it’s at that moment that you need to have proven in your own life when the waters – “When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.” God is able to actually affect material changes in your environment, if you trust him and if you have faith in him. That’s of course, what Jacob at last did.

If you go back to Genesis 35:6-7, “And Jacob came to Luz (this is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, and there he built an altar, and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother.” Now you note that at last he built the altar. He had been promising to build that altar for 20 years and at last he built it. Instead of making promises, and making vows, and having lots of complex thoughts he began to simply obey. And I don’t know how you are but I think we try to substitute all kinds of complex thinking, and all kinds of wonderful ideals and great intentions, and all God is asking us to do is simply practical obedience.

I don’t know if you’ve any blocks in your life. If you begin to feel, “Boy, I wish God was as real to me as he used to be,” or, “I wish I could break my way through this problem that I have.” Loved ones, the answer is not in more understanding of theology, it’s not in more mysticism, it’s not in more praying even, it’s probably in obedience. It’s obedience about something in your life that God has spoken to you again, and again. God is not mysterious and usually the problem is not a mystery, it’s a simple act of obedience that God wants you to undertake and then he will open the very gates of heaven to you.

At last Jacob took that kind of action. Instead of all the thinking, and all the good intentions,

he began to simply obey. And so in Verse 8, “And Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died,” and this woman that was really one of the only memories now that Jacob had left of his mother. His mother, of course, was the dear lady that had got him into all the trouble at the beginning and now when Jacob at last was beginning to come into an end of his own manipulation God allowed Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse to die. “And she was buried under an oak below Bethel; so the name of it was called Allon-bacuth.”

It’s the same with many of us, God gives you some people that he allows to be with you through a certain part of your life and then he takes that person away from you. That person is there for a certain length of time. God knows that you need them and then he takes that person away from you. It’s good for you to see that your whole life is not a chance development. Your whole life is a carefully planned and designed journey that God has planned for you. You think of it, I can think of people in my life that God allowed to be with me at the crucial time I needed them and then he gently takes them away because, of course, he wants you to begin to depend on him alone. So, God did it with Deborah.

And then in Verse 9, “God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, ‘Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.’ So his name was called Israel.” God had done that to Jacob earlier on. He had actually changed his name, you remember, when Jacob wrestled with the angel and the angel probably represented his own self and his own manipulating attitude and when Jacob wrestled with that angel and at last came through to begin to trust God even though he still, you can see, bluffed a little later on. Yet at that time God gave him the name Israel. It was only at this time when God really saw that Jacob had come to the end of himself that he gave him the name Israel in truth. It is so with you and me.

Haven’t you come into things in your life ahead of where you’ve actually eventually come into them? In other words, haven’t you found that God has graciously raised you into a position of grace long before you ought to have had that position of grace at all? God seems to act prophetically that way. He seems to give you a taste of what he wants you to come into fully even before you are actually ready to come completely into it. God acts with you prophetically. He calls your name Israel before you really are an Israel, before you’ve really managed to strive with God and prevail he calls you Israel. So he graciously does that with you and me.

I don’t know if you’ve thought of some of the things that happened to you at the beginning of your Christian life, but many of us have had answers to prayer that are really surprising and we look back and think, “Why could God answer me then, I knew so little about him?” But God does that, he answers you prophetically, he seems to give you a feel for the thing before you enter into it. It’s amazing.

I think all of us have had the experience of, “I’ve been here before. I was here before.” Then you get into reincarnation and all those things. But it is amazing, isn’t it? You come into places where you think, “I’ve been there before.” But it’s also true spiritually, you come into things before you really come into them. God gives you a glimpse of it before he actually brings you in. Don’t be discouraged. Don’t be discouraged when you say, “Oh, I once was there and now look where I am.” No, God just lovingly raised you up to that place so you could see over the horizon and see the beauty of the meadows he was going to bring you into but now he’s really bringing you into the meadows.

So many of us have experienced the life of victory over self and sin, experienced a little of it when we were born of God. Then we sank into defeat and we began to cry out, "Where is the blessedness that I knew when first I saw the Lord? Where is that soul refreshing view of Jesus and his word?" And we remember there was a time when we seemed to have victory. God was gracious. He was actually giving you more than you were ready to receive at that moment so that you would always have that as a hope that would draw you on.

And so it is with Jacob. At last, he comes into the truth and then God repeats to him the promise that he gave to the patriarchs, that is to Abraham and to Isaac. And in Verse 11, "And God said to him, 'I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you. The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you.' Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured out a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it. So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel." And you see the promise in Verse 11, "And God said to him, 'I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you.'"

Well, was it true? Well, look at 1 Chronicles 2 and God promises a nation and a company of nations shall come from you. 1 Chronicles 2, "These are the sons of Israel," [Jacob's new name] "Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan," down, down. Verse 5, "The sons of Perez: Hezron." Verse 9, "The sons of Hezron." Verse 18, "Caleb the son of Hezron," and it goes on and on. Believe me, take my word for it, it's still going in Chapter 3, it's still going in Chapter 4, it's still going in Chapter 5, "The sons of Reuben the first-born of Israel." It's still going in Chapter 6, "The sons of Levi: Gershom, Kohath." It's still going in Chapter 7, "The sons of Issachar." It's still going in Chapter 8, "Benjamin was the father of Bela." It's still going in Chapter 9, "So all Israel was enrolled by genealogies." Yeah, yeah God kept his promise. He kept his promise and so he will with you. You know he'll keep his promise.

Look at 2 Kings 13, because God promised that he would allow kings, a company of nations shall come from you and kings shall spring from you. 2 Kings 13, "In the twenty-third year of Joash the son of Ahaziah, king of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel." Then in 14, "In the second year of Joash the son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel." And then it goes on in Chapter 15, "In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel," another king and it goes on through 15 and into 16, "In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, begin to reign." And it goes on in 17, and goes on in 18, and all those are kings that sprang from Jacob and yeah, God kept his promise and he'll keep it to us too if we walk the same way, you know. And so eventually, God was able to bless Jacob. If he was able to bless Jacob and lead him into a place of faith and Jacob was such a manipulator then God is able to do the same with you and me. He's able to do the same with us.

There was a lady called Jessie Penn-Lewis and she said, "Father, whatever it takes to bring me into a place of full faith, bring it into my life even if it means my death." And loved ones, if you'll say that to God tonight, "Lord God, bring me into a place of full faith and trust in you whatever it takes, even if it means my death." God will recognize that and it doesn't matter whatever kind of a manipulator you are -- it doesn't matter what kind of a Jacob you are, God will be faithful and he will keep on keeping on and he will honor your prayer, and he will bring you to a place at last of peace where you can receive a new name.

Loved ones, that's what the Father has for us. He has a new name for us, a Christian name, a name that you have because you at last fully enter into Christ and are at last content with what he alone will give you. I would just put that to you this evening. Jacob's trouble all through his life was he wanted what he wanted. Now do you believe that God has planned your life? Do you believe that he has it organized and that he knows why he has brought you here? Then will you begin to rest in that and stop striving to make your life what you want it to be and rest in the Father and say, "Lord, will you bring me into what you have for me?"

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we want to come into the career and into the personal life that you have planned for us. Father, we want to come there -- we want to be at rest in that. Lord, we have so often fallen into the pattern of our colleagues and our friends where we have tried to strive our way into the kind of life that we think we would like. Lord, we see that that is doomed to continual failure and disappointment. Father, we would tell you this evening we want to find your place for us. We want to find your work for us. We don't care whether it has a lot of money or whether it has poverty, whether it has a lot of success, or whether it has failure. We don't care whether a lot of people will know us or nobody will know us. We don't care, Lord, whether what we achieve is something great in man's eyes or whether it's unimportant. But Father, we tell you now that we want to stop striving, and stop manipulating, and stop working angles, and just come to rest in you.

Father, we know that Jacob could never have borne all those children, and all those descendants as the sand upon the seashore. We know he could never have brought about all those kings. Father, we see that we with our striving can bring about nothing but if we're willing to put ourselves in your hands you have something worthwhile planned for us. So, dear Lord, tonight we will put ourselves in your hands and say, "Be it unto me according to thy word. According to what you have planned when you sent us forth into this world, be that unto me."

Father, we would receive that now and we would end our striving, and we would put our trust and faith in you and do the next thing that lies to our hand with all our might to please you and not to forward our own lives. Father, we take this position this evening and we commit ourselves to you in Jesus' name.

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 evermore. Amen.