

**Genesis 28: 10-17; “The Conversion of Jacob”, Sermon # 82 in the series –
“Beginnings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on February 25th, 2018,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

I want to speak to you this morning on the subject of conversion to Jesus Christ; what it means to come to know God through Jesus Christ our Lord. I am certain that the experience which is related to us here in this passage is the conversion of Jacob to God. The question that I want to raise with you this morning is this: What did Jacob experience in his conversion that will be helpful to ourselves in terms of understanding how we can come to Christ, or whether we have come to Jesus Christ for salvation?

I would like to relate to you 3 elements of Jacob’s experience of conversion in order that you may know how conversion to Jesus Christ generally takes place. I am going to give these to you in an alliterated form so that you can more easily remember them. The key words of our study this morning start with the letter P. 1st – Jacob came to a certain place. 2nd – Jacob saw the gospel pictured. And 3rd – Jacob heard the gospel promises and believed them. So we have the place, the picture, and the promises. These are the 3 elements that we will look at this morning. **1st of all – Jacob came to a certain place.** (verses 10 and 11)

It says in verse 10, “Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran.” “So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set.” “And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep.” Here is the heir of the blessing; the one who thought he had succeeded in obtaining both the birthright and the blessing, being forced to wander far from home because of his own sinful way of going about to obtain both. Was he discouraged that night that he went out from Beersheba? It is possible that he was. But before he left, he had indeed received his father’s sincere blessing, and that was something that he thought that his father would never willingly give him.

Now he was setting out on this great expedition, journeying to Haran to meet relatives that he had never seen before. He was going to begin to learn about the great world outside of the tents that he had loved to dwell in. He was leaving everything that was familiar behind; the comforts of home, and the loving thoughts and words of his dear mother. In a way, he was being exiled; fleeing from Esau, but in a way it was also an adventure. But what a long way it was to Haran! Did he walk, or did he ride a camel the 500 miles? We are not told. Abraham’s servant went with camels and a retinue of helpers, but Jacob went by himself. And there was a reason for this.

Jacob had come to “a certain place”. He was about 50 miles into his journey. It was at this unlikely place that he was going to come to know God. He was not looking for it. He was not praying for it. But God was going to come to him that night, in sovereign mercy and electing love. “The sun had set”, it says in the text. He took one of the stones of that place and he put it at his head, and he lay down to sleep. Truly we need to meditate upon this scene, and to think of it now, as it relates to ourselves. Do we know that God often chooses the most unlikely of times, the most unlikely of places to reveal Himself to us?

Sometimes we think that that people cannot be converted unless they come to church. But we find here that the setting that Jacob came to, that evening, was hard ground for a bed. And it was not too comfortable with a stone for a pillow. He was under the stars, and out in the wilds. But what Jacob did not know was, that God was there too. God was going to make this place, where Jacob lay down to sleep, into the setting of a church. Whenever a person is converted that person must be brought to a certain place.

It is a time and a place where they come to realize that their father and their mother cannot always be there to protect them from themselves, or from the consequences of their own sinful heart and actions. They may see life and the future as an adventure, but they may also be fearful

of what the future holds. Perhaps they have come to see life for what it is. It is a changing thing, and the changes may not be easy to take. They may wonder if God really loves them at all when they are forced to leave their father and mother and roam far from home. Jacob had no idea that God would choose this time, in this isolated spot to reveal Himself to him. Jacob obeyed his father and his mother and he went to Padan Aram, it says in verse 7. But in the conversion of his soul God was going to use this time by himself, and so He drew near to have personal dealings with Jacob, the one whom He had chosen to have mercy upon.

God drew near to Jacob in his conscious experience because this was the chosen time and the place where He could best accomplish His purpose, and leave the most lasting impressions. Time spent by yourself can be time well spent, if you will think about the fact that God's eye is upon you. But I am not sure that Jacob was aware of God at all when he lay down to sleep. Jacob had lain down to sleep, but God would come to Him right there, at the time when he was most weary, in the time that he was the most helpless, in the time that he was most insensible to spiritual things.

As he was beginning to think of drifting off to sleep, he may have been thinking that his being exiled to Haran was the consequence of his trickery with Esau, and his father; that, that was what had brought this trip about. This is how it often is at the time and place of our conversion. God comes to us to reveal himself to us when we are most weary and fearful and discouraged because of the consequences of our sins, and He comes in mercy and grace, and He shows us that He cares for our souls.

Listen to the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 11: 25. "I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes." "Even so, Father for so it seemed good in Your sight." "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father." "Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." This is what must happen in conversion; the Son must will to reveal the Father to you.

Then Jesus says to you through the one who is preaching the gospel to you: "Come unto Me all you who are weary, and I will give you rest." Jacob surely was weary physically, and I believe that he was weary spiritually as well. There is often something very mysterious and very personal in the conversion experience itself. And it is because salvation is of the Lord, not of man. It is God coming to your soul, and in connection with His Word, revealing Himself to you. Oh, the person being converted most definitely knows that there is something that he must do in response to what God is doing.

This is because he knows that he is the subject of the Lord's calling to him, and that he himself must believe in what God reveals to him. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me." But conversion is the experience of your being led to God, of your being led to consider the gospel, of your being led to respond to what God is showing you and teaching you in relation to what Jesus Christ has done for you in His life, and death, and resurrection. When you are converted to Jesus Christ there is always a definite experience that you have of how God has revealed Himself to you in accordance with His Word.

It is something that He sovereignly brings to pass, but the actual experience is different for every person who believes. You don't always know that conversion is taking place when it is taking place. In some cases the person cannot immediately conclude that they have been converted, even though regeneration has taken place. It is even possible that a person can be fooled into thinking that they have been converted, when they really have not been converted. Our perception of things which are taking place in our soul is not always clear to us.

But with Jacob it was a true and definite experience. Conversion is the whole chain of events in your experience that God initiates and that He continues to lead you into, in relation to your responding to the truth of the gospel. You must have a Savior in order to have eternal life. All of

us are alienated from God by nature. We are dead in our trespasses and sins. We must enter through a narrow spiritual gate into the kingdom of heaven. Someone, either a person, or God Himself, as it was in this Old Testament case of His extraordinary working through dreams, must present the gospel to you. Conversion begins with the drawing of the Father, and it continues with His effectual call in the gospel being presented to the one being converted. Then at a certain and definite point the Holy Spirit of God gives the gift of regeneration, the gift of life to spiritually see, and hear, and receive the truth of the message of the gospel.

And then the person responds in faith to what has been revealed to them in the gospel; the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of sinners. Jacob did not understand many of these truths at all. And yet he was converted to Christ that night so long ago, in this Old Testament way of God's revealing Himself to him. You may not understand some of the doctrines surrounding the subject of conversion very well either. But God will lead you and teach you what you will need to learn by bringing you to understand His word.

The 2nd Element of Jacob's conversion was that he saw the gospel pictured.

It says in verse 12, "Then Jacob dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it." This was one of the ways that God used to reveal Himself to people in the Old Testament times and in the times of the early church. In Numbers 12: 6 when Miriam and Aaron had spoken unjustly against Moses, the Lord "came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam". "And they both went forward." "Then He said, 'Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream.'"

This is what the Lord was doing for Jacob to make known to him the gospel in picture form. Jacob saw a ladder in his dream. It was "set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven". The picture is plain; this ladder was not simply representative of God's providence to protect and help Jacob. It was not simply a stairway or an escalator for angels to get to and from heaven. This ladder was meant for Jacob himself to use as the way to know God. How do I know this? Turn with me to John chapter 1.

In verses 43-51 we have the account of Nathanael's first encounter with the Lord Jesus. After Jesus showed Nathanael that He had omniscient understanding of the thoughts of his heart by telling him that He "saw Phillip under the fig tree"; before Phillip came and told him to come and meet Jesus, Nathanael said to Him, "You are the Son of God!" "You are the King of Israel." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe?" "You will see greater things than these." "And he said to him, 'Most assuredly I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'"

You see the angels of God were not ascending and descending upon just any spiritual staircase. The ladder or staircase was a symbol in this vision of Jesus Christ Himself. He is the only Mediator between God and man, and He is the only way to ascend to heaven; the only ladder bridge to God. It is here that Jacob was being preached the gospel in picture form. Christ's ministry and His appointment by God to be the only mediator between God and men, is declared to Jacob in a dream, in a vision which God mercifully gives to him. And I hope that you will receive this truth this morning for yourself.

All that the angels do in their service to God on behalf of those who are to inherit salvation, is done in connection with Jesus Christ. And the angels ascending and descending all point to Jesus as the only way to heaven. A ladder is meant for climbing. Perhaps it was more like steps since the angels were ascending and descending on it. There would be many angels to help Jacob during his lifetime. They would obey God orders in conjunction with His wise ordering of

things in Jacob's life, including this incident in the dream of ascending and descending on the Son of Man. This was Jacob's conversion.

3rd – Jacob heard the gospel promises and believed them. (verses 13-15)

He heard these promises from God and they are gospel promises in the context of Jacob being the father of the nation of Israel. These are promises of earthly, personal and national blessings being made to him, and they have great spiritual implications for not only the Jews but also those Gentiles who would come to believe in Christ in both Old and New Testament times. Let's look at each of them briefly. "The Lord," it says, "stood above the ladder and said: 'I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.'"

God would give the land of Canaan to the descendants of Jacob, the Jewish nation and people descended from him. This land would be an earthly inheritance which pictures a heavenly inheritance in Christ. Of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, it is said in Hebrews 11: 13, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." "For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland." "And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they come out, they would have had opportunity to return." "But now they desire a better, that is a heavenly country."

"Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." That city is the Jerusalem above, Mt. Zion, and is ultimately the church of the living God composed of Jews and Gentiles through the work of Christ who becomes the "ladder" to God for everyone who will believe. "Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This is the same promise that was given to Abraham in chapter 12, verse 3. Christ is the "seed" in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. We find this truth stated and confirmed by the apostle Paul in Galatians chapter 3. In verse 16 it says, "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made." "He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ." The descendants who are believing will be saved in Christ, believing as Jacob did here, the promise of His coming to do the work of redemption.

This includes "crushing the serpent's head" which was the original promise given to Adam, and also His fulfilling the law which would be given to Moses a descendant of Jacob's, who himself fulfilled the role of a mediator until Christ should come. Here are angels again. They were helpers of the ancient people of God as they came out of Egypt and were given the law on Mt. Sinai. But salvation would not be found through keeping this law, but by faith in Christ. He was the Angel of the Lord. Exodus 23: 20 says, "Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared." "Beware of Him and obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries." "For My Angel will go before you..." This would be the Angel that Jacob would wrestle with in chapter 32 and the One who would give him a new name – Israel.

And this leads us to the promise in verse 15. "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 what I have spoken for you." This is the promise given to those whom God has chosen, not only physically to keep Jacob and all the elect in relation to their earthly journeyings, but also to keep him spiritually in all the trials and difficulties that he would face. These are the promises which God used to create faith in Jacob, and He would sustain him with them wherever he went. Jacob would rest on these promises and even remind God of them in a time to come.

You and I, when we are converted, it is because God has given us precious and magnificent promises of salvation in Christ, that He will save and keep our souls. When we rest upon those

promises and memorize them and give them back to God in our prayers through Jesus Christ, then we can be assured that God will, and is, hearing us. When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he didn't say, "Well it was only a dream, and I cannot believe that God will do all this for me." He said, "How awesome is this place!" "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" That is because this was the night of his conversion. He had never known God in a personal way before. Now he did.

He would remember this night for the rest of his life, and he would even bring up the promise God made to him on his deathbed. Conversion, true conversion is something that we remember, something we think about, and something that we build upon for the rest of our life. In our next sermon we shall see, Jacob's profession of faith before God, will result in his performing acts of remembrance, and in his taking vows; the things that he did the next morning after this never-to-be-forgotten night.