



The Sermon

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Genesis 33:1-20

July 31, 2022

"Jacob Faces His Fears, But Regresses"

TRANSCRIPT

So I invite you to open to Genesis chapter 33. We're going to read the entire chapter and we're going to see what Jacob is up to.

"Then Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids, and he put the maids and their children in front, and Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. And he himself passed on ahead of them and bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

"And then Esau ran to meet him and he embraced him, and fell on his neck and he kissed him, and they wept. And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, 'Who are these with you?' And so he said, 'The children whom God has graciously given your servant.' Then the maids came near with their children, and they bowed down. And Leah likewise came near with her children, and they bowed down; and afterward Joseph came near with Rachel, and they bowed down. And he said, 'What do you mean by all this company which I've met?' And he said, 'To find favor in the sight of my lord.' And Esau said, 'But I have plenty, my brother; let what you have be your own.' And Jacob said, 'No, please, if now I have found favor in your sight, then take my present from my hand, for I see your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably. So please take my gift which has been brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me and because I have plenty.' And then he urged him, and he took it.

Verse 12, "And then Esau said, 'Let us take our journey and go, and I'll go before you.' But he said to him, 'My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds which are nursing are a care to me. And if they are driven hard one day, all the flocks will die. Please let my lord pass on before his servant, and I will proceed at my leisure, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir.'

"And Esau said, 'Please let me leave with you some of the people who are with me.' But he said, 'What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord.' And so Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built for himself a house and he made booths for his livestock; and therefore the place is named Succoth.

"Now Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram, and camped before the city. And he bought the piece of land where he had pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money. And then he erected there an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel." Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we thank You for Your Word, and we thank You for the truth that is in Your Word, because, Father, if we need anything, we need truth, and we need it to teach us exactly what we need to know, because Father, You know everything, and we know very, very little. And Father, we thank You that You have left this Bible for us to learn Your truth, to be able to dig into it. We thank You, Father, that You have left the story of Jacob in Genesis for us so that we can look at his life and we can see ourselves in his life and we can see what we need to do, what he did wrong. And what he did wrong can help us learn so that we won't do the same thing.

And so, Father, thank You for being You. Thank You for sending the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank You for saving us. Thank You for giving us a way of escape from our sin. And so, Father, we pray that these next few minutes that You would be with us as we open Your Word and Your truth, that it would guide us and comfort us, and most of all, give you glory, in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

Many of you know we started our church in January of 2018 with just 12 people. It's amazing when I consider all the different ministries that are taking place - the leadership, the teachers, the preachers, the administration, the volunteers, and all of you from everywhere, all walks of life, all over the world. People have moved here to come to this church. It's absolutely amazing, and I'm blown away by it. And I look out this morning and I realized that we've been in this room here 18 months, and now we're trying to expand; we're having to go to two services. So it's absolutely amazing. It's overwhelming what the Lord's doing.

But we also know where the Lord's work is being done. Satan sets up shop; he's there, too. And to my mind, one of the greatest threats that faces our church and what the Lord is doing boils down to one word, and it's "pride." It's pride. Pride has been called "the cancer of the soul," and it's when we have an elevated view of ourselves. It's essentially taking the glory that belongs to God for ourselves. It's the beginning of all sin, and it can show up in all of us; and it begins small, without even knowing it, and it hinders our relationship with the Lord. And eventually, it destroys. It destroys relationships, it destroys families; and pride, yes, can even destroy a church. It can show up in many forms and in many ways.

For example, for those of us in leadership, often people will come up and they'll thank us for what we're doing, or they'll praise us for something about this church; and if we really believe we're the ones doing it, then we don't understand it's God working through us. It's not us. We start to believe that it's us, then we embrace that lie which begins to be pride. We need to acknowledge that anything good in us is really done through us by God, because if we don't - it's His work - but if we don't, then the seed of pride is planted, and it begins to sprout.

Or, maybe we learn something new in theology and we begin to embrace the doctrines of grace, and we're special because we've been enlightened to new understandings and what God is doing, and it excites us. But unfortunately, we elevate ourselves in our own minds over others who maybe don't quite understand what we've come to learn. And when that happens, the seed of pride is planted, and it begins to grow.

Or, perhaps you've just now started to attend and you're excited about the emphasis of the Word, of the teaching, and the outreach, and the evangelism, and the worship, and everything we've got going on here; and that's a good thing. But maybe your excitement leads you to look down on

others that don't like Trinity as much as you do. You see, and when that happens, pride takes root and begins to germinate. Or, maybe you're here and you love what's going on here at Trinity, and there's things here that you wish would change; and if leadership would just do that or do this, or take away that or add this, or whatever, and leadership isn't onboard, then perhaps your pride takes over, because they don't see what you see; and pride sets in and it begins to start eating away.

Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction." There is nothing that can be more devastating and more destructive than pride. Why? Because when pride shows up, we slide God off the throne of our lives and we ease back up and take it ourselves. You see, pride is an arrogance, and it manifests itself as independence from God and dependence on self, and it's so subtle.

Maybe you think, "Well, as long as I stay in church and I show up for the Bible studies and I apply my gifts, then I don't have to worry about pride, I'm doing OK." However, this is exactly where we find Jacob this morning in Genesis chapter 33. You remember we learned last week that he had experienced the pentacle of his Christian life. It was right before he was about to face the biggest problem of his life: his brother Esau. And the angel, who was our Lord preincarnate, appears in perfect timing to give him the assurance and what he needs to face his brother. And so the angel wrestles with Jacob all night, and finally, with only a touch, the Lord dislocates his hip, and the wrestling match is over. Jacob has finally been wrestled out of his own strength and wisdom.

You see, that's the key. He's been shown it's not his strength, it's not his wisdom, it's not his abilities; and Jacob loses the struggle. But in that loss, Jacob really has tremendous victory, because he came to learn that the real strength and the real power comes when God has conquered him, when God is in control. And Jacob, once he finally realizes he's helpless against God Almighty, what does he do? He just clings. He just clings. He clings to the Lord with all he has, and the Bible says, "weeping, exhausted, and seeking His favor." And that's the greatest position any of us can be in. Jacob thought the real enemy was Esau, but the real enemy was himself. And that's a story for us, and that's a picture of us.

So finally, you remember, Jacob was asked, "What is your name?" and he said, "Jacob." And the Lord said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob," - which means "trickster" or "deceiver" - "but your name will be Israel," -

which means "God dominated," it means "God fights for you," it means "God's fighter."

Now here's what's interesting. When God changed Abram's name to Abraham, the old name was never used again. Saul's name was changed to Paul, and again, his old name was never used again. In the case of Peter, Simon which means "weak," became Peter, "the rock." His new name is used almost exclusively. But here until the end of Genesis, Jacob's name is used 45 times, and his name Israel is used 23 times, only half as much; and that seems to indicate that while Jacob had his mountaintop experience with the Lord, he falls back quite often into being self-controlled and self-reliant in his own prideful flesh.

And even though Jacob was saved, we learn a lot from this, I learn a lot from this. It's very possible for a believer to regress in their Christian life for certain periods of time, because sometimes we're strong in the Lord, and other times we regress spiritually, and we regress when pride and self-reliance takes over. And so that's our main lesson today, that's what we're going to study today. And we're going to learn a lot from Jacob, and we're going to learn a lot. And he's in here; I learned a lot, and I needed this more than any of you, because his life and his mistakes and his story is in this Bible for us. It is for me and it is for you, because it is real life. He is not a superhero that doesn't have issues, he is a person just like me and just like you. And so the title of the message is "Jacob Faces His Fear, But Regresses."

I got a friend of mine that flies a plane, he's always filing flight plans. So I said, "All right, here's our flight plan." Here's the route that we're going to take through our passage this morning. Number one, verses 1-3, we're going to see "a fearful situation"; and it was fearful. Last time he'd seen his brother he said, "I'm going to kill you," and he meant it. Next, "an unlikely resolution," verses 4-11. And then we're going to look at "habitual deception," verses 12-16. And finally we're going to see "spiritual regression."

Verse 1: "Then Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, Esau was coming." Now it's been 20 years. And a lot of us that are older now realize 20 years passes real fast - at least it does the older you get. It's been 20 years. And there's no Facetime, there's no texting. He hadn't seen his brother. And the last thing he hears is, "He is going to kill you. He is going to take you out." And it was a promise. And now we pick

up. The two have not seen each other, and we read, "Esau is coming." And so Jacob's a new man. He's just met with the Lord, he's been face-to-face with the Lord, and he's had this dramatic, this spiritual experience, this new man, but he's still got this old situation, and it's caused by sinful deception 20 years ago; and the issue still lingers.

And I think that's a lesson for us. Once we come to Christ, the Lord doesn't automatically remove the consequences of our old self. How many of us are dealing with past sins? You're not alone. We have to deal with them, and they're not always easy. And so even though Jacob is a new man, he's got to deal with this.

But not only does Jacob need to deal with the effects of his past sin, but this old sin nature, this deceptive nature is remaining just under his skin. It's like someone put it – I love the way they say this, they say, "When we become a Christian, we are no longer clinging to sin, but sin still clings to us," right? And that's where Jacob is. And I can't help but think of the author of Hebrews in chapter 12, verse 1, and he's talking about Christians running the race. You know the verse, I love this verse, and he says, "We need to battle, we need to lay aside every encumbrance and the sin that so easily entangles us." And the King James says, "The sin that so easily besets us." And the ESV says, "The sin that so easily clings to us." And I believe these sins that the author of Hebrews is referring to are these sins that are so easy, they just pop up on a regular basis, they're just under the surface. And some of us may have different issues with different sins, but those besetting sins are the ones that just seem to plague us more than the others. And now that Jacob was a forever changed man, he still had these besetting sins, like we do, of pride and self-reliance and, "I'm going to do it myself." And like I said before, we think too little of Jacob. We need to pause and be honest with ourselves.

There was a book a long time ago, *Man in the Mirror*. We need to look in the mirror and we need to see ourselves, because we are really just like Jacob, and probably worse. That's why the story's here, and that's why we're going to look the next few minutes about this man, this patriarch, because we're going to learn what he did, and then we're going to learn more about ourselves, and hopefully we can avoid needless pitfalls.

And so, back to Esau. He's coming. He's coming. But look what the verse says: "He has four hundred men. Now at this point, if you're Jacob and you're looking out over the horizon and you see your brother coming, your

twin brother who last you saw was going to kill you, he's got four hundred men, it can only mean one thing. It has to mean danger. It has to mean, "He's going to kill me." It has to mean, "There could be all-out war, a slaughter, and I may be gone."

Why would Esau bring four hundred men to welcome his brother? Doesn't seem right. So to Jacob's mind, it's very real. This is a life-threatening situation, and I call it a fearful situation. Must have caused his heart to race. Must have caused him to lose his breath. Must have pushed him to panic mode. And it would us. Maybe you haven't faced death like Jacob, but you're in a situation that is fearful. You're in a situation that consumes you. You're in a situation that just wakes you up at night, weighs you down; and it's fearful, whatever it is. How do you handle those situations? How do you handle those situations in your life? Well, let's see what Jacob does.

"So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. And he put the maids and their children in front, and Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last." Now this is proof; he is scared to death. He's trying to protect himself. He's trying to arrange his family. And what's interesting is he's putting them in the order that he loves the most, because if this is going to be a ground warfare and it's going to be an attack, I'm going to put Jacob and Rachel in the back. Now how would that make you feel? That's another story. But he's awfully showing favoritism already.

"So the maids and their children are in front," - we read, look - "then Leah and her children, then Rachel and Joseph." And so Rachel and Joseph are obviously more protected because they're in the back. Dr. Johnson says, "Jacob is operating in the flesh. He's operating in the flesh here." Proverbs 29:25, "The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe." So Jacob is fearful.

Dr. Barnhouse comments, "Jacob continues to act like Jacob, the self-reliant deceiver instead of Israel, God's fighter." And after the Lord had just brought Jacob to the end of himself, why would Jacob limp in his body and also in his spiritual life? There was no need. But you see, that's us. That's what we, do isn't it? That's us.

Do you find yourself failing to trust in the Lord and in His power, especially in fearful situations? I do. I certainly do. But Jacob had just learned in his all-night wrestling match that God was providing what he

needed to not be fearful. Donald Grey Barnhouse continues. He said, "It is possible for a believer to pass through the highest spiritual encounters with the Lord, and it was meant to give him exactly what he needed; but he never really lost the fear," you see. He never really lost the fear. God designed that meeting to take away the fear, but he couldn't really trust God fully. Oh, he committed his way to the Lord, but he didn't trust also in Him. That's me; and I bet that's you.

And so he still carried the burden himself. He quit clinging, and he started cringing in the fear of man; and there was absolutely no need to, there was just no need. Do you realize that God's grace is intended to be a reality in our lives, and we miss it and we miss out when we don't fully trust Him. So we need to learn here. We need to stop and learn here how easy it is to fall back and rely on our own understanding and handle the problems ourselves; and that ultimately boils down to pride. It's pride.

Verse 3, "But he himself passed on ahead of them and he bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother." Now this tells us that Jacob is a changed man. I mean, the chapter's preceding this, we don't think he'd be bowing down and humbling himself. But he's doing that here. And he's also showing leadership, and he's showing courage, because he does move out in front, and he's showing this humility. But bowing down seven times was usually reserved for kings in the east. And so even though Jacob is changed, he still is battling this old nature, and it appears he's acting in his own flesh and he's really going overboard to try to impress his brother with his humility. He didn't even need to do it, he didn't need to do it.

So that's our first point. That's a fearful situation. But we'll go on to the next point. But before we do, I've got to mention this. When we face fearful situations, we must not only pray, but we also need to go to work. I don't want you to miss this. You've heard it said, "Pray towards heaven and row toward shore." I believe that's biblical. In other words, when we pray, we must also use means.

But I want you to notice that Jacob's heart was more set on planning than praying. He plans and he works, and then he prays. He's leaning on his plans more than his prayer, and that's nothing more than self-sufficiency and – what? – pride. It's easy for us to do this. Instead, we want to pray first. That's what we do, right? We want to pray first, plan, then work – that's what we should do – and then be trusting in the Lord as He works

out the circumstances. Work and pray, pray and work, work some more and pray some more. But while we do this, we need to be constantly looking to the Lord, trusting in Him, to answer us, to take us away from the troubles; and this is really the only way we can battle from keeping pride to take the throne.

So we need to be fully occupied with God. We need to be praying before we plan, right? We need to be praying while we work. We need to be in the Word, letting the Word permeate us, feed us, trusting in God, as we walk through these problems. We want to be in the greatest position, in the most powerful position in our lives, then we need to be most occupied with God. And that's when we're clinging to Him, right? That's when we are denying ourselves and clinging to the Lord.

So often in my life I set out with a problem, and I start planning, and I start working, and I start calling, and I pray after. That's not what the Lord wants. You may have heard this story. A mother once gave Robert E. Lee her baby; and he took the baby, and he looked at the mother and he said, "Teach him to deny himself. Teach him to deny himself."

Well, Jacob was learning this, but it was taking a long time. Let's go to Point Number Two: "An unlikely resolution." "Then Esau ran to meet him and he embraced him, and he fell on his neck and he kissed him, and they wept," verse 4. Well, this reminds us of a very familiar scene the: prodigal son. You remember that? I like to say "the loving father." The father's driving focus was love. He wasn't holding all the sins and the wrongs against his son, he just goes and loves him - incredible, unselfish love.

And how unlikely is it that Esau would come to his brother in this kind of love after what Jacob had done to him? Well, Esau wasn't even a believer. So this reception seems impossible. How could Esau do this and fall on his neck and kiss him in affection and then weep, and his brother just lied to his father and cheated him? And it doesn't make sense, it doesn't make sense, unless we believe in a sovereign God who works in every heart.

Notice Jacob took control and did everything he could to try to protect himself - dividing his family, bringing the gifts, bowing down. But Esau has already been changed. He already had a different attitude. I think of Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes." And God can move in the attitudes

and the hearts with whomever He chooses, from the most average man to the most powerful, influential man in the entire world. God holds their hearts just like this.

How many of us have some difficulty in our lives right now, and there's one person, or there's a group of people that are standing in your way? Maybe it's a boss, maybe it's a spouse, maybe it's a brother or a sister or a friend or a coach, or someone you're trying to sell something to, someone who just doesn't like you, and they're in your way, and they're causing stress. God can move their heart just as easily as a farmer releases his water to travel along the channels to irrigate his fields. It's nothing. It's nothing. It's child's play for God. How many times do we find ourselves so upset with that person standing in our way that we forget that God holds his heart and the direction of his heart in His hand, and God is using that for our good; He just wants us to trust Him.

Maybe you're thinking, "Oh boy; if someone would bring me a huge gift like 550 animals, wow, that would change my mind." Maybe that changed Esau's mind. But look, when Esau asked Jacob why he sent them, look what Jacob says at the end of verse 8. Jacob says, "I want to find your favor. I want to find favor." And then in verse 9, Esau responds, "I have plenty. I don't want it. I don't need it." Esau didn't even want the gifts, he didn't want the gifts. The Lord had already changed his heart and moved in his heart to show favor to Jacob.

All of Jacob's scheming, you see, was needless; and it was costly too, wasn't it, expensive. All of Jacob's worrying, his work and his planning, was nothing; and the Lord handled Esau's anger just like he did Laban's. How easily we forget, how hard it is to trust. How many times have we faced a situation where a person is blocking what we want? We assess it and we assume it's probably not going to get worked out, and so we go to work scheming to try to fix it.

We're being just like Jacob. We're mixing living by faith and living by the flesh. We forget that God has sovereignly allowed this person to be standing there, and He can move their heart and He can give us favor whenever He pleases. And it may not be as quick as we want. After all, it had been over 21 years with Jacob and Esau. But God is never late, and He's always on time.

We notice now in verse 11 what Jacob says to Esau. "He says, 'Please take my gift which has been brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me because I have plenty.' Thus he urged him and he took it." So Jacob is insisting that Esau take the gifts, and so he does. And we need to know that, because it was a custom in those days that if you didn't accept a gift, you still were at odds with your enemy. And so Jacob was afraid that if Esau didn't accept the gifts, then maybe he was still angry with him, you see. And so again, Jacob is not trusting in the Lord, he's trusting in the acceptance of the gift.

A. W. Pink makes a comment: "How much better would Jacob have been if he had just stayed still and trusted the Lord to act for him. Let us seek grace to learn this important lesson. Not only are all our fleshly plannings and efforts dishonoring to God, but they are uncalled for and they're unnecessary in the end. When God sets them aside, they've accomplished nothing."

And so now that Jacob's fears have been alleviated and his fearful situation has turned out totally different than he expected, there's not going to be a fight, there's not going to be war, Esau's not going to kill him. God has brought about this unlikely resolution. The pressure's off. The pressure's off. And Jacob falls back in his old habits of deceiving and manipulating. That's Point Number Three: "Habitual deception."

"Then Esau said, 'Let us take our journey and go, and I'll go before you.'" See, Esau's offering to escort his brother. He's offering to escort his brother and the entire company back to Seir, and Jacob's hesitant because he's still afraid of Esau, he's not trusting. So Jacob tells a half-truth, which is a whole lie, and then another lie after that. So excuses the help - look down in verses 14 and 15 - by saying, "My crew, my bunch, all the children and all the herds, they're a little slow, they're going to slow you down, Esau." And that's funny, because when he was booking it away from Laban, there's no word of them slowing him down then.

Well, maybe it's a good time to make a point of application. How often have you been in a situation when you're asked to go somewhere? You see, God wanted him in Bethel. He should have gone to Bethel. But God wants you to go somewhere. But it's against God's will, it's going to compromise your testimony, and you should say, "You know, I can't go, because my convictions of serving the Lord prevent me from going there." But you don't

say that, you don't say that. You make up some reason, some other reason. It's deceptive, it's dishonest; and that's kind of what Jacob does here.

As believers, we always want to be truth-tellers, you see. We always want to be men and women pointing towards the truth; that's our testimony. How embarrassing is it that men of the world are more righteous than believers. Jacob's self-reliance and pride, they're in full display here. He feels he can control the situation better with a lie than telling the truth, and his flesh takes over. He could have easily thanked Esau and said, "Look, the Lord wants me to go somewhere else, He's commanded me to go in a different place." But he didn't. And when we're out of the will of God, we will make almost any excuse to rationalize what we're doing.

Dr. Barnhouse says, "Jacob uses his family as an excuse to end the interview and get away as quickly as possible." He didn't care about his children. One thought burned in his mind: "How can I get away from Esau?" He was reverting back to his old deceptive ways minute by minute. "The passing of his fear restores self-confidence," Barnhouse says. "It makes him feel God's not necessary anymore." His mind was working in high gear, and soon he formulates a complete fraud and he begins to put it in practice.

So Jacob's pride takes over, and he fails to allow God to control the situation, and his old habit of deception comes back, and he lies again. Look what he says in verse 14. Jacob says, "I will proceed at my leisure, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me, according to the pace of the children," and he says, "I'll come to my Lord it's Seir." He's deceptive. He's saying, "Esau, I'm right behind you. I'll see you there." He has no intentions of going, he's not doing it.

So let's think about this. Esau, who's not a Christian, leaves thinking he's going to see his brother in a few days. But as soon as he's out of sight, Jacob goes in the other direction. Can you imagine what Esau was thinking about his brother? I mean, "Jacob, the guy hadn't changed a bit; same old deceptive guy."

See, how damaging is that for our testimony when we will not stand up for the truth. Esau who isn't a believer acts better than Jacob who is a believer, and it is so damaging. How quickly we forget to trust in the Lord once our head is out of the noose and the pressure's off. Once we get what we want

we just forget to even sometimes pray and thank the Lord; we go right back to doing our things our own way, just what Jacob is doing.

And Matthew Henry says this: "Those who profess the gospel of Christ should live as those who believe the gospel truth and who submit to the gospel laws and who depend upon the gospel promises." And here's the point: if we profess to be Christians, our daily conduct must match what we believe. The world will notice. We can't come here on Sunday and live differently Monday through Saturday. How easy it is for our flesh to ruin our testimony.

You know what happened? We will see next week that Jacob is going to end up in a terrible place, a horrible place; it's going to devastate his family. And that's what happens. It leads to "spiritual regression"; that's our last point. Verse 17, "Jacob journeyed to Succoth, he built for himself a house and he made booths for his livestock; therefore the place is named Succoth. And now Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem." The problem isn't that he didn't go with Esau, the problem is he lied, he lied to him; he wasn't seeking the Lord's guidance. And Jacob goes to live and plant roots down in a place where God had said do not go, had not told him to go. He said, "Go to Bethel." He should have gone to Bethel.

Back in Genesis 28, Jacob, when he had this vision of the ladder, you remember the angels going up and down? It was at Bethel where he built this pillar of remembrance, and he made a vow there. In Genesis 31, when he's there with Laban, he's getting ready to leave, God comes to him and says, "Return to your father's and your relatives, and I will be with you, because I am the God of Bethel, of Bethel." Then after the disastrous events next week, the very next chapter, God says, "Go to Bethel."

So going to Succoth and Shechem was a backward step both spiritually and geographically, and right here Jacob is showing incomplete obedience by going to Succoth and not Bethel. He's acting in his prideful self-will, and it is an indication that he is not fully committed to follow the Lord and serve Him. He was doing what he wasn't supposed to be doing, going where he wasn't supposed to be going. We always get in trouble when we're not where we're supposed to be, doing what we're supposed to be doing. We make it too simple; but that's so true. Halfway obedience – listen – always leads to spiritual regression. To be completely in God's will, Jacob needed to be in Bethel, which means "God's house"; and the problem was that Jacob was

trying to be both Jacob and Israel at the same time. That's impossible, can't do it. We can't do it.

Look what it says: "He bought the piece of land where he had pitched his tent." He settles down, he drops anchor, he buys land, and it even says earlier he builds a house, when the characteristics of the patriarchs where they were pilgrims. Abraham lived in tents so he could move and be ready to obey God at any time. But Jacob is dropping anchor; and just like Lot, when he pitched his tent towards Sodom and he ended up in Sodom, Jacob is doing the same thing, and he's being too influenced by the world wanting to impress the world himself. It's a danger. So his family pays dearly next week for his half-hearted commitment.

S. Lewis Johnson says this: "Conversion is no guarantee of an abiding faithfulness in the spiritual life." Yes, yes, the bent of a true Christian will be one that serves the Lord. However, like Jacob, we may have spiritual experiences that are true and that are rich and that are incredible, but they don't exempt us from lapses into spiritual regression and degeneration. For a season, David had a great real revelation from God: he was responsible for his sin with Bathsheba. And Peter stood on the mount of transfiguration with the Lord, and a few days later he denies even knowing Him. We all know genuine believers who have had great testimonies and great ministries and incredible futures blessed by the Lord, but they have fallen into tragic sin that just wipes out their testimony. So this is hard, but it's true, and we need to learn from this. It can happen to any of us. None of us, none of us are exempt. D. L. Moody said the one thing he feared the most was the loss of his testimony for Christ.

Well look, verse 20: "He erected an altar to counteract his disobedience." You see, when we're in the middle of disobeying the Lord, we're usually careful to do things to make others think we're doing good. And Jacob builds an altar for everyone to see that the Lord's in his life, but deep down he's compromising with his flesh and the world, and the Lord is not his priority. He's out of position; and it's an indication that he needs to be in Bethel, because the Lord tells him that again: "Go to Bethel and build the altar there," after all these bad things happen. Don't straddle the fence; get to where God wants you to be in the first place."

That's a lesson for us. Go where you're supposed to go, and be doing what you're supposed to be doing. The Lord isn't pleased when we go to church and show up for Bible studies, but deep down we're going through the

motions to impress others, but secretly we're holding back ourselves from full commitment. We're refusing complete obedience. And that's what Jacob was doing, and that's what we all do; and when we put on the outward show of religion while secretly living for the world's pleasures, it never ends up good.

Unfortunately, at this particular time in Jacob's life, he was attempting to follow the Lord; but he wasn't in all wholeheartedly, he just wasn't, he was holding back. You see, we can't live by faith and by the flesh. That's what we're learning. Jacob was the new man Israel, but unfortunately he was allowing the old man Jacob to control his life. The symptoms of spiritual aggression are similar to what we see in bodily health, right? We lose appetite, we don't want healthy food, like prayer and reading our Bibles. And when we notice we're not in the Bible and we're not reading, we're not walking with the Lord, that's when alarms need to go off, and that's when we need to pay attention to our spiritual life.

So here's what we've seen. We've seen a man that's having a lot of trouble, a man that's having trouble following the Lord, a man that his old self just takes control. We're also seeing a man that's like us. And so we've seen a fearful situation, and we see those in our lives all the time, and we've seen an unlikely resolution. God can take control of it, a habitual deception. And finally, it leads to spiritual regression; and it's going to be rough next week what happens to his family.

So I'm going to end with six takeaways, and here's what I want to say.

Number One: "Be careful of a mindset that thinks, 'I've been blessed, so I know best. I've been blessed, so I know best.'" Number Two: "If pride is our greatest enemy, then humility needs to be our greatest friend," doesn't it? The most mature Christians I have ever seen in my life are the most humble, the most selfless, the most loving. Humility needs to be our greatest friend.

Number Three: "Be on the lookout for pride and self-reliance, especially after great spiritual blessing." Number Four: "No Christian is exempt from regressing spiritually." I wish I could say at a certain age, a certain number of years; it's just not happening. There can be times in our life, anytime, that we regress spiritually; and we've got to be aware of it.

Number Five: "Partial obedience always leads to problems." What happens to Jacob's daughter next week, Dinah, and what his sons do is incredibly

awful. Lastly, "Recognize: 'What are the sins that trouble you most? What are your besetting sins? What are the ones that just nag you?'" Be on high alert; and when they show up, run to the Lord, cling to the Lord, read your Bible, pray, fellowship, battle.

Finally, our Lord made a covenant with Abraham and his future generations as His chosen people, and it's through the seed of Abraham that our Lord Jesus Christ came. And in about a dozen places in the Bible, the Lord God is referred to as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and" – guess who? – "Jacob, Jacob." "Israel" is only used three times. And we've studied about Abraham, and we've studied about Isaac, and now we're learning about Jacob; and I believe that the reason God identifies Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, more than Israel, is because it highlights the fact that God delights in saving messes of sin. He delights to save sinners and people who are weak, like me and you, and people that know they're sinners. He takes great pleasure in the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God, for all of us who recognize we're sinners and we're condemned to hell, and we know we need help from outside, because we are messes, just like Jacob.

Jonathan Edwards said this: "The door of God's mercy is thrown wide open, and Christ stands in the middle of that door, and He says, 'Sinners, come. Come to Me. Cling to Me.'" That's all you can do. Have you placed your trust in Christ? Were your sins forgiven? Do you recognize what an awful sinner you are, and you're at odds with God, and you need a Savior? If you've never done it, there's not a better time than to do it right now, because God takes sinners, the worst of them, and He changes them, and He saves us, and He takes us to heaven. True blessing will never ever be found in anyplace except the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who is Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, thank You for Your Word. And it's not always easy to hear things that step on our toes and convict us. But, Father, we know if we want to be better, if we want to be more Christ-like, we need to hear this. And so, Father, thank You for all the grace You've poured upon us, and all the mercy and all the love You've shown us in Your Son Jesus Christ, and that we can trust You completely, a thousand and ten percent, to cling to You, to hang on You, and to trust You for all in our lives. Help us do that, Father, in Jesus' name. Amen.