

Finding What We Are Looking For
Genesis 32:22-31
(Grace – 3/14/10)

I. Introduction

We have been talking about a reality that exists for billions of people on this planet.

The reality is that no matter what they do or don't do – they still haven't found what they are looking for.

Have you truly found what you are looking for? Do you know who you are and what your purpose is in this life?

How will we ever find what we are looking for?

A few weeks ago I introduced three thoughts that I believe are critical to embrace if we are ever going to truly find what we are looking for, even as those who call themselves Christians.

1. Understanding God as Trinity

To find what we are looking for requires that we connect with our Creator. God is the starting point of all things. We will never know who we are or what our purpose is in life without Him.

But the God of the Bible is not some vague unknowable God. God has revealed Himself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

2. Embracing the church as community

Institutions cannot fully meet our need. We need community, and in the midst of community we discover more about God and ourselves.

(If you missed these messages and want to hear them, go to www.gcfportland.org)

3. Committing to God's goal for humanity – **transformation**

We have had some conversation about the first two and today I would like to look at # 3.

II. Committing to God's Goal for Humanity – Transformation

Why is transformation important? Why should we want to change?

Primarily because of our Romans 7 condition:

“So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. 15 I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. 16 But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this

shows that I agree that the law is good... 18 And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. 19 I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway... 21 I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong... Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? 25 Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 7:14-16, 18-19, 21, 24-25, NLT)

Without Christ, we are broken, conflicted, and dying. God comes with a desire to transform us into His image, to give us “*a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair.*” (Isaiah 61:3, NLT)

For many of us there is some vague desire to change, but we still feel like Paul in Romans seven.

Where do we start? How do we enter into this process of transformation?

This is what I would like to share with you today, and to do so we are going to walk through the life of a man named Jacob as related to us in Genesis 25-32.

Although he lived so many years ago, I think you will be able to relate to his story.

In Jacob we have a man clearly called of God, but who struggled deeply because of trying to accomplish everything on his own and in his own way.

Let us look together at his story.

A. God Announces Jacob's **Destiny** (Genesis 25:21-23)

“Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, ‘Why is this happening to me?’ So she went to inquire of the LORD. The LORD said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.’” (Genesis 25:21-23, NIV)

Now Jacob was born second and God said that both of them would be fathers of nations, but that the older would serve the younger.

Jacob, the younger brother, was the one who was to inherit the covenant that God had established with Abraham. “*And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*” (Genesis 12:3)

Jacob was a man of destiny!

B. Jacob's Manipulation and **Deceitfulness** (Genesis 25:29-34 & Genesis 27:1-40)

Jacob's name means “supplanter,” which means “to take the place of, especially through force, scheming, etc.”

To supplant speaks of deception and manipulation, and in the following passages we will see how Jacob used these attributes to steal his brother's birthright and his blessing.

“Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, ‘Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!’ Jacob replied, ‘First sell me your birthright.’ ‘Look, I am about to die,’ Esau said. ‘What good is the birthright to me?’ But Jacob said, ‘Swear to me first.’ So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.” (Genesis 25:29-34,NIV)

Now the birthright was a big deal! This gave Jacob the rights of the firstborn son, which meant many things, including a double portion of the father's inheritance.

By the way, before we are too hard on Esau, we should look at ourselves.

Are we despising our birthright as children of God? Exchanging it for material and financial gain? Purchasing clothes and consumed by fashion? Engaging in endless forms of recreation? Lusting after pornography? Holding on to anger and bitterness?

The second instance is recorded in Gen 27.

Many of you are probably familiar with this story, but essentially Isaac (the father of Jacob and Esau) tells Esau to go out and bring back some wild game, cook it up, and then Isaac wants to bless him.

Rebekah overhears this and as Jacob is her favorite son, she encourages him to dress in Esau's clothes, cover his exposed skin with goat hair (as Esau was a hairy man), cook a goat and go in and steal the blessing!

Isaac is now blind and the deception works, so Jacob gets the blessing!

Now blessing were not taken or given lightly in those days; listen to what happens when Esau comes back in Genesis 27:33-35:

“Isaac trembled violently and said, ‘Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him—and indeed he will be blessed!’ When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, ‘Bless me—me too, my father!’ But he said, ‘Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.’” (NIV)

This is God's chosen man? A man who was to give birth to a mighty nation?

Now God had already promised Jacob these things, but Jacob took matters into his own hands, and we will see the results of his pursuing the promises of God in his own strength.

C. Jacob's **Flight** and God's Affirmation (Genesis 27:41-44 & 28:10-21)

“Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, ‘The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.’ When

Rebekah was told what her older son Esau had said, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, 'Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you. Now then, my son, do what I say: Flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran. Stay with him for a while until your brother's fury subsides.'" (Genesis 27:41-44, NIV)

As a result of his actions Jacob, must flee from his home and go off to a strange land.

God has also called you, but how often, due to your own choices and responses, have you ended up in a "strange" land?

But there is still hope, because on the way a most amazing thing happens.

God appears to Jacob in Genesis 28:10-21 reaffirming His covenant and Jacob's destiny.

I would have already given up on Jacob and been looking for another man. But God continues to call and work with Jacob.

D. Jacob's troubles with **Laban** (Genesis 29:16-30 & 30:31-43)

First of all, as recorded in Genesis 29:16-30, we read how Jacob and Laban strike a deal that for seven years of work, Laban will give his youngest daughter Rachel, who is very beautiful, to Jacob in marriage.

So, Jacob works those seven years, but when he wakes up the morning he finds the older sister Leah lying beside him!

Don't ask me how that could have happened because I can hardly believe it either, but it looks like you reap what you sow! Laban deceives Jacob in a similar way to how Jacob has deceived his brother previously.

After Laban's feeble excuse that you never marry off the younger before the older, Jacob works another seven years for the woman he truly loves – fourteen years for two wives!

After this, we read in Genesis 30:31-43 that Jacob and Laban strike up another deal. How they could even trust each other I don't know!

In this deal Jacob will continue to tend all of Laban's flocks if he will give Jacob all of the spotted and colored animals to Jacob as his wages.

Now under normal circumstances, these would be in the minority and Laban would still have the greater herd, but Jacob knows a little trick (remember the meaning of his name) that will make the animals give birth to the spotted young.

As a result, through deception again, Jacob's flocks greatly increase, while Laban's decrease.

Now God has already said He would prosper Jacob, but Jacob has his own ideas on how that is going to happen and it gets him into a lot of trouble.

Look what it says in Gen 31:1-2, “*Jacob heard that Laban's sons were saying, ‘Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father.’ And Jacob noticed that Laban's attitude toward him was not what it had been.*” (NIV)

E. Jacob's Flight and Encroaching **Fear** (Genesis 31 & 32:1-21)

As a result, Jacob secretly gathers his family and possessions and flees without telling Laban.

When Laban discovers what has happened, he pursues Jacob and after a bit of bickering it is decided that Jacob will not come back to his uncle Laban's land.

Sometime after they part, someone reports to Jacob the following message: “*When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, ‘We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.’ In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. He thought, ‘If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape.’*” (Gen 32:6-8, NIV)

How would you feel if the last thing you knew was that your brother had wanted to kill you and now he was coming with FOUR HUNDRED MEN!

I think I might be in great fear and distress as well.

So, now Jacob finds himself in the proverbial position of being “between a rock and a hard spot.” He can't go back because of what has happened between his uncle and him, and he is afraid to go forward because of Esau.

Have you ever felt this way? I would propose to you that God finally has Jacob where He wants him. This is a situation that Jacob, although he tries, is not going to scheme himself out of.

F. Jacob **Wrestles** With God (Genesis 32:22-31)

Let's look now at what happens, because the critical moment of Jacob's life is quickly approaching.

“*That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone...*” (Gen 32:22-24, NIV)

Jacob was left alone.

You see, if we do not submit ourselves to God and His desires, He will go to great lengths to get our attention.

Everything that Jacob had worked so hard for could not help him now – he was alone.

How about you? What does God have to do to get your attention?

Hopefully, He doesn't have to go this far, but I see something similar happen to people all the time.

So, Jacob is alone and the Scripture goes on to say, *“and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.”*

Now whom is Jacob actually wrestling with? As it is made evident in verse thirty, he is wrestling with God in prayer!

“When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, ‘Let me go, for it is daybreak.’ But Jacob replied, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me.’” (Genesis 32:25-26, NIV)

Now Jacob is tenacious, I'll give him that. Even after having his hip wrenched he must be starting to understand what is happening and is determined to get the blessing (the one he has been striving for all his life!).

But Jacob is soon going to learn what is necessary to get that blessing.

Verse 27: *“The man asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘Jacob,’ he answered.”*

Now this is an extremely significant interchange, and I like how the Amplified Version translates this verse.

“The Man asked him, ‘What is your name?’ And [in shock of realization, whispering] he said, ‘Jacob – supplanter, schemer, trickster, swindler!’”

Jacob finally stops pretending and is willing to come honestly and wholeheartedly to God.

Now God can bring about a transformation in Jacobs's heart and life.

“Then the man said, ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.’” (Verse 28)

III. Application

Nelson's Bible dictionary defines the meaning of Israel as “prince with God.” Jacob, the deceiver, becomes Israel, a prince with God.

When we completely surrender our life to God, we will never be the same. We fully enter into the process of transformation.

Verse 31 says, *“The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.”*

When God touches our lives in that moment of surrender, we will never be the same.

Now Jacob at his moment of surrendered finally became the man God had intended for him to be all along, a prince with God.

Do you want to find what you are looking for? Or are you holding on to your life and watching it slip away as Jacob did?

I feel that there are many who call themselves Christian who have not truly surrendered their hearts and lives to God.

Look at the result of Jacob's surrender: A nation was born and through that nation the whole of Old Testament Scripture was given and preserved, and through this nation our Messiah, Jesus Christ, was to manifest Himself. Hallelujah!

Jacob was a person like the rest of us who had his problems. But what could God do with you if you fully surrendered to him?

I urge you, surrender fully to God and become His prince or princess today!

“The secret of an unsatisfied life lies too often in an unsundered will.” Author unknown.