

Audio Sermon: Are You Jacob or Israel?

by Alan Redpath

The sermon explores Jacob's transformation into Israel as a metaphor for the profound change that faith in God can bring to one's character.

Duration: 40:08

Scripture: Genesis 32:24

Topics: "Spiritual Transformation", "Personal Revival"

Description

This sermon focuses on the transformation of Jacob's character by God, highlighting the need for personal encounters with Jesus to bring about genuine change. It emphasizes the importance of confessing one's shortcomings, acknowledging the need for God's intervention, and surrendering to His transformative power. The story of Jacob's wrestling with God serves as a powerful illustration of how God can change a person's identity and character when they come to the end of themselves and seek His blessing.

Transcript

It's very difficult to know, really, what one should say to a congregation, an audience, that you'll never see again until we get to heaven. That thought has been impressing itself on my mind today, probably my last opportunity to speak in the name of the Lord Jesus to you here in this beautiful place. What shall I say? I've asked God about that, and I believe He has directed me to a particular portion of His Word way, way back in the dawn of human history.

You know, there's nothing I enjoy doing more than reading biographies. Perhaps that's because I'm a curious sort of person. I like to know about people, don't you? And I like to pick up a biography and read it.

And you always get to know people that way. The only thing is this. When you read a biography about someone, there's always one fact, at least, about the person that the biographer was unaware of.

You never can get to know everything about anybody in a biography, except in the Word of God. It never flatters its heroes. It always tells the truth about them, never seeks to polish them up, just shows us human nature in the raw, people as they really are, and the scars of them, whose character is revealed to us in the Word of God.

I'm not particularly speaking about this, but you remember that amazing passage in the book, Hebrews chapter 11, which is a sort of picture gallery of tremendous fellows who lived long, long ago. You know, I

used to think that that was a record of the greatest men who'd ever lived, and they were, in my mind, way up on a picture gallery, miles above anybody. And I sort of gaped at them and thought, well, they must be tremendous men.

I could never be like them. And then it suddenly dawned on me, they weren't the greatest men that ever lived, they were the weakest men that ever lived, as actually, Hebrews 11 is a rogues gallery. That may shock you, but listen.

Noah was among them, and he was an alcoholic. Jacob was among them. He's the biggest swindler the world has ever known.

Moses was among them. He committed murder. David was among them.

He committed adultery. Samson was among them. Oh, his morals don't bear looking at.

They were the weakest men who've ever lived, but they all came to one moment in their lives. They came to it in a different way, in different circumstances, but they all came to one moment when they recognized that they simply hadn't got what it takes, and that life was too big for them, and they came to the end of themselves. And when their impotence was linked by faith with the omnipotence of God, they became men whom God could use.

Now, I'm going to tell you in simple language the story of one such men tonight. You'll forgive me, or perhaps I don't need to ask for forgiveness, if I put it to you in 20th century language, but I'll read it, first of all, at least an extract from it, as it appears in the Word of God. This will be familiar language, maybe, to some of you here.

This is the story of Jacob, and a crisis in his life. Genesis chapter 32, and listen to it. Perhaps you have your Bible.

Genesis 32 and verse 24, here's what it says. Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him.

And he said, let me go for the daybreakers. And he said, I will not let you go except you bless me. And he said to him, what's your name? And he said, Jacob.

And he said, thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel. For as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. Now then, here's a fascinating little story, which is absolutely so relevant and up to date that it's almost not funny.

You think of this man to whom God said one day, your name shall be no more Jacob, but Israel. Now what's in the name? Tremendous lot in the name. When you recall the names of people, you know, you recall not only the name, but the character behind the name.

Men like Eisenhower, men like Winston Churchill, immediately there comes to your mind the character that made them what they were. And if that's true today, it was much more true in New Testament times. Thou shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sin.

There is none other name given among men under heaven whereby we must be saved. What's in the name? Everything in the name, for it stands for character. And if that's true in the New Testament, it's

much more so in the time of the Hebrews.

Your name shall be called no more Jacob. What's that mean? Cheat, swindler, deceiver. Your name shall be called Israel, prince with God.

Good night. What a change in the man's name. From a cheat to a prince with God.

That man had his name changed. And this is symbolic of the fact that he had his character changed. Now listen.

If Christianity is incapable of changing anybody's character, shut your Bible up, close your churches, go home, and have nothing more to do with it. For it is the biggest farce and the biggest deceiver of men in history. If Jesus Christ is not what he came to be and claims to be, pack up the whole thing.

Stop playing church. Don't merely be content to sort of have a Sunday huddle with your family at a place of worship. It means absolutely nothing unless Jesus Christ can change character.

A fellow said to me not so long ago, you'll never have another world, a better world with human nature as it is. Course you won't. He's dead right.

Dead right. All our problems are centered in human nature. Marvelous discoveries we've made.

I understand. I think it's Time magazine or Life or News Report something said the other day, 80% of scientific, technological information, facts that we know now, nobody knew anything about 20 years ago. Tremendous discovery.

There's nothing wrong in nuclear energy. Of course there isn't. But when it's in the hands of a man that's selfish, that's greedy, that's ambitious, it's dangerous.

Oh yes. The trouble with the world after all these years of advanced scientific discovery is the trouble of human nature. It's never changed.

It's always the same. Therefore, therefore we face expulsion point as I speak to you. Human nature in the raw, basically selfish, basically ambitious, basically proud, basically wanting its own way.

I don't know whether I took, you know, I've got an awful memory these days. I've got a wonderful forgettery. Do you find that as you get a bit older? Terrible.

Like a silk. Terrible. I can't remember whether I told you this.

I don't know. But I can't help telling you again. So laugh.

Just to be, you know. But some time ago I was up in Scotland and there's a little island on the River Clyde. And I was having a holiday on this island and I was standing one day on the pier.

I was waiting to go out for a cruise on a steamer and I noticed a ship had come in and it was unloading 400 sheep. And I watched this operation fascinated. A British railway porter put a ladder up the side of the ship and waited for the sheep to come down the ladder.

Well, I mean, he looked at them and they looked at him. They were very sheepish looking sheep and they just didn't move. So he thought he'd better do something about it after all his pay, trade union rates.

So he went up the ladder and he got hold of the first lady by the horns and pulled her down the ladder. Well, when she got to the bottom, she rushed across the pier and dashed off. And of course, number two came and then number three and number four and there's a whole whirlwind of sheep.

But the thing that interested me was that sheep number one, as she rushed across that pier at that town, suddenly was confronted with somebody's baggage. So a sheep, after all, is what can it do? It couldn't turn sideways, it couldn't divert, couldn't take an alternative route, it couldn't go back. There was only one thing to do.

It was to take a colossal leap up into the air and jump right over the whole thing. And it did. Made a masterful jump, high jump.

And number two came to the same spot, did exactly the same. And number three, up he went. And number four, all went like this.

All of them, one after the other. And you know, really, British Railway, port, tremendous. He was looking at this and he thought, well, without being paid over time, I suppose I can help it.

And he went up to this baggage and he got hold of it and he pulled it right to one side. Well, do you know? Now look here, I'm not kidding. I saw 390 sheep come to that same place where the baggage had been and up in the air and down again on the other side.

Oh yes, they did. Isn't it strange? But isn't it much stranger that the Bible, as I say, never flatters anybody but dares to tell us that all we like sheep have gone astray. We've turned everyone to his own way.

That is what the book calls S.I.N. And there you have the whole trouble in the world. Human nature in the wrong. Now what about this man Jacob? Look at him for a minute with me in the room.

I suppose the biggest effect on a man's life, on your life, is your environment, is your home. What sort of a home did he come from? Well, it started off well. His parents, Isaac and Rebecca, fell in love at first sight.

That's a great thing to do. Immediately he saw her, he said, that's the one for me. And she said, he's the one for me.

And so they fell in love and they were married. And we're told in the book that Isaac loved Rebecca. That was a good start.

It didn't seem, however, that they were going to have a family. So he prayed for her and God answered his prayer and shortly twins were about to be born. And those twins began squabbling before they were actually born and they never stopped fighting till they died.

And presently the twins appeared. One was a, I think, a bit like a hippie type. Perhaps, I don't know, perhaps I'm doing it him or you.

Some hippie and then just as anyhow long hair. And he rather was a wild sort of fellow, you know? He was obviously a man who wasn't prepared to be with it. Anyway, he wasn't a conformist.

Oh no, he wouldn't conform. And from the moment they saw the light of day there was trouble in that home because Isaac loved Esau. And do you know why he loved him? Because his old dad, Isaac, had got an obsession for venison.

He loved food. He ate like nobody's business. He absolutely loved eating.

And Esau was trained to be a man who could get him meat. And he loved Esau. But Rebecca, and that's the first time you hear of a but in the home, she loved Isaac.

She loved Jacob. So the two had favorites. Now when parents start doing that sort of thing there's trouble in the wind.

And sure enough, there was. One day the old dad said to his son, Esau, look, he said, I'm sick of life. I'm about to die, I think.

He said, as a matter of fact, he lived 30 years after this. But he said, I'm about to die. Isn't it strange, isn't it strange how many people stop living before they die? Just quit, hand in the resignation, take it easy.

They just stop living before they're due to die. This man lived 30 years. But he said, Esau, I'm about to die.

And he said, I want to pray for you, but you know I can't pray until I've had a good feed. So go and get hold of me a nice big meat of that lovely venison which I love, and then I'll pray for you after you've given me a good feed. So off he went.

Meanwhile, his mother had been listening to this conversation, and she's now's my chance, and she got hold of Jacob and said, look here Jacob, just dress yourself up like Esau, put his clothes on, and just go in and steal his blessing, and ask your father to bless you. So Jacob thought, good idea, so he went in, he kicked his old dad who was by that time a bit sort of stupid, you know, he just, it was a story of a good man going downhill, he'd eaten so much he couldn't distinguish between goat meat and venison, and the whole man was a bit sort of blotto with food, I don't know about drink, but certainly with food, and he'd just gone down. Oh isn't it sad to see a man who starts well for going down.

I'd rather be a man who starts badly and go up, that's what Jacob did. But his father began so well, why don't you remember the first introduction to him in the Bible? He offered himself on a mountain of Moriah with his father Abraham, as a sacrifice, tender-hearted youth, really right with God, really prepared to do anything, but now as an old man, oh he's going downhill. And so when Esau came home, he was, he heard what had happened, that Jacob had got the blessing, he'd got his father's blessing, and the promise of his father, of his possessions, and all this, and Esau just blew his top.

He was absolutely hopping mad, and so Jacob got scared, and his mother said, look the best thing for you to do is take three weeks holiday, and go and see your uncle Laban. And so Jacob said, okay, and off he went. Three weeks vacation turned out to be 21 years.

He never got back and saw his mother, he got back just in time to bury his dad. But follow me with him will you, as he for the first time in his life, left home on his way to meet his uncle. By the way, I suppose, oh that frightens me, but I suppose it's true, there may be some theologians here, dreadful thought, but perhaps you are, and theological students.

Well listen, I'll put a question to you. How old was Jacob when he left home? I don't know. I should think sort of a cool 70, but as such, may I tell you, he'd got a long way to go.

He lived to be 147. Thank the Lord I won't do that. Oh thank God that he shortened the lifespan.

But I would regard Jacob at the age of 70, just as a nice sort of youngish middle-aged fellow, who was in the prime of life and setting out from home for the first time. What do you think of that? 70 years at home and now he's off. He's let loose for the first time in his life.

Fancy that, having to be 70 and brought up by a mother all that time. It would drive me around the bend, it really would. Goodness, no wonder he was a bachelor.

And when he left home aged 70, I tell you that man against the background of that unhappy home, with the wrath of Esau breathing down his neck, with the memory of his cheating and deceiving, he went out from the first night away in the desert. He lay down and had a sleep. He got a stone, put it for a pillow, no motels, and so there he had to lie.

And my, his stone must have been a very uncomfortable pillow. And he had a dream that night. I'm not surprised he had a dream.

You always dream when you're worried, very frequently anyway. And Jacob dreamt. And as he went sound asleep he dreamt.

And in his dream there are three great exclamation marks. Behold a ladder reaching down to earth and the top of it to heaven. Behold the angels of God ascending and descending.

And behold at the top of the ladder the Lord. And Jacob in his dream saw this and the Lord spoke to him and said, Jacob I'm going to make you a promise that all of this land will be yours and in your children all the families of the earth will be blessed. And I promise you I'll never leave you and I'll go with you everywhere and I'll never forsake you until I've accomplished all that I've told you to do and I'll never leave you alone.

And Jacob wakened up and we read he was terrified and said surely this is the house of God. This is the very gate of heaven. And for the first time in his life he built an altar speaking of his prayer and worship.

And he said Lord if, if there were no ifs on God's side but on Jacob's there were, if you look after me, if you watch over me, if you'll take me to see my uncle safely and if you'll bring me safely home I promise you I'll tithe every tenth of what I get and you are, you will be my God. Now just, just a sec, let me get you with me again. You may accuse me of stretching a point but I don't think so.

I would say in New Testament language at that moment Jacob was converted. He had a confrontation with the living God. And there are two marks that are always present in a genuine conversion that are present in his life that day.

One, a sense of sin. Two, a sense of the holiness of God. And nobody's converted unless that happens.

A sense of your inadequacy, a sense of God's holiness that he's almighty and you haven't got what it takes and the backlist of life is too big alone. So he will be my God. The motives of it may have not been pure, questionable about the real depth of it but nevertheless at that moment he had a personal encounter with God.

Now let me ask you, have you had that? Have you really met personally the Lord Jesus Christ? Although I speak to a few of you, many of you, who are just comfortable church members. Never met God, never experienced a living Christ in your life, never had an encounter with Jesus. I think when I was here uh

three years ago, I told you, I went right back into the pages of memory of younger days, obviously, and told you about an incident that occurred to me in my life once on the football field.

By the way, I don't quite understand this Australian rules business. I'll need a bit of education about this. I do understand rugby league but I'm much more interested in rugby union because that's the game I play.

And I used to play for one of our counties in the north of England and remember one year playing for Northumberland against Yorkshire. And this was the final county championship match of the season and it depended, everything depended on the results of that game as to which of us would be the champion country. Well, there were about 30,000 people there and I tell you it was a fight from beginning to end.

When you get somebody from Newcastle against somebody from Yorkshire, there's no mercy. They're absolutely tooth and nail tearing each other apart. And we were, oh it was a terrible match, but two minutes from the end we were losing by four points to nil.

That was in those days a drop goal to nothing. But just before the finish of the game, the ball came out the back of our scrum and our scrum half got hold of it and flashed it over to his out half and who sent it across to his backs, who one of whom cut down the middle, passed to his wimpy cue, who dashed down the line and scored right at the corner flag as he was pulled down. Yorkshire 4, Northumberland 3. Now I'm not here to give you a lecture on football but I may just say to you that that try has to be converted.

And it's done by bringing the ball back 25 yards at right angles from the place at which it was scored and there kicking it between the uprights and the centre, over the centre bar of the goalpost. And if you're successful, two more points. If you're not, nothing.

Everything depended on that kick. If the fellow got it over, Northumberland 5, Yorkshire 4. If he didn't, Yorkshire 4, Northumberland 3. I was terribly sorry for the fellow taking that kick, especially if it happened to me. And I remember going back 25 yards and putting that ball in the ground and it was right over here and the goalposts were right over there.

The angle was so narrow that it seemed an utter impossibility and I stepped back about six yards and I just paused for a moment and the silence was just like that. You could have heard a pin drop. 30,000 people, 60,000 eyes glued on me at that moment.

All I could hear was my heart beating and after I couldn't wait any longer, I took a deep breath and ran forward and gave that ball a tremendous root and it soared straight up into the air between those goalposts and I heard the crowd roar, he's got it, it's a goal. But just as it came down, it slightly veered off course and I watched it breathlessly as it hit one of the upright bars and came down on the wrong side. I do appreciate your sympathy.

You're about 35 years late. But do you know when we went back to Newcastle on fire in that evening, in our special reserved coach on the train, our halfback, who on Saturday nights, for reasons which I needn't go into, was rather talkative and that evening he never stopped talking and he looked across at me and he said, I'm putting this in evangelical language, he said to me, why didn't you miss the wrong thing altogether? Why did it go like that? Why didn't you fall on your back or didn't you kick it into the grandstand? What a nurse the use of getting so near as missing it by half an inch. You see, it didn't make any difference.

For if I had missed it or kicked it into the grandstand, the result would have been just the same because almost means failure. Again I say, you'll remember my story, but again I say, have you encountered Jesus Christ? You can be almost a Christian but not one and it doesn't make any difference whether I'm attending church twice a week or whether I never go near the place and every Sunday I'm out on the beach. If I haven't met the Lord Jesus personally and yielded my life to him and said, Lord, you'll be my God and received his life into my heart, I'm not a Christian.

But that night in Bethel there Jacob met God. Well, when a man meets God, there's a tremendous difference to be expected, is there? Better ask ourselves about that, is there? Isn't that the trouble? Well, to be expected may be, but I want to tell you that for 21 years Jacob was just the same. The same man, he'd gone up from Bethel and he went to the country where his uncle lived and he got into one kettle of fish after the other.

He married the wrong girl to start with. And then he formed a partnership with his uncle, Jacob Laban, Inc. And the thing was doomed to failure before it began.

They hadn't any common faith, the one was a believer, the other wasn't. And one after another it was ding-dong, they went for each other and outwitted each other and swindled each other, till after 20 years Jacob was absolutely at his wit's end. He touched bottom.

Couldn't it be a Christian to live like that? That proves your first point is wrong. No, it doesn't. It simply speaks to the experience of your heart and mind.

My friend, how long have you been a believer? How long is it since you first confronted Jesus Christ and He met you and came into your life? Tell me, has there been a difference? Is there any change? 20 years having within me Jesus and yet being mastered by the old wife all the time. Never growing up, never becoming any different, no change. That's the experience of masses of people within our churches today, who really have met God, but somehow or other it hasn't worked.

And Jacob for 22 years was like that, just in the same old mess, until he touched rock bottom. I want to say to you very thoughtfully that sometimes God lets you and me out on a long loose rein, but He holds the reins in His hands, and there comes a time when He starts pulling the rein in and says, I've had enough of this. Maybe He's brought you to Unley Town Hall as a fellow or girl, man or woman, who's just about reached rock bottom.

There's nowhere nearer to God than you, because when you touch rock bottom, Jesus is right there. And maybe that's exactly where you are. He's had to let you out on a long leash, and you've just tried to live without Him and forget about Him, but somehow or other things have gone from bad to worse.

Need it have happened? I don't think so. It didn't need to happen to Jacob. I wonder why it did.

I don't know. When I get to heaven, I'm going to ask Him. But I think without blackmailing Him, I think I can tell you one reason why it happened.

Listen. Supposing Jacob, when he had met with God before he went another step on his vacation, had gone right back home and said, Esau, I'm sorry. And pardon me, is there somebody outside a Christian church would never dream of coming near, who wouldn't attend a service, who's not a bit impressed by your Christianity, who is not prepared even to talk about the Lord and what they are because of your treatment of them and mine.

And we've never gone back and said, sorry, I wonder. Maybe ask yourself that question. But look here.

Let me hasten. It came to an end. God got hold of Jacob and pulled him in.

They went back home. On his way back home, had a news, had a cablegram sent to him. And the cablegram said, watch it, watch it, Esau's coming.

Oh, Esau, that's after 21 years. He hasn't forgotten yet? No, he doesn't. You know, family squabbles sort of last.

And this one had last 21 years. So Esau's coming, look out, look out. So Jacob said, all right.

And he sent his wives and cattle and all the rest he'd got on in front of him. And he went, and he went, and he got alone. And he began to pray.

And as he prayed, oh God, save me from Esau. Lord, I'm not worthy of the least of all your mercies. I've lived like a rotter.

I've lived like an absolute cad. I'm not worthy of anything, but Lord, for goodness sake, for the Lord's sake, save me from my brother. And my Bible tells me, I read it to you, there wrestled a man with him till the breaking of the day.

No time to elaborate on this, but I'm questioning, but this was one of the many pre-incarnation appearances of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who didn't begin to live at Bethlehem, but he lived always, all through eternity. And there, he met Jacob again. And there wrestled with him, a man till the breaking of day, until God said to Jacob, let me go.

And Jacob said to him, I won't let you go till you bless me. I would give my right hand, and I need it. If there was somebody in this audience who's speaking like that to God tonight.

Lord, I've made so much of a mess of it. I've absolutely messed up my life. I've chosen my own path.

As a child, I made some sort of contact with you, and I met you, and I believe then I was converted maybe, but I've tried to forget, and I've just lived like I like, like I can, and everything's gone wrong, and I'm at wit's end corner, I'm down to the very bottom, I'm struck rock bottom. Lord, Lord, what this fellow was saying at Unley Town Hall, I've never met him before, and he's got a funny English accent, and I don't understand all he's saying, but, but, but, what he's saying, I can see, this is what I need. I can't let you go, Lord, till you bless me.

And then came the answer, what's your name? What's your name? Do you mean to say God didn't know? Of course he, of course he, he'd been watching him for 22 years, holding the reins, watching him pay the fool, calling him in, pulling him in, he knew who he was, what's your name? God wasn't asking Jacob for information, he was calling upon him for confession, and I hear that man in my mind, I can see him just looking up, the man who was wrestling with him and saying, sorry Lord, it's still Jacob. I'm still exactly the same. All right, you've told me that, you've made your confession, listen, your name shall be no more Jacob, but Israel, for as a prince, you power with card and prevailed, and from that moment, Jacob was a changed man.

Oh, there's a lot more in the story that I haven't time to go on to tell, but this was the crisis of his life, the change didn't come in an instant, the Israel character developed, the Jacob character died out, and at that

moment, as the man came to God desperate and broken, and confessed to him, Lord, my name is Jacob. The Lord said to him, all right, thank you for telling me, I've known it, but I wanted you to tell me, your name shall be no more Jacob. Listen, what's your name? What's your name? Jacob? Cheat? Swindler? Deceiver? Excuse me, but hypocrite? What's your name? Don't tell me, tell the Lord, for the wonderful thing is tonight, for the manly town hall, the God of Jacob is right here, and he's able, if I'm willing to acknowledge that I am Jacob, and I can do a thing about it, he's able to fit into my life and make me Israel.

As I hand over my life to him, concrete, and he enters and takes control. Would you let Jesus get into the life-changing business in your heart this night? Just acknowledge to him you can't do it yourself. Acknowledge to him that you're really desperate, face reality, don't pretend anymore, you're just desperate, and you can't go on anymore in this condition, Lord, Lord, it's Jacob, and I can't do a thing about it, right? Just you come to me, and let me come in and change the Jacob to Israel.

Can you let Jesus do that? Let's pray. I don't know a thing about you, but God knows everything about you, so I'm leaving the issues of this meeting with him and you. Your name shall be no more Jacob, but Israel, no more self, but Jesus.

Tonight, you can come to him and tell him the truth, and acknowledge what you are, and enter into a miracle, the life-saving and transforming power of the indwelling Spirit of God, who is alive today and with us now to do this very thing. Will you ask him? Out of yourself, into Jesus. Just a moment's prayer.

It's the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses us from sin. It's he who died on the cross who can do this for you. It's he who lives today and save and keep you.

Did you ask him? Lord Jesus Christ, we recognize that how desperately we failed because of the kind of people we are. We've been selfish and unkind and cruel and critical and censorious and proud and self-righteous. Oh Lord, it's all such a mess.

We acknowledge this is all the Jacob in us, and we come to you at the end of our tether, and we say to you, Lord, I won't let you go except you bless me. Lord, tonight do thou just come in and step over the threshold of some life here and make thyself real. Your name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel.

Lord Jesus, thank you that you're a prayer-answering God, and thank you tonight that in answer to our faith and trust and commitment, you're able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask of thee.

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