

**Genesis 28: 10-17; "This is the Gate of Heaven", Sermon # 82 in the series - "Beginnings", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on September 17th, 2006 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 believe that the experience which is related to us here in this passage is the conversion of Jacob to God. 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 our soul, and in connection with His Word, revealing Himself to us. Oh, the person being converted most definitely has a part in it because he is the subject of the Lord's grace and 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 being led to God, of being led to consider the gospel, of 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, His death, and His 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, and it is different for every person who believes. You don't always know that it is taking place when it is taking place. In some cases the person cannot immediately conclude that he has been converted, even though it has taken place. It is even possible that a person can be fooled into thinking that he has been converted when he really has 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 our experience that God initiates and that He continues to lead us into, in relation to our responding to the truth of the gospel. We must have a Savior in order to have eternal life. We are alienated from God and dead in our trespasses and sins. We must enter through a 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 us. 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 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 in the gospel to him about the only Savior of sinners, the

Lord Jesus Christ. 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 many of the doctrines surrounding the subject of conversion very well either. So 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 3rdly- 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 and the one who thought he had succeeded in obtaining both the birthright and the blessing, 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. And he was now setting out on this great expedition, journeying to Haran, to meet relatives that he had never seen and to learn about the great world outside of the tents that he had "loved to dwell in." He was leaving everything that was familiar to him; 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 this 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 put it at his head and he lay down in that that place to sleep. Truly we need to meditate upon this scene

and to think of it 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 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 is going to make this place, where Jacob lies 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 and from the consequences of their own sinful heart and actions. They may see life and the future as an adventure, but they are also fearful of what the future holds. They have come to see that life 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 went to Padan Aram," it says in verse 7. But in the conversion of his soul God used this time by himself, and He drew near to have personal dealings with the one whom He chose to have mercy upon. He draws near to Jacob and He chooses the time and the place where he could best accomplish His purpose and leave His lasting eternal impressions. Time spent by yourself can be time well spent if we think about the fact that God's eye is upon us. But I am not sure that Jacob was aware of God at all when he lay down to sleep.

Jacob lays down to sleep, but God will come to Him even there, at the time when he is most weary, in the time that he is most helpless, in the time that he is most insensible to spiritual things. He was probably thinking that it was the consequence of his trickery with Esau and his father that brought about his being exiled to Haran. 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 in mercy and grace 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 know 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 Him. Then Jesus says,

"Come unto Me all you who are weary." Jacob surely was weary physically, and I believe that he was weary spiritually as well. And that leads us to -

**The 2nd Element of Jacob's conversion; 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 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 is not simply representative of God's providence to protect and help Jacob. This ladder is not simply a stairway or an escalator for angels to get to and from heaven. This ladder is 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 shows Nathanael that He has 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 says 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, the only way to ascend to heaven, the only ladder bridge to God.

Angels are the servants and attendants of our Lord in all his ministrations. They sang together at his birth at Bethlehem. They were there ministering to Him after He was tempted in the wilderness. One of their number strengthened Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. They had to stand as anguishing spectators at the cross, but were made glad by his resurrection and told the good news to the women at the tomb and some of the apostles. And last and best of all they came down when Christ ascended to heaven 40 days after his resurrection. And after the apostles saw Jesus rise up into the clouds and they steadfastly looked toward heaven, two angels stood by them and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you

stand gazing up into heaven?" "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." (Acts 1: 11) The angels will be there at that glorious and awful day, as well. "Christ Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God." (1 Thessalonians 4: 16) He will be "revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thessalonians 1: 7, 8) But here Jacob is 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. But the Son of Man, Jesus Christ was not given to redeem angels, but men. Angels are sent out by God to render service to those who will inherit salvation. Angels are those who observe the New Testament church in its worship of God. When Jacob woke up after seeing this in his dream, he stated, "How awesome is this place!" "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. The picture is of God in His own house opening the door or the gate for Jacob to come in to, and become a part of, His church. The picture is one of God's grace being shown to Jacob. The angels He will send to Jacob to help him at various points critical points in his life. You can see one of them in Chapter 32 where it says, "So Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him." "When Jacob saw them," it says, "he said, 'This is God's camp.'" God was going to provide and care for Jacob in every way by the grace of Jesus Christ which would be purchased at the cross, so many years later. "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them." (Psalm 34: 7) 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 is Jacob's conversion.

**3rdly- 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. "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, chapter 18, verse 18, and chapter 22, verse 18. It is given to Isaac in chapter 26, verse 4. 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. Verse 18 says, "For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham (and we can say to Jacob as well) by promise." What purpose then does the law serve?" "It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. 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 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 3rd 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 his earthly journeyings, but also to keep him spiritually in all the trials and difficulties that he would face. These are promises which created faith in Jacob and would sustain him wherever he went. He 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 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 none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" That is because that 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. Next week, we shall see Jacob's profession of faith before God results 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.