

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

April 30, 2000

Sermon: *The Magnificent Defeat*

Scripture: *Genesis 32:24-30*

There is in the Bible, stories about people whose lives have been changed by God. One of the most remarkable stories is of Jacob. Let me tell you about him before his life was changed so you understand a little bit more about him after his life had had an encounter with God. Jacob was a twin. His brother Esau was born first and not far behind Jacob came. Those who were helping with the birth noticed that Jacob's hand was on his brother's heel. His mother and daddy took that as a sign so they called him Jacob. The word Jacob means somebody who slips up behind somebody and takes them by the foot and trips them up. All of his life, he was known as the trickster or tripster or the cheat or the manipulator. Someone said you have to be very careful of your expectation of children because they might live up to it. All of his life, Jacob lived up to the expectation of his parents and he spent his life trying to see how he could cheat and how he could manipulate and how he could get his way. It got so bad that finally he had to leave home because he and his brother just could not get along. He had cheated his brother out of his inheritance and finally he just had to leave. The story we are going to read this morning is now he is a grown man and he is married, has children and he has become very successful. On his way back home, he has an encounter with God that changes his life.

We are going to read part of that story this morning out of the book of Genesis, Chapter 32. It is the understanding that as we read it, we believe that God is the God who can change your life. He is the God who can make a difference on the inside of you. As you read about Jacob, I hope you will see your own self in the story. Beginning down in Verse 24. "Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until day break. When the man saw that he could not over power 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, the dawn is about to break." Jacob replied, "I will not let you go until you bless me." The man said, "What is your name?" He said "My name is Jacob." Then the man said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel because you have struggled with God and with men and you have overcome." Jacob said, "Tell me your name, but he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him. Jacob called the place Peniel, saying it is because I have seen God face to face and yet my life was spared.

Most of us are very suspicious about people who say they have been changed. We find it difficult sometime to believe people's lives can really be changed. We have statements in our folk culture that goes something like this. You can't take a pig's ear and make a silk purse out of it. We talk that a leopard can not change its spots. When we go out to prison in our ministry here at church and people in prison say that their life has been changed by God there is a little phrase that is used of those people and that is 'they have a jail house conversion.' People are always skeptical whenever they come and say that their life has been changed.

Years ago I came across a book that was entitled *The 100 Books that Helped to Change the World.* In it was a synopsis of each of those books, many of them I had heard about, some I had never heard of. One I had never heard of was by an Italian author named Machiavelli entitled *The Prince.* Let me read you what Machiavelli says about people and then tell you why the book is so important. This is what he said. "It may be generally affirmed about men that they are thankless, fickle, false, studious to avoid danger. Greedy of game, they are devoted to you when you are able to confer benefits upon them. When danger is distant they will shed their blood, sacrifice their prosperity and their children, but in the hour of their need, they will turn against you." The reason that book has been one of the books that people have said helped change the world is because there were two men who read that view that Machiavelli had about people and adopted it and it completely colored their political concepts. One of them was a man by the name of Mussolini and the other politician by the name of Hitler. These men believed you can not trust people. They believed that if people will stick you in the back, they will stick you in the back, and

therefore there are people that you simply cannot trust at all. It is interesting to me that most of us are more Machiavelli than we are Christians. We somehow just don't believe that people can be changed.

Now you are aware that while you are here at church this morning, there are a lot of people who are not. Some of those same people say that one of the reasons I don't go to church is that those people who go down to the church say they are very religious and yet they do the same things that I do. There is a word they coin to you and that is the word, hypocrite. They simply don't believe that you can be changed. They simply don't believe that Christ can make a difference in your life.

The story that we will be reminded of today, according to the Bible, is the story of a man whose life was changed. The wonderful good news that the Bible teaches us is that when a person can have an encounter with God, that his life can be deeply, remarkably transformed. He can be a different person.

Let me tell you about this man by the name of Jacob. Jacob as, I told you had manipulated his brother and gotten so bad he had to leave home. Now, years later, he is coming back home getting ready to try and make amends with his brother and try to get back with his family. What he heard however, was that Esau had heard he was coming and was waiting for him. Not with open arms but with four hundred men who were his friends, with their swords and their arrows ready to welcome their brother back home. Jacob began to understand there wasn't any turning around and going back. The realization was, that the next morning, he was going to have to confront his brother and four hundred armed men and that everything he had done was going to now come back to haunt him. He decided that what he would do is send all of his family ahead, get rid of all his possessions and that night, Jacob got alone with God. What Jacob said was, "Dear God, if there is ever going to be any hope for me, it is going to have to be between me and You before it is before Esau and I tomorrow." That night alone with God, Jacob had to start facing who he was. Think about it just for a moment. Jacob had always spent his life time manipulating, working out deals. He had always been able to do whatever the difficulty was, to work himself around it. For a minute I am sure the old Jacob came back and he said, "Well I will just work myself around it," but he had gotten to the spot where regardless of what he did, he wasn't going to be able to get around it.

I love the old story about a pilot in a private plane. He had four passengers. One was a world famous politician, one was a world famous scientist, one was a boy scout and one was a preacher. Unfortunately, the plane ran into trouble and the pilot came out and said, "We are in trouble, the plane is going to go down and I have a parachute but I hate to tell you there are just three parachutes for the four of you. You are going to have to determine among yourselves who is going to get the parachutes." The pilot jumped out with his parachute. The politician said, "I am a world famous politician, people depend upon me, I am helping to change the course of the world." They all agreed the politician needed to get one of the parachutes. The second man steps up and he said, "I am the smartest man in the world. I have in my head inventions that are going to change the world, going to help sick people. If anybody ought to live, it ought to be me. The smartest man in the world." He grabbed a parachute and he jumped. There was the boy scout and the preacher. The preacher said, "You are a young man and I have lived a long time. You have your life ahead of you. I tell you what you do. You take the last parachute and you jump and I will go down with the plane." The boy scout said, "No, preacher that isn't necessary. You know that the smartest man in the world who just jumped? He got my back pack."

Jacob had always been able to work his way out but he had gotten the back pack that time. There wasn't any other way. Alone with God now, this is the truth we wanted to learn this morning. In your life, God will always place Esau's that will make you face your life apart from Him. In your life, what you are going to find is that there is going to come a moment when there is nowhere else to go, it is just between you and God and you are going to have to face the kind of life that you are living. It comes in all kinds of ways. Sometimes it comes with a sense of emptiness in your life. I have just gone along and life isn't meaningful to me anymore. If this is what life is, it doesn't have any joy for me. It may be the guilt in your life. It maybe that you say I have done so many things wrong, I just somehow have a burden that is always on me, I have to get some relief. It may be the facing of sickness, it may be the facing of death, it may be other kinds of tragedies in your life, where you recognize there is just no going forward anymore. You are going to have to get alone with God. Sometimes it may be because you are having, just like this man, to face up to what you have done in your life.

Let me tell you a beautiful story. If I were to ask you if you could identify a man by the name of Lowell Paxton, most of you would not know that name. I would tell you that if you knew this man also

created the Home Shopping Network, many of you could raise your hand and say, Oh! I know about that. Lowell Paxton had become one of the richest men in America. He said he spent 260 days away from home creating his empire. Even today, Lowell Paxton owns more radio stations, more television stations than any other man in America. He is extremely wealthy. He came home for Christmas and you can imagine Christmas. Around the Christmas tree, with the man who owns the Home Shopping Network, presents everywhere. He had invited all of his family home, all of his grandchildren home, it was going to be a time of real celebration. He knew that he had been gone a great deal, he knew that he and his wife had not been getting along real well. He said that in the middle of that celebration his wife came and said three words. "I am leaving." That night, when it was suppose to be a time of real celebration, she walked out the door. His family had also agreed that they would celebrate New Years Eve at Los Vegas. His children asked for him to come on and go and he went to the ritziest hotels and one of the biggest suites that was there. He went out that night and ate with his kids and said I have to get away and I have to go upstairs. He went upstairs and he said, "You know what I bet is in this room. I bet that what is in this room is a Gideon Bible." He looked over to the side and there was a dresser and it had thirty-two drawers in it. He went through everyone of them until he found the Bible. He opened up the Gideon Bible and there he began to realize that he needed to give his heart and his life to Christ. He came down the next morning and the children said, "Dad, how was last night?" He said, "Last night was the most remarkable night in my life. Last night I began to realize that I needed to give my life to God. Last night I became a Christian."

I don't know what it is on your television channel but on mine it is channel 55. It is called the PAX network. The PAX network is Lowell Paxton. He said, "I want people to know that PAX means peace. I want people to know the peace that I have found. I want people to know the joy I have found in Christ. I want to be able to put wholesome television programs on that will be helpful to others." Lowell Paxton came to the point where his life went out underneath him. There was no where else to turn. He began to realize he had spent a life time trying to make money. He had lost his family in the process. In the darkness of that night, he gave his heart and his life to Christ.

The second lesson you will learn is that the person who was wrestling with Jacob, and most people think is was an angel, wresting with him, he said Jacob, I want you to tell me your name. The angel knew what his name was. His name was Jacob. Jacob said, "my name is Jacob." More than just what his mother called him, he wanted him to face up to what the name meant. The name meant that I have been a trickster and in his heart what the angel was trying to get the man to do was to face what was really wrong in his heart. He wanted him to face up to himself. That was very hard for Jacob to do. Jacob was very successful. He had always been able to make it, to get down to say this problem has been caused by me. The problem is my life, the problem is my heart, and one of the hardest things in the world for you to do is to get down on your knees and say "Dear God, I am a sinner. God, I have failed. God, the mess I am in is nobody's fault but mine." That is hard to do. I have entitled this story, "*The Magnificent Defeat*" because when you ever admit defeat, it can be one of the most remarkable changes in your life. You stop blaming others, you stop blaming the circumstances, you look in your own life and you say "Lord, it is me." Until you are willing to do that, there is no way God will be able to change you. Notice the last one. He turned to him and said, "Jacob, let me tell you what I want to do for you. I am going to so completely transform you that really what I am going to do is change your name. No longer will you be called Jacob, I am going to call you Israel. Israel means prince of God. When his mother saw him, she said, "You are going to be a cheat." When God saw him, He said, "You are going to be a prince."

The wonderful good news that I have to share with you, is that you can leave this place today with a different name, with a different character, with a different bent in your life, you can walk out of here so transformed by God that there is nothing to do but say you have a different name. Jacob didn't know all of what that experience was going to mean. I think you know Jacob, when he was changed to Israel, that is the name of a whole country of people. He didn't know that those twelve sons that he was going to have were going to be the descendants, the people, of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob never knew what God was going to do with his life.

You may not know what God is going to do with your life. You may not know that when God changes you, He has a purpose and a plan, a program for you that you never dreamed, what God is going to do through you. My what a difference it is going to make. This story has always meant a lot to me because I had a Jacob experience. I was a sophomore in college, I was a preacher's kid, who ran as fast as I could,

to get away from it. I began to look around at the people who were my friends. I already had friends, as a sophomore in college who had married and gotten divorced. I had friends who were having affairs. One of my best friends had already had a run-in with the law. One of my closest friends was already in prison. I began to realize that my life, if I kept going the same way I was going, I was going to end up in the same position. One day in a college dormitory, I got down on my knees and I said, "Dear God, I am a Jacob, there is no way out, I can't change me, I can't change my circumstances. If anything is going to happen, you are going to have to do it." That night God changed me from a Jacob to an Israel. I never knew that in a college dormitory forty years ago, that I would be standing in front of you today as a preacher. I never had any idea that I would do that. What I wanted to emphasize to you is, you never know what God is going to do with you. If you will let Him change you, He has a plan and a purpose for you that you never dreamed possible. That is the reason I always urge people to give their heart and their life to Christ. How important it is that you be able to do it.