
Find Salvation in Suffering (Genesis 28:10-17)
2/24/2018 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow



Where do you find God? It's a question that people have been asking since creation. Some people climbed to mountaintops in search of God. Monks and hermits hid away from society hoping to find God by their seclusion and pious thoughts. The crusaders went to war and to death hoping to find God there. Many have abandoned everything they knew to go in search for where God can be found.

Many Christians today, even folks that have been in church their whole lives feel like they are still missing God. Is he with you? Do you feel close to him? Have you found God? Today, as we look at the account of Jacob's ladder, we'll see that we don't find God, he finds us. And he finds us in places you wouldn't expect. Today, we see from God's Word that we Find Salvation in Suffering.

Where do you find God? Many believe God is with the really good people; the ones who are in church every week, or the people you can really rely on, or those who are out there feeding the hungry, helping the poor, caring for the sick! That's not true. Have you ever noticed how Jesus speaks the most condemnation to the Pharisees? They were the really good people! They were the people who were most sincere about their faith! They made certain that their actions, not just their thoughts and feelings, but their actions carefully followed the morality laid out in their beliefs. But by Jesus' words God was certainly not with those good people.

Many believe God is found with the people who are doing really well in life; the ones who are healthy and wealthy, who are living their dream lives and getting the most out of every second! That's not true either. Jesus tells the story of the rich man and poor Lazarus, where the poor beggar goes to heaven and the rich man goes to hell. God certainly was not with that rich man. So where, then, do you find God?

Let me introduce you to a man named Jacob. Jacob was born into quite the family. His grandfather was Abraham, a man who had literally walked and talked with God. Jacob's father, Isaac, was a miracle child born to Abraham when he was 100 years old! God was certainly with Jacob's family.

Nevertheless, it didn't always seem like that was the case. Great as Jacob's family was, they were still sinners. You see, Jacob's parents, Isaac and Rebekah, did

some horrible things as parents. They played favorites. Isaac always favored Esau and Rebekah always favored Jacob as they grew up. Instead of home being a place of rest and comfort, their home was a sort of battleground where Jacob knew he could never measure up in his father's eyes, he could never be as good as his brother Esau. Maybe some of you can imagine the constant struggle, disappointment, trying and failing that marked Jacob's life.

Bad as his family was, Jacob didn't really help things much. He more added to the chaos. Whether it was out of a sense of revenge or his own faulty sense of justice, Jacob multiple times found ways to get back at his brother and his father with lies, tricks, and deceptions. In fact, just before Genesis 28, Jacob had pulled his biggest lie yet, deceiving his old and possibly close to death father, and cheating his brother out of something very dear to him: Isaac's blessing.

Esau was rightfully furious at Jacob. He had put up with Jacob's nonsense in the past but this time Jacob had gone too far. Esau was ready to kill Jacob. This is where Genesis 28:10 starts, with Jacob running away from home to save his life from his brother. Jacob has nothing. Our reading has him with nothing but the dirt for a bed, his clothes for a blanket, and a rock for a pillow. Jacob is alone. He had to leave behind his family. Now he has to travel to some far off place and basically start a whole new life.

And the worst part of it all is: this is all his fault. If he hadn't wronged his father and brother, none of this would have happened. He would still have his family, still have the wealth of his father and his own work up to that point. Now he had nothing and no one.

Had Jacob even realized how bad a position he was in as he laid his head on that rock? Did he fear the dreams he would have as his mind dwelt on his father's disappointment, his mother's fears, his brother's rage, and the all too uncertain future ahead of him?

But Jacob didn't dream about any of those things. Instead, he dreamed of a stairway reaching from earth all the way up to heaven! But this was no ordinary dream because God himself then spoke to Jacob. God spoke to Jacob and renewed to him the generous promises that he had given to Abraham and to Isaac! Moreover, God promised to be with Jacob through everything he was about to face.

It's here that God chooses to show himself to Jacob. It's here that God comes to Jacob with his incredible promises. It wasn't when Jacob was safe and secure in his parents' home. It wasn't when Jacob was able to enjoy the fruits of all his work up to that point. It wasn't earlier in life, when Jacob was more innocent, before he had done all his deceitful and malicious backstabbing. It was precisely when Jacob's own sins had crushed him, had taken everything away from him, and had left him in despair and alone; it was this time that God came to Jacob.

You see, this is often how God works. He shows us our need before he provides for that need. With Jacob, God allowed his sin to show him just how backward and wrong he was, just how little control and hope he had and right then God came to him with his gracious promises.

If you don't see your need for God, then don't bother looking for him. You won't find him. If you're perfectly comfortable with your sinful self just like those Pharisees were, God has nothing to say to you; at least nothing good. If you're confident about the future to which your sinful ways are leading you like the rich man in Jesus' story, then God has no promises for you; at least no promises you'll want to hear.

But if you recognize your own sin, then open your eyes and look. If you feel the guilt and shame of doing what you know you shouldn't do and being who you know you shouldn't be, then open your ears and listen. If you are terrified of the future your sin will bring you, God has promises for you.

Did you notice what God said to Jacob? He showed him the dream with the stairway, then, when he spoke, he gave Jacob promises, promises that Jacob didn't deserve, but that God would graciously keep. In one of those promises, God said that all peoples on earth would be blessed through Jacob's offspring. That offspring that God promised has come and you are blessed through him. Through Jesus Christ, that blessed offspring who brings God's blessings, God reveals himself to you in a very similar way as he did to Jacob: he reveals himself through his promises.

For all your sins, everything that is wrong with you, all the ways you see that you have sabotaged your own life or hurt the people you love, God promises

forgiveness for those sins in Jesus' death on the cross. For the guilt and shame that comes with the realization that as evil as the world is around us, you have added to it by your sins and deceptions, God promises a clear conscience in Christ's perfect life. For the terrifying possibilities of what the future holds, God promises you hope; the hope of having God's power in your life to stop the evil that you are contributing to this world and instead to do some good with your life; the hope that no matter how bad things get God will be with you through them all until he brings you safely to your heavenly home.

Learn to look for God in the right places. Learn to Find Salvation in Suffering. What sane person would look to an innocent man cruelly put to death on a cross for hope? But through Christ's suffering, God brought salvation to the entire world. What religious person would expect God to appear to the chief of sinners? But after the suffering of seeing just how utterly sinful we are, God brings us salvation through the message of the gospel: that we are forgiven for Jesus' sake. What kind of person at all would look to the times of pain, fear, and hardship for growth and strength? But God uses our suffering to strengthen our faith in his promises of salvation.

The suffering will come. You and I live in a world corrupted by sin. There will be illnesses, accidents, and death. Other people will wrong us. As Christians we will face the added suffering of a constant battle with our sinful nature. In God's law, we will continue to see new ways that we have added to the evil in this world, new ways that we have hurt our fellow human beings.

Hold on to the gospel, because that forgiveness gives God's power to repent of our sins and instead live for good. Hold on to God's promises, especially in those hard times, because that is where God can be found.