

## “Altar’d - Freedom”

Scripture: Genesis 32:22-32; 33:18-20

Graphics: altar, fire, freedom, change

Big Truth: God calls us to surrender our control and demonstrate our commitment through obedience. Are you willing to commit only when it’s conditional, when it’s convenient, or when it’s on your own terms? Jesus walked toward the cross in full obedience without condition. Are we willing to let go of control in order to commit ourselves fully in obedience? Are we willing to fully surrender? Are we willing to have an undivided heart? Are we willing to surrender our past to embrace the God’s freedom for the future?

Focus Phrase: God calls us to surrender our past to receive His freedom.

### 1. Introduction

- A. **PRAY!** (Jesus, You are Lord...)
- B. I want to start a little differently this morning by diving into the scripture and then we’ll continue on in our series called Altar’d. This message is simply called *Freedom!*
- C. **READ Genesis 32:22-32; 33:18-20**
- D. Here’s what may seem to be a rhetorical question but: **Have you ever struggled with change?**
  - i. You want to go in a new direction, but something seems to hold you back.
  - ii. Maybe you want to live into a new calling, but your friends hold you back from changing.
  - iii. Or, maybe you want to have more peace in your life, but the same feelings of anxiety, and the same self-defeating thoughts, cycle through your mind.
  - iv. Or maybe your anger is like lava that bubbles underneath the surface waiting to erupt.
  - v. Or the chains of temptation seem to hold you so tightly.
  - vi. Or maybe your faith in Jesus is stagnant, and you want to be all in as a follower of Jesus...to not be someone who goes through the motions, but one who loves God wholeheartedly, and worships passionately.
- E. Can anyone relate?
- F. During this season of Lent, we’re intentionally meeting Jesus at the altar that we’re building in our lives so that he can change us.
- G. Remember our formula that says: **Space + Surrender = Shift**
- H. We’re making space FOR God and, as we surrender everything TO God, he will transform us from the inside out.
- I. This morning, are you reaching back for the past? Or are you reaching forward for change?

- J. Author Susan Kent says, “Sometimes we hold on to the past, and sometimes the past holds on to us.”
- K. Past decisions and mistakes can cling to us like road salt on a dirty car. Where we have traveled has taken its toll. Thankfully, the grace of God is available to make us new, and clean, and free. Who else loves going through the car wash on a sunny spring day?!
- L. Today’s altar comes to us by way of a person who struggled with change. His name was **Jacob**. Jacob was the grandson of Abraham, and the son of Isaac.
- M. If you're taking good notes, here’s our goal: **God calls us to surrender our past to receive His freedom.**
- N. God’s freedom from your past comes when you surrender it to God fully...and that allows God’s future for you to be lived IN freedom FOR Him.

## 2. Scripture

- A. Let’s talk about Jacob for a minute.
  - i. Even from birth, Jacob was known as a deceiver. In Genesis 25, we read about the birth of twins, Jacob and Esau, to Rebekah, Isaac’s wife.
  - ii. When Rebekah gave birth, in Genesis 25:25, “The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle, so they named him Esau. Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau’s heel, so he was named Jacob.”
  - iii. Jacob, the **heel grabber**, was born, grasping at the heel of his older twin brother, Esau, trying to take his place as the first born right from the start.
  - iv. Jacob, very early on, became known as a **deceiver**. When it was time for the boys to receive their father Isaac’s blessing, **Jacob lied** to his father about his identity.
  - v. In Genesis 27, with help from his mother, actually, Jacob lied to his father by claiming to be Esau, so he could steal the blessing and inheritance meant for the oldest male heir.
  - vi. That blessing, in that culture, was not just warm and fuzzy words. The blessing was a powerful moment when the father would speak words of encouragement and prophecy, to guide and propel the blessed person into their future with God’s help.
- B. One of the things that I felt God leading me to do when both my kids got married was to write a note of blessing to each of them. It was kind of a sappy Dad way to telling them how proud I was, giving some advice, and then simply expressing my love for them as they moved into that new chapter.
- C. Not only did that portray what I was hoping and praying for them in the future, but it also allowed me to begin to let go of the past in a healthy way. What **WAS**, would never be again. And giving that blessing was a way to release the past so that we all could embrace the future.

- D. When we go through change like that, we often think that our identity comes from where we've been in the past, who we've been in the past, what we've done in the past. We think what WAS is what will continue to give us our **identity**. That's just not the way God works. Jacob is a prime example.
- E. Jacob had a sin problem, but at the root of it, Jacob had an **identity problem**. And because of that he had a behavior problem.
- i. Jacob was a schemer, a liar, and found every way he could to get ahead. He was always lying and scheming to get HIS way. He was always presenting a false self.
  - ii. After Jacob cheated his brother out of his birthright, he had to leave his home to avoid his brother's wrath. Esau held a grudge and wanted to kill Jacob. So Jacob had to run.
  - iii. Jacob eventually got married and started a family. He became very wealthy.
  - iv. And by the time we get to our scripture today, lots of time had past. Yet, time, by itself, doesn't always heal the past. If we keep living out of the same false identity, nothing will ever change.
  - v. After a long time, Jacob was about to face his brother Esau. He sent word to his brother, that he had animals and servants he could give, if only he could find favor in his brother's eyes. He wanted to bargain with his brother, to avoid being killed. Can't blame him there.
  - vi. Jacob didn't want to confront his own sin. He wanted to avoid the consequences OF his sin. There's a big difference.
  - vii. Jacob was trying to escape the circumstances of his past, instead of surrendering his past. And there's a huge difference between wanting to avoid our past and ignore it, and being ready to surrender our pasts, no matter what.
- F. One way keeps you in bondage to the past...the other way brings freedom.
- G. Jacob was about to find out who he really was...and who this God that he claimed to serve wanted from him, while he was on the way to this confrontation with his brother, and with his past.
- i. Jacob sent his possessions on ahead of him to pacify Esau, and he was alone. But not really alone. He found himself wrestling with a God-like figure.
  - ii. Have you ever found yourself wrestling with thoughts in the middle of the night, tossing and turning, unable to shake the past?
  - iii. Genesis 32:24-26: "So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 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."

- iv. Jacob was holding onto God. And the moment of truth would come.
- v. Verse 27, The man asked him, “What is your name?”
- H. Did God know his name? Absolutely. Was God ready for Jacob to be open and honest about his real identity. For sure.
- I. So unlike when Jacob lied about his identity to his father Isaac, THIS time Jacob would not deceive or scheme.
- J. What is your name? “Jacob,” he answered.
- K. True life-change begins when we are truthful about who we are, where we’ve been, and what we’ve done.
- L. When we’re honest with God, we’re in a position to be transformed.**
- M. Jacob, the deceiver, the manipulator, the heel grabber, wrestled with God and the identity of his past. He’d lived his entire life putting his own desires first.
  - i. He wanted his father’s blessing, so he lied to get it.
  - ii. He wanted his brother’s inheritance, so he took it.
  - iii. He wanted Rachel as his wife, so he schemed to get her.
  - iv. Now, he wanted to be free of the burden of his sin against his brother, but he wouldn’t be able to get freedom on his own.
- N. He would have to put God first, place God’s will above his own will, and fully surrender himself, and his past, to the living God.
- O. When Jacob wrestled with God, his hip was wrenched. Jacob was brought to his knees, which is exactly where he needed to be.
- P. God calls us to surrender our past to receive His freedom.**
- Q. Then, as we read, God changed Jacob’s name to Israel. God gave him a NEW identity, which was freed from the past and ready for the future.
- R. In verse 28, God, said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.” “So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, ‘It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared’” (v. 30).
- S. In this sacred space, Jacob surrendered his past and his present. He surrendered his identity and God changed it.
- T. New identity. New place. New life of freedom from the past.
- U. Jacob had been carrying the **baggage** of his past, and the burden of shame and regret. But God was at work.
- V. After the wrestling match, Jacob did see his brother. And transformation and freedom began to take shape. Esau hugged his brother Jacob, and at that moment, Jacob was released from his past.

- W. And when Israel, now, got to where he was going, after reconciling with his brother, and being freed, when he got to Shēchem, “There he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel” (v. 20). El Elohe Israel means “the God of Israel.”
- X. That altar was a witness to the change in his life. He surrendered and gave God authority over his life - past, present, and future!
- Y. **God calls us to surrender our past to receive His freedom.**

### 3. Application

- A. When you surrender your past and trust Jesus to change you, you will experience the joy and freedom He wants to give you.
- B. Everything in your past that defines you apart from the grace and mercy of God through Jesus, in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, is a thing that God wants you to surrender today.
- C. The first step is to **stop running from your painful past**, hiding from your past sin, or pretending it’s no big deal.
  - i. Your past, like Jacob’s past, is known to God. Fully known. Nothing you’ve done is a surprise to God. And, honestly, it’s not a surprise to others in your life.
  - ii. What you’ve done, how you’ve done it, and your attempts to bury it, are impacting your relationships, your emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being, and it’s negatively impacting your witness for Christ.
  - iii. If you aren’t willing to stop running from it and stand before a holy God in repentance, then God will wrestle with you on the shores of the river.
  - iv. Turn and face it.
- D. And then, ask God how to **fully surrender your past on the altar**.
  - i. Getting to the place of surrender is the hard part.
  - ii. Jacob was not necessarily willing to fully surrender before God took him to his knees. He wanted to move on, but God needed him to know that Jacob wasn’t going to get there without a fight.
  - iii. Your past does NOT need to define you. The shame you feel over some action or circumstance does not need to define you.
  - iv. Jesus died on a cross for your past to be unchained from your present and future.
  - v. The place of surrender is the altar of the Lord. God is asking you, today, to bring that past that you think defines you, and lay it down on the altar today.
- E. Finally, once you’ve surrendered your past, **live in your true identity in Christ alone**.

- i. Are there any areas in your life, where you are presenting a false self? And what will it take to surrender that to the Lord - surrender the past - in order to experience freedom today?
- ii. When we deceive people in our lives, we break trust. We sin against God, and we sin against others.
- iii. Are you the same person in every situation? Living out of a false identity leads us down a pathway of lies and deceit, like Jacob.
- iv. God has created you to live in HIS identity. You are a born-again, Holy Spirit-filled, recreated, full of joy and peace, fully-surrendered and future-looking, hopeful and ready child of the King of Kings who is SO READY for you to tell the WORLD about his love and grace, no matter who it is, where they are, what they've done, or why they did it. You are FREE!

**F. God calls us to surrender our past to receive His freedom.**

**4. Conclusion**

- A. It's time to let go of the baggage that you've been carrying around...weighing you down.
- B. I said a few weeks ago that I'd probably invite us to the altar to surrender fully. I'm going to do that this morning, as we're getting ready to sing.
- C. The song is, O Come to the Altar...
- D. Are you hurting and broken within?  
Overwhelmed by the weight of your sin? Jesus is calling  
Have you come to the end of yourself?  
Do you thirst for a drink from the well? Jesus is calling  
Leave behind your regrets and mistakes  
Come today, there's no reason to wait Jesus is calling  
Bring your sorrows and trade them for joy  
From the ashes, a new life is born Jesus is calling  
O come to the altar The Father's arms are open wide  
Forgiveness was bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.
- E. As we sing this song...would you come? Would you look into your past, ask God what you've been carrying, and then lay it down - surrender it?
- F. Be Altar'd. Let's pray...**