Genesis Sermon Series (17)

**“The Further Journey”**

Genesis 31:1-3, 17-21/ May 1, 2022

**Journey of Life**

I left Korea at the age of 35 to go to Canada, then came to the United States at the age of 41, and I have lived here until now. It has been 21 years since I left my home country. When I left Korea, I didn't know that I would live abroad for such a long time. My family suffered a lot, having to settle in and live in an unfamiliar country. There were many twists and turns in my journey as a pastor, and I almost quit everything because of my illness. Looking back on my life since those days, I feel that my life journey is valuable because it is my unique path and is the precious journey I have taken.

What kind of life have you lived? Maybe your life wasn't that simple either. There will have been times of success and failure. There will have been happy moments and unhappy moments. You may still be struggling with various difficulties. No matter what kind of life you have lived, I hope you can love your life. Because your life is your unique path and the journey that you have taken is precious.

However, it is not enough to cherish and love the life we have lived. We have to go to the destination of our lives. We must stop wandering in places away from home and return to our original home. I am talking about a spiritual home, not a geographical one. Every human has an ‘instinct of spiritual homecoming.’ The instinct of spiritual homecoming is revealed more strongly in the second half of life, when we can look at our lives in a more contemplative way than we can in the first half of life, when we struggle to build an external platform for life.

According to Richard Rohr, who is a spiritual teacher, life is not a linear journey in one direction from birth to death, but a deeper journey that at some point turns into a more ultimate one. Most people continue their arduous journey until the second half of their lives with the values of ‘more, bigger, higher’ that they had in the first half of their lives. They do not realize that there is a deeper and more ultimate purpose in their life.

Metaphorically, the first half of life can be compared to living away from home, and the second half of life can be compared to returning home. Our lives are not about living away from home, but rather about returning home. We must begin a deeper and more beautiful journey from the first half of life to the second half of life. This is a journey that follows the instinct of spiritual homecoming within us and the way to realize the authentic goals in our lives. The story of Jacob illustrates this very well.

**Jacob’s Journey**

After leaving his father’s house, Jacob went to Paddan Aram and lived there, which was an unfamiliar land where his uncle Laban lived. Through ups and downs there, he finally got married and had many children. Having endured his difficult path, he earned a lot of money and laid a solid foundation for life. On that basis, he would have gone on to educate his children, buy a good car and house, play golf, travel abroad, and enjoy the rest of his life. This is the successful life that most people dream of.

But this is just a goal for the first half of life. We have a more authentic goal in our lives. We have to travel deeper into the second half of life toward that goal. Jacob was self-made in a strange land, had four wives and twelve sons, and was financially well off. He seems to have arrived at the destination of a successful life by all accounts. But one day God suddenly said to Jacob, **“Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives.” (31:3)**

God’s words, “Go back to the land of your fathers,” clearly show that that is not the destination of Jacob’s life journey. God asked Jacob, who thought he had achieved his goal in life, to start a further journey. This is similar to requests to Abraham who lived in Haran, to the Hebrews who lived as slaves in Egypt, to the Jews who were captured in Babylon, to all of us who have lived in the land of false selves. We must begin ‘the further journey’ that God is asking.

Then, what kind of journey is God’s request for the further journey, which is the journey of the second half of our lives, and the journey that accomplishes the true purpose of our lives? It is not a journey toward possession and achievement, but a journey to discover our true selves as a being unrelated to possession or achievement. It is not a journey to find the beautiful scenery outside, but a journey to find the beauty of being inside us. As Erich Fromm put it, it is not a journey to have, but a journey to be.

Before we go on this journey, there are things we need to do first. It is a ‘meeting with our naked selves’ that we have never met properly. What have we really been trying to get while living in pursuit of possessions and achievements? What is the fundamental source of our desires? Am I really who I think I am? If we do not notice and let go of the ‘false selves’ that dominate us, our journey is not a new one, and it cannot be a deeper one. It’s just an extension of the journey we’ve walked in the first half of our lives.

**Toward the Further Journey**

If you look closely, you can see that Jacob's living away from home was a journey to discover his shameful and false self. Jacob had deceived his father and run away to Paddan Aram, where his uncle Laban lived. Uncle Laban found at once that his nephew Jacob was a pretty useful worker, and in order to keep Jacob working for him for a long time, he deceived and tricked him for 21 years. Being thoroughly deceived by his uncle for long time, Jacob was forced to face himself, who had deceived his father.

Jacob was also the one who deceived his brother. Not only did he buy the birthright for a bowl of red stew, but he also stole the blessing his older brother should have received. Jacob went through something that caused him to look back painfully on how he had deceived his brother. As you know, Jacob loved Rachel, the younger daughter of Laban, but because of his uncle's trick, he married Leah, the older daughter. Jacob had to face the shame of deceiving his older brother by marrying the older daughter, not the younger one.

Jacob was the one who stole his father’s blessing. It was an incident that hurt not only his brother but also his father. When he left Laban's house with his whole family after hearing God's words to return home, Jacob found out that his wife Rahel had stolen the Teraphim, which is a household god, that his father-in-law cherished. Watching the theft committed by his beloved wife, Jacob once again had to look back painfully on how he had stolen his father's blessing.

Although I will deal with the story of wrestling at the Jabbok River separately in the next sermon, let me just share with you that this story shows very well what the last gateway to the further journey of returning home is. It is a grueling battle against the false self. The journey from the first half of life to the second half of life, which is the deeper and ultimate journey to the hometown of the soul, must face the false self and pass through the gateway of breaking the hip bones of the false self. Only then can we start a new journey with the new name of Israel.

Dear brothers and sisters, you should not keep traveling with the mindset of the first half of your life. You need to start a deeper and more ultimate journey suitable for the second half of your life. But it is possible not only when you are old and only after you have achieved some goals in life. If you want to achieve your ultimate purpose in life, if you want to become a deeper and more mature being, and if you want to live a happier and more valuable life, you have to start a deeper journey right now. I hope that you will be able to listen to the words of God who appeared to Jacob one day, **“Go back to the land of your fathers!” (31:3)**