

Yahweh Shammah: I Am There. I Will Never Leave You.

By Bobby Schuller

We're in a series, and if you haven't been following, it's no problem. We're in a series called I Am, in which we're talking about kind of the heavier stuff in the bible. Being a church where we kind of want to be available to people who aren't that religious, a lot of times I try and keep the sermons a bit lighter, but in this series I decided let's get some meat and potatoes. Let's learn the Bible and particularly the importance of a lot of the Old Testament.

And one of the main things I want to do is examine the names for God. He has many. I think there's over 40 in the Bible, and we're only going to do ten, and we're doing these ten, well, because I'm the one preaching and I just get to pick my favorite, and I think that's fair. No, they're the ones that mean the most to me.

The one we're going to talk about today is not super well known: Yahweh Shammah, or Jehovah Shammah, which quite literally means "I am there." Or we might say I am there for you. Whatever it is you're going through today, and if you're going through suffering, trials, challenges, God wants you to know you're not going through it alone. Not without Him, and not without loved ones. That no battle in your life do you have to face all by yourself. Feeling alone is a terrible feeling. Many of us can feel isolated in the midst of our challenges. We think, man, if

somebody knew what I was going through, somebody knew what I did, I would be a burden to them. They'd be embarrassed to be seen with me. They wouldn't respect me anymore. They would view me differently.

And so very often in life the challenges that we face, we feel as though we need to struggle with them alone. That we can't reach out to our friends and family, and sometimes we feel we can't reach out to God. Maybe you feel like you've disappointed God. And maybe you feel like God's abandoned you because of your mistakes, or because you've messed up, or because of your imperfections. And I want you to know today that everybody's imperfect, and everybody sins, and everybody makes mistakes, and everybody has regrets, and in spite of that, isn't God so good? He will never, ever leave you. And that's the thing He wants you to hear today. That as we go through the trials of life, and there will be many trials in life, we don't have to go it alone. We have people in our lives, and we have God in our life, and He will never, ever abandon you. Feeling alone in the midst of a struggle or a trial feels terrible. You don't have to feel that way. God is keeping you company. It's his name – Yahweh Shammah. I am there for you.

I know it's so easy when you are going through a trial, a valley, a hard time in life to feel alone. And I think that one of the main reasons we give up on those trials is because we feel alone. Because we think we have to carry that burden all by ourselves. So maybe God's put a dream in your heart or a promise in your heart and you've been living for that

dream, but its slowly been kind of dying because you feel alone. You feel isolated. And God wants to tell you don't give up your inheritance, don't give up your treasure and don't give up your promise for a little bit of comfort today. Or as we'll see in a moment, don't give up your birthright for a bowl of soup.

Your future is so bright and the only one who can give it up or lose it is you, and I know you won't. You're an awesome person. You're going to endure and you're going to get through this with God and with your friends. He says He'll never, ever leave you. Amen.

The story I'm looking at today is an awesome one. It's a story of two brothers who can't stand each other. Maybe you have siblings, little bit of a rivalry there. It's nothing compared to the story I'm about to tell you, I promise. Unless you've tried to kill your brother or your sister, I'm like well, there was this one time.

So we talked a couple weeks ago about Abraham and the promise that was given to Abraham, and God chose Abraham to bless the whole world. He wanted to make a new family, and out of this one family, He was going to bless everyone. And by the way, that's our family. We inherited that family. We are all, the scriptures say, the seed of Abraham. We all inherited Abraham's promise, and all of us, with all of our different backgrounds and creeds and colors, all of us are one family in God. And that promise went from Abraham then to his son Isaac, and today we're going to talk about that man. Isaac, as an old man, that

promise already begins to blossom in his life. As an old man, he's already super wealthy. He's got a lot of family members that are extended cousins and things. And he's got this big powerful tribe. And he's the chief. He's the guy. He's the man. And he has two sons with Rebekah.

Now Rebekah becomes pregnant with twins, and already inside her womb they're fighting. She can feel them, like get out of my way. You're getting me. I'm hitting you. And she asks the Lord, 'why is this happening to me?' And then she goes into labor. And as she goes into labor, the first son, Esau, he comes out and he's like a buff baby. Like he comes out of his mom and he's already, as a baby, covered in hair and he's red, and just gnarly and awesome. And he comes out and they say this baby is hairy. We will name him Harry. In fact that's what Esau means, the name Esau means hairy.

As they're pulling him out, he's coming all the way out and then attached to his foot is this hand, another baby's hand holding on. And they go that's baby number two. They deliver that baby, and they name him Ya'akov – Jacob, which means 'the one who grabs the heel'; literally, cause he grabbed his brother's heel on his way out. This word Jacob also means.. it's like an idiom, to say to grab someone's heel is to mean to deceive them. So it's a word play. He's called the one who grabs the heel, but the one who deceives. And we're going to see how that plays out later in the story.

But these two boys, they grow up hating each other. They're very different. Esau grows up hairy, buff, hunter, jock. He's out there hunting and killing things, eating things with his hands and all tough. And Jacob is a little bit of a wimp. You don't know, but you get this idea that he's hanging out around the tents a lot, he doesn't like to go hunting, he seems like a bit of an academic, maybe a thinker. Doesn't say much about him. And the two are just very different. They're ying and yang. It's the jock and the nerd. I picture Urkel; something like this when I picture Jacob.

And as happens sometimes, the two parents begin to favor either son. The dad favors Esau. Why? Not because he's tough and buff. The Bible says it's because he cooked good food. I don't know. Men thinking with their bellies, I guess. The mom, Rebekah, she loves Jacob. And so this rivalry continues to grow. Now in those days, Isaac the dad; again, it was super rich, very powerful, and he was the chief of the tribe. And he passes on his power to the firstborn son. Well who's the firstborn son when you have twins? Sorry Jacob, tough break. Tough break! Esau came out first, he's going to be the leader. And that inheritance is called the birthright. It's Esau's greatest treasure. I mean picture, like some trust fund kid in Newport Beach. He's going to inherit everything from his parents. And for Esau, that's what it's like. It's a huge inheritance and it's not only an inheritance, it's a sort of tribal power. He's going to become the chief.

So one day Esau's out there. He's like Gaston, you know? He's out there hunting and he's had a rough day, it's been raining, he's cold and he's coming in and he's starving. And he comes into the house, or into the tent or whatever it is, and there is little nerdy Jacob making a stew. We're just going to call it lobster bisque. He's making a delicious lobster bisque. Smells amazing. And Esau comes in and he's starving, and he says 'oh brother, can I please have a bowl of lobster bisque?' And here's Jacob, he's just looking at him, stirring, and he says something like 'well how bad do you want it?' He says 'brother, please, I'm starving, I'm going to die.'

And try and picture Moses telling this story, because as you read the Torah, whether or not Moses actually wrote the Torah is irrelevant. We're intended to read it as though Moses is telling the story because there's like a commentary. And Moses said Esau despised his birthright and for a bowl of soup, gave up all his inheritance, and his future power, and his worth and value in the community for a bowl of delicious lobster bisque. Must have been some good smelling soup. And Jacob then receives that birthright, and now through an oath, has upon himself, he will now become the chief of that tribe.

And the reason this story is important is because it's such a human story. All of us are kind of a little like Jacob and a little like Esau. We are like Esau in the way that we have this great thing in our future, but very often the present hunger that we have causes us to abandon

our future so we can have a little comfort now. Look, if you've done it, join the club. I have, too. And what I've seen in life, very often the hunger gets to us.

And what I want to say to you first this morning is stay hungry. Stay hungry. That this dream that God has put in your heart, stay brave and don't give up your future to be a little comfortable now. But rather, be willing to make the sacrifices, to take the steps, to have the late nights and to put in the hard work so that your dream really does come to pass. And many of us, maybe you struggle with addiction, to alcohol or drugs, and you find yourself Jones-ing. Don't give up your birthright for a little comfort now.

Maybe its debt or its spending money, or maybe there's that person; that girlfriend or boyfriend in your life, and you're tempted to go back to them because you feel lonely and you want to settle. Don't do it. Don't give up on the great future God has for you so you can feel a little bit of comfort now. Don't be like Esau thinking I'm starving, God, I'm starving. I need to eat something! Stay hungry and inherit your birthright because it's so good. And I know you will. I'm proud of you. You're doing great.

You won't be like Esau, you'll be like Jacob where you will inherit this birthright and despite the fact that people see you as weak or wimpy or not good enough, you will see your destiny fulfilled. So keep hope alive and stay hungry, and don't give up your birthright. It is so good. Can I

get an amen? I know we're not in the South, but man it sure feels like it when I get to preaching sometimes. I like the South. Don't give up your birthright. Jim Rohn said, "We must realize that we suffer one of two things in life: the pain of discipline and hard work, or the pain of regret and disappointment." You've got to choose.

So the story continues. Isaac is dying, the old rich dad. He's dying. He's in his bed and he calls his favorite son, Esau and he says 'son, come to me. I want to bless you.' And what he's saying is I want to pass on to you the blessing of Abraham that was given to me. 'But before I do that, go out and go hunting and bring back the animal and cook it for me and present it to me, and then I'm going to eat and then after I eat, I'll bless you.' Typical dad.

Rebekah, the mom, hears this and she pulls Jacob aside and she says, 'did you hear that? Your dad's about to bless your brother. That blessing is yours. So here's what we're going to do: while your brother Esau is off hunting, he's going to be gone for a few hours, go kill a goat. I'm going to make your dad's favorite meal. He's going to love it. And then you're going to take goat skin and put it on your arms.' Think about how hairy Esau must have been. 'You're going to take goat skin and put it on your arms so that your dad thinks you're your brother cause that's how hairy he is.' No? All right. I think it's gross.

So he does that, and he goes to his dad, who's at this point almost blind, and he says, in a very high pitched voice, 'dad, I want the

blessing.' And his dad says, 'you don't sound like Esau.' And he says, 'no dad, it's me.' I'm taking this too far. He says 'no dad, it's me.' And he says 'here I've got this great food for you.'

And he goes 'I need to know it's you. Let me see your hands.' And he gives him his hands, and he rubs his hands through his hairy goat skin and goes 'yep, that's Esau.' All right. And then he puts the blessing onto Jacob, meaning that the blessing that God put on Abraham, passed to Isaac, now goes not to Esau, but to Jacob. This is a very big deal because now Jacob is not only going to be the head of the community, he inherits the promise so that it comes through Jacob and not through Esau.

Esau comes back, finds out he's been deceived and tricked again, and he screams to heaven in a rage and decides he's going to murder his brother. And there goes Jacob, running away from his brother.

And here is what we need to learn from this story. First of all, I don't really condone the fact that Jacob deceived his dad. It's interesting how often the Bible shows that the blessing can go through imperfect people, not through the perfect. But even more important, the real message of the story is here's Jacob, he receives the blessing, but it hasn't been fulfilled yet. And there is this in-between of suffering. Because the Bible says he's running away from his brother, he's afraid and he's lying down in the wilderness with his head on a rock. Now I have a very comfortable My Pillow that I got from TV that is super comfy.

The idea of laying my head on a rock sounds terrible. And that's what the Bible wants you to see is that Jacob goes from being kind of a rich kid, to being out in the wilderness, all alone, afraid that his big burly brother's going to murder him with a knife. And so here he is wondering where is God's blessing?

And here's the second message for you today. Just because God has spoken a blessing over your life doesn't mean there won't be suffering between when it was spoken and when it will be fulfilled. I know that for me, every victory in my life came when the dream was put in my heart, or the idea was put in my heart, or the first step towards that dream was taken, and then it was like a deep valley and then a victory. For me it was the dream is in my heart, the blessing is spoken over my life, and then suffering, pain, sleepless nights, hard work, failure, failure, failure, failure, then a victory. And what we learn from the story is that just because God has given us the blessing doesn't mean it's going to be fulfilled right away.

And the other thing we learn is that when God speaks a blessing over you, you're not the only one who hears it. The enemy hears it, too, and instantly says I'm going to do my best to keep that promise from being fulfilled. And what God wants you to know is that the only one who can lose and give up that birthright, that promise, that blessing, that fulfillment is you.

When God speaks a blessing over you, and He already has, there will then be attacks, suffering, loss, deception, all sorts of challenges before you reach that next great mountaintop experience. So keep hope alive. It's in that moment there is Jacob, he's received the blessing, he's received the birthright, and he's sleeping with his head on a rock, afraid, alone, isolated, no friends, no mommy Rebekah, no anything, and a brother out to kill him, and it's there that God meets him in that deep, difficult place.

He allows Jacob to see something really special. He pulls back the veil, and Jacob sees this stairway to heaven. That's what it's called in the Bible. A stairway going up and down to heaven with angels ascending and descending; a very weird picture. And at the top is God. And God is speaking over Jacob: 'Jacob, you will be blessed, and you will be a blessing. I will make your name great and I will make your descendants outnumber all the stars in the sky and all the sand in the seashores.' I think he actually says all the dust of the earth won't outnumber your posterity. So there's just a tremendous blessing from God. It's a reminder that the blessing that was confirmed by his father really came from God, even though he sort of stole it. And God says over Jacob, 'I am Jehovah Shammah. I am there for you. I will never leave you. This promise will be fulfilled.'

And that's God's word over you today, friends. You wrestle with your imperfections. You think maybe I've lost my blessing because of the

mistakes I've made. Maybe you think God didn't say that blessing over me. That was just that crazy young pastor with the cool haircut. Thank you. Whatever it is. The blessing that was spoken over you is from God and you don't lose it by making mistakes or by being imperfect. You lose it by giving up. And we've all done that before. We've all given up in our past from time to time, but never again! Never again will you give up your birthright for a bowl of soup. Never again will you say in the midst of valley and the suffering God won't fulfill His promise. He will! He's with you, He's never forsaken you, He will never abandon you, and you are not alone, and that is very good news, and I can't wait to be with you when you cross that finish line. It's going to be awesome.

Jacob's ladder teaches us that when life stinks, God is still good, and that God's going to get us through it, and that He's going to help us endure that suffering. Cause God says I'll never leave you. And wherever God is, heaven is. And wherever God is, life and joy and blessing and favor are. God wants you to see what Jacob saw. That there's a whole heavenly world behind the scenes at work to make sure your destiny will come to pass.

So today, guess what. You can relax. Just don't give up. You can relax. Just keep one foot in front of the other. God will get you where He's called you to go. It's so important that we don't feel contempt in our hearts for stress because stress is good for you. Yes, I know, People Magazine told you stress was bad for you. No man, stress is good for you.

It is good for you. Now stress can become bad for you if you don't know how to handle it. But overall, science has actually shown us, and I think life has shown us, that stress is good for us. In fact, a Harvard business review said people who have a positive view of stress have a greater mental toughness, deeper relationships, heightened awareness, new perspectives, a sense of mastery, greater appreciation for life, deeper meaning and strength in priorities. I know when I see people who are trying to avoid stress in life, I'm seeing some of the most stressed out people I've ever seen. Because the irony of enduring stress is that it makes us stronger, and makes the stress less destructive in our lives. So stress, the most important thing about stress, is that we learn not to hold it too long, and we learn not to go it alone.

And so whatever stress you're going through in life, I know for me, very often I want to be a tough guy. I don't want to tell Hannah or my kids or my family or my friends that I'm hurting or that I'm suffering, I'm going through a hard time. Why? I don't want to be a bother to them. I don't want to push them away. Right? The thing is, when we are willing to be a little bit needy, we actually draw people to us. If you are worried about being too needy, let it go. If you never worry about being too needy, you might want to back it up a little bit. But if you're like me, and you're really worried I don't want to share my heart, I don't want to share my stresses, I don't want to share my struggles, I don't want to burden them, I don't want to weigh them down, I'll figure this out, it'll be fine, get that

self talk out of your head and learn that needing someone is a blessing. Needing someone is an opportunity to bond deeply with them. And every study shows and Christianity teaches that when we bond deeply with other people, that's when we get the most life and joy and satisfaction out of life.

So if you're stressing about something or suffering, don't go it alone. You're not alone. Don't go it alone without God, and don't go it alone without your friends. Maybe because you're missing a terribly awesome opportunity to bond deeply with the people who need you, and to tap into an incredible source of energy, joy and life, which is having good, good relationships.

Needing someone is a blessing. Suffering and stress can be a blessing if we allow adversity to draw us closer to God and closer to people. To bond deeply with others.

There's a great African proverb that says "if you want to go quickly, go alone, but if you want to go far, go with friends." And that's right, man. When it comes to life, God has given you this big promise. The bigger it is, the longer it will take to be fulfilled. And if you're going a long way, you cannot go alone. You need friends, you need family and you need the Lord. And He wants you to know He will never, ever leave you. He'll never forsake you and He'll never abandon you, and that's very good news.

Let's pray: Thank you, God. Thank you. You're so good to us. Lord, we bring all of our trials, and our regrets, our sins, our losses, our bills, all of our challenges, we just bring them to you. You provide everything. We've never been without because of you. You've never abandoned us. You've gotten us this far.

And so Lord, I just pray a blessing over everyone under the sound of my voice that they will hold deep in their hearts the blessing of Abraham and the blessing of Scripture that they'll be above and not beneath, the head and not the tail. That they will be the victors and not victims. That they will be satisfied and over comers. That they are called and loved. That they belong, despite their imperfections. They're forgiven, chosen, blessed and destined for salvation. And Lord we thank you, it's in Jesus' amen we pray, amen.