

Jacob's Ladder- The Dream That Became a Reality.

Text: Gen 28:10-22

Suggested Hymns:

347, 363, 398, 393, 396

1) The Aloneness Of Man

2) The Pervading Presence Of Our Loving God

3) The Response Of Worship And Life

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Genesis 28:10–22, ¹⁰ *Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep.*

¹² *Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: “I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.*

¹⁴ *Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*

¹⁵ *Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.” ¹⁶ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.” ¹⁷ And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!”*

¹⁸ *Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. ¹⁹ And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously.*

²⁰ *Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, ²¹ so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. ²² And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God’s house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.” (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The household of Isaac was in turmoil. Mother¹ and son² had teamed up to deceive the aged father, and the older son Esau hated his twin brother enough to kill him. At this point God once again intervened. He overruled the petty plans of man so that His good purpose was served.

Before continuing the narrative of Jacob's journey to his relatives in Aram, the Lord through Moses tells us something about Esau. This once again illustrates Esau's spiritual dullness. Apparently he had not realised how unacceptable his two Canaanite wives were to his parents since he had learned that Jacob had been sent to his mother's relatives to find a proper wife.

So, in a belated attempt to win his father's goodwill, Esau took a third wife, a daughter of Ishmael, from a branch of Abraham's family that was not only outside of the promise, but actually hostile to it. Esau's action helps us to understand why God did not use Esau in His plan.

That is a lesson for our youth today. Marry someone of the same faith!

Part of God's training program for Jacob was to help him, firstly - to put down his sinful nature, his inclination to deceive, and to seek his own advantage at the expense of others. God let Jacob experience the results of the treachery he had perpetrated on his father.

Jacob had to learn the hard way. He had to leave his home. He was forced to run for his life — and with a guilty conscience, at that. It is not an easy way to leave one's childhood home and family.

But another part of God's training program for Jacob was secondly - to teach him that he could trust God's promises. Instead of informing Jacob that his dishonesty disqualified him from being the heir of the messianic promises, God let him hear those promises again — first from the lips of his aged father, and then directly from the lips of God.

The theme for today is *Jacob's dream - The Dream That Became a Reality*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Aloneness Of Man

Jacob By Himself.

Picture his situation. Jacob was leaving home for the first time in his young life. This in itself, as you might recall from your own personal experience, can be somewhat of a traumatic experience. The situation, however, was filled with additional complexities.

At his father's instruction, Jacob was travelling back to the home of his mother's relatives for the purpose of finding a wife. He had just received the blessing of his father, indicating that he would be the one through whom God would pass along the promise of the Saviour, and it was important that he find a wife whose faith would be in harmony with his.

Besides this, Jacob had incurred the wrath of his brother Esau, who was in such a rage that he contemplated murder. To top it all off, Jacob's aged father, Isaac, was seemingly near death.

This is the background as we join Jacob, who is about to spend one of his first nights away from home. He is all by himself, separated from family and friends. He is all by himself, with the ground for a bed, and a stone for a pillow. He is all by himself, with the fears of the past and the uncertainty of the future crowding in around him on every side.

Our Feelings Of Loneliness

We also may have had feelings of loneliness. This helps us to understand how Jacob must have felt at that time. There may have been times when we too have experienced this feeling of complete and utter aloneness.

Perhaps when we were in the confines of a hospital room, awaiting the cutting edge of the surgeon's knife the next morning. Perhaps it was the time when the children were sick, your husband was gone, and a feeling of frustration and inability to cope with the situation was piling up inside you.

Perhaps you've experienced the feeling we read about in psychological reports, a sense of aloneness even when one is surrounded by people on all sides.

Of course, one might say, that the Christian should know that he is always accompanied by the presence of God, that he is never separated from his heavenly Father. However, we could reply by saying that there is a feeling

common to all human beings which can serve to blot out even the awareness of God's presence.

It is the feeling of guilt over some past sin or sins, the deep-rooted idea that one has cut himself off from God's presence and favour by some action that was contrary to His will.

If such is the case, it's altogether possible that one might feel more comfortable with the thought that God was not present. The presence of God, under such conditions, can be a very disturbing thing.

2. The Pervading Presence Of Our Loving God Revealed In A Dream To Jacob

In our text the presence of God was revealed to Jacob in a dream. In addition to his trials and anxieties which we have mentioned, it's very possible that Jacob was also plagued by the voice of an uneasy, guilt-ridden conscience. After all, his dealings with his father and his brother had not been exactly on the up and up.

But in spite of this, Jacob was not by himself. He was surrounded by the pervading presence of a loving, heavenly Father, a God who wanted Jacob to know the reality of His merciful, forgiving presence.

And so we come to Jacob's dream, the dream in which he envisioned a ladder stretching from earth to heaven while the angels of God ascended and descended upon it. Let us take note that God chose to reveal Himself to Jacob in this way at this particular time.

The dream conveyed to Jacob the idea that there is communication between heaven and earth, between the human and the divine, between God and Jacob.

He saw a stairway reaching from where he was into heaven. On the stairway angels were ascending, carrying Jacob's needs and requests to God, as well as descending, returning with God's help and assurance.

It is interesting to note that the Lord Jesus compared himself to the stairway Jacob saw.³ In Jesus Christ, God built a bridge on which He comes to us and on which we can return to Him.

The climax of Jacob's dream came when the Lord Himself stood at the top of the heavenly stairway and repeated to Jacob the promises originally given to his grandfather Abraham.

The very promises that Jacob had tricked his father into giving him, he now heard from the lips of God. Here was no deception. Jacob was to know where he stood with God. God considered him a child — weak and sinful, but reconciled to God!

God promised Jacob that his descendants would be numerous, that they would inherit the land, and that through their one great Descendant all nations on earth would be blessed. And to the lonely, frightened traveller God added one more promise: ***“I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.”***

This made it clear to Jacob that he was not completely alone, but that God was with him every step of the way. And the words which God spoke served to underscore and supplement this truth, for God repeated to Jacob the blessing of the covenant first made with Abraham and then with Isaac.

Listen as God speaks to Jacob: ***“I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.***

¹⁴ Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your Seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

¹⁵ Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.”

In this way God chose to assure Jacob of His forgiving, protecting presence, both for him and for his future descendants. For God's words, ***“In your Seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed,”*** were a specific prophecy that one day the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, would be born and include Jacob in His ancestry.

Revealed Through Christ to Us

This event in the life of Jacob, in which God assured him of His presence and blessing, is not simply an isolated act that has no relevance or meaning for us. In many ways, as we have seen, you and I are not at all unlike Jacob. We too are beset with feelings of loneliness and guilt, just as he was.

But just as God assured him of His forgiving and protective presence, so He has done the same for us. Not in a dream, but in the living revelation of His Son, Jesus Christ. It was Christ who referred to Himself as the fulfilment of the ladder which Jacob envisioned in his dream, the ladder that stretched from earth to heaven. So it is the cross of Christ which serves as the ladder that bridges the gulf between heaven and earth, God and man.

The blueprints for the construction of this ladder of reconciliation between God and man were drawn in heaven, but the foot of the ladder was placed on earth, in the midst of men. For only as God came down to earth to live and suffer and die among men could they grasp the reality of His love for them.

The top of the ladder reached to heaven itself. For it was Jesus Christ, true man and true God, who died on it. And He did so that men might have a way to attain the height of heaven through faith in Him. He died on the cross that the abyss of sin might be bridged. He shed His blood that there might be forgiveness for our guilt, that we might enter into union with our heavenly Father.

There is even more! When Jesus died on the cross, He was completely forsaken by God. He was forsaken, however, in order that we might never be forsaken. He was alone in order that we might never be alone. It is our Saviour, the Seed of Jacob, Jesus Christ, who assures us that in every circumstance of life we are continuously and completely surrounded by the living presence of a compassionate, forgiving, loving, merciful, and gracious God.

3. The Response Of Worship And Life

Jacob's Response to God's Presence at Bethel

How do we respond to this tremendous revelation of God's presence in Christ? What is our reaction to this great love whereby God has made it possible for us to join together in full fellowship with Him? How did Jacob respond? What was his reaction?

At first Jacob was afraid, and that certainly seems to be normal. It would take a pretty callous person, to put it mildly, to react in any other way when suddenly confronted by the presence of God Himself. This fear, however, soon gave way to a feeling of awe and reverence and worship.

Listen to the text: ¹⁶ *Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.”* ¹⁷ *And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!”*

Jacob’s first reaction was the response of an act of worship, and so greatly was he impressed by the sense of God’s presence that he used the name Bethel, which means *“the house of God.”*

This single act, however, did not fulfil his desire to fellowship with God. He went on to make a vow that pertained to the making of his entire life a daily liturgy of praise and thanksgiving to God. And he determined to express this praise in a most practical way by pledging to give the Lord a tenth of all that he would possess throughout the years.

Jacob’s vow was not made in the spirit of monetary or selfish gain, nor did he intend it as a tool by means of which he hoped to pry additional bargains from the Lord. It was the sign of a growing faith that trusted God’s promises and sought to react with deeds of love.

Our Response to God’s Presence in Christ

What an example Jacob sets for us in terms of our worship life and our life of worship! He shows us the relationship between this Sunday morning hour of worship and the living of our daily lives to the Lord.

As Jacob was not satisfied to express his faith and love in a momentary act of worship, so we too must throw aside the idea that one hour in God’s house is in some magical way the sum and substance of Christian living.

This is not to say that the worship of God is unimportant. It is extremely important, for God Himself desires it. And the person who lives in fellowship with God will want to express his faith in the response of worship.

We must go further. As Jacob chose to dedicate his entire life —body, soul, and mind —to the Lord, we must endeavour to do the same. For this too is what

God wants. Indeed, this is what He did for us. He gave Himself willingly, completely, totally for us that we might be enabled to give ourselves willingly, completely, totally to Him.

God lives! He lives to love us, to share Himself with us, and to bless us with His abiding presence. This is not a dream. Through Jesus Christ it is the greatest reality of life. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Rebekah

² Jacob

³ John 1:51