

July 29 – Intro to the Jacob story and the significance of Jacob’s vision (Gen 28:10-22)

SK: For many years, I wondered why there was so much written about Jacob. His life is not the stuff of best selling, inspirational, heroic material. It is the story of a true life in the raw – unfiltered and unpretentious.

Introduction (Based on material from Pastor Brian Morgan, PBCC)

We are blessed to travel through all the stages of Jacob’s life. To our surprise, we find God is with Jacob in every aspect of his journey. **The Bible is not an instruction manual that contains principles of spirituality. It is a story about God in search of humankind and his progressive establishment of his kingdom on earth.** The amazing attribute that we learn about God is that he condescends to come right into the midst of our mundane, messy world: home, work, strife, and all the stresses of life.

There are a few special epiphanies of a ladder descending from heaven, and an all-night wrestling match with the Angel of the Lord, but most of Jacob’s life is full of everyday stuff: in the womb (Rebekah), at the dinner table (with Esau), in the home (with Isaac), out in the field (the angel of God), by a well (Rachel), in a tent (Leah), by the farm feeding trough (Laban), beside a brook (the Angel of the Lord), in a pagan city (Dinah), in a foreign prison and palace (Joseph), through a pagan friendship (Judah), in the face of prostitute who acted righteously (Tamar), and on a death-bed (Ephraim). We find that God met Jacob at home and abroad, at work and at play, in company and in solitude – much as he does with each of us.

In the book of Genesis, we learn more about Jacob than Abraham and Isaac put together.

- Jacob is the first lover, in the Bible – love as an all consuming passion.
- First worker – daily expenditure of labor is actually described in all its toilsome agony, and breathtaking creativity
- First entrepreneur – exercise of faith in the workplace to envision, to invent, and implement.
- First dreamer – whose night-time visions are explicitly described.
- His is the first intimate details of a deathbed experience
- The first to reveal his last will and testament

Jacob’s story is universal because it is so personal.

- He grows up with an emotionally distant father
- He is deeply bonded with his mother
- Family is fragmented and messy (not idyllic)
- His parent’s marriage began in love, but grew emotionally distant from each other, each parent sought intimacy and solace through their favorite child.
- More communications through the children, than between his parents
- Over-powering/competitive brother
- Wives that he can not please
- Manipulative & deceiving father-in-law (Laban)
- Children alienated from one another

This is the stuff of real life, even our very own life stripped of external posturing. It is in this messy complexity of family life that Jacob's own identity, his vocation, and his spirituality are formed, forged and hammered in the heat of everyday life. We are so privileged to hear every detail from whispers in the honeymoon tent to panic prayers on the eve of a fateful rendezvous. But most important we get inside Jacob himself to discover what make him who he is – a perspective that only God could give to us.

What is the driving force in Jacob's life: It is the desire to know the blessing of God. (Esau cared very little about this). The pursuit of blessing is the engine of faith in the story, and is the prize, that is contested at every level. To get this, Jacob "takes on God;" He does not wait passively. The intensity with which Jacob seeks the blessing of God makes him truly a God wrestler. He hounds God, even tries to "hustle" God. In the end it is his new name by which the nation will be called, and the process by which *Jacob* ("heal-graber") becomes *Israel* ("he who prevails with God")

Jacob's dream/vision at Bethel – Gen. 28:10-22

We learn several important spiritual concepts through this story.

- Primacy of God's election
- How can we find God and his will for our lives?
- Insight into God's plan of salvation

Genesis 28:10-22 ¹⁰ Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. ¹¹ When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep.

Where is Jacob? He is in a no place. It is dark and he is alone in the wilderness – a very dangerous place to be when you are by yourself. We find out later, all he has is a staff. For some reason, Isaac has not sent Jacob off with anything. Therefore, he has nothing to offer the "bride's price" (dowry) and is forced to work for that right. As Bruce Waltke eloquently states, "The security of the sun has been replaced by the dangers of the night. The comfort of his parent's tent has been replaced by a rock. Behind him lays Beersheba, where Esau wants to kill him; ahead of him is Haran, where Laban waits to exploit him. **He is situated between a death camp and a hard-labor camp (20 yrs.)**

Yet, in this reality, in this "no place," he will have a vital encounter with the one true God, the God of his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham that would forever impact his life.

The dream (not Jacob's ladder)

¹² He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "**I am** the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. **I will** give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. ¹⁴ **Your descendants will be** like the dust of the earth, and **you will** spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. **All peoples on earth will be blessed** through you and your offspring. ¹⁵ **I am** with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and **I will** bring you back to this land. **I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.**"

- God’s revelation requires no scheming from Jacob. It is initiated by God and not by anything the Jacob does to deserve this. This is God’s Election.
- The term for stairway (sullam) is more likely to represent the steps of a ziggurat, rather than a ladder.
- The vision confirms Isaac’s blessing of Jacob (Gen 28:3-4)
- The promise to Abraham is escalated to “dust of the earth” from “stars in the sky.”
- God will unconditionally stay with Jacob until His work is done.

¹⁶ When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." ¹⁷ He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." ¹⁸ Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. ¹⁹ He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

- A “no place” becomes the “house of God” (*Bethel*). Later it became Luz – a significant Canaanite city. God did not want the Israelites to be distracted. To the righteous, un-holy ground and even a “no place” can become Holy ground when God chooses to intervene. It happens at his good pleasure. My personal experience in Jerusalem – I thought I would feel more of a connection with Jesus in Jerusalem. In reality, I found a greater connection with Jesus through his Word and in my heart. The main thought that came to my mind was, “Jesus is not here! The tomb is empty!”

²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear ²¹ so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God ²² and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth."

- Jacob recognizes the incredible presence of the divine and has the spiritual sensitivity to respond with passion and humility.
- This statement reveals Jacob’s relative spiritual immaturity, and yet the scriptures do not have a negative tone to Jacob’s comment. From God’s perspective, this was an important growth step for Jacob in his transformation. Thankfully, God does not compare us to others, but deals with us as we are.
- This is the longest vow in the Old Testament.
- God’s promise and Jacob’s vow turn this desolate “stony” place into a sanctuary.
- Later Jacob is slow in keeping his vow to return to Bethel – stays too long at Shechem to his family’s detriment.
- Jacob’s promise to give a tithe is a transformation. He is no longer a grasper, but promises to be a “giver.”

- Primacy of God's Election:
 1. It is based on God's sovereign choice, rather than our efforts or desires. It is his mercy, grace, and love that a contact between heaven and earth is possible. Later we learn the depths that God was willing to God to save man – to sacrifice his only begotten Son.
 2. Contrast the prayer-less patriarch (Jacob) and the prayerful servant (Eliezer – faithful servant of Abraham). Yet God Elected Isaac and Jacob.

- How can we find God and his will for our lives?
 1. The Church can not gain its significance from becoming a worldly place like Luz. **Philippians 3:7-11** ⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

 2. We must believe and trust his word. We should be as diligent as we can, but understand that ultimately everything rests in God's hands. As Christians today, we need to be "filled with" or "controlled" by the Spirit (Eph. 5:18b)

- Insight into God's plan of salvation:
 1. God revealed to Jacob that the pathway to heaven would be initiated by God and not by man. In contrast to the "Tower of Babel" that men toiled for in their ridiculous quest to reach out to God, God reveals to Jacob that the pathway to heaven would be made by God himself.

 2. God's presence in our life does not entail a life of ease but a life of hardship through which the saint is perfected. Jacob describes his 21 years in exile, even while God was with him, as a time when he experienced extreme physical affliction and was wronged endlessly by Laban (Gen 31: 38-42) Waltke, "If God rewarded our virtue immediately by alleviating suffering, we would confound morality with pleasure. We would use God for our selfish indulgences (doing good to get good), not on pleasing God by serving the community. By gapping reward from virtue, God allows the saint to develop spiritual graces such as faith, perseverance, character, and hope. Hence the saint glories in tribulation (Rom 5:3; 1 Peter 2:20-23; 3:8-22)."

 3. Bethel, the gate of God, typifies the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:47-51), who is the only mediator between God and men (1 Tim 2:5), who gives "access to the Father by one Spirit" (Eph. 2:18), and "who sends his angels as ministering spirits "to serve those who will inherit salvation." (Heb. 1:14)