

Genesis 28: 10-22 Pursuing Grace 7/29/18

Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. ¹² And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! ¹³ And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. ¹⁴ Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth 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 promised 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 So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹ He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first. ²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, ²¹ so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, ²² and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you."

(Pastor prays)

There is no loneliness like that of a guilty conscience and a broken family. Words get said, hearts get broken and bitterness sets in. Family pain is a peculiar kind of hurt. It's hard to shake and feels impossible to cure. That has to be how Jacob felt. Genesis 27 is about a family being torn apart, and Chapter 28 brings the camera angle down on one guilt-ridden member of that disintegrating family: Jacob.

Jacob is less a victim than he is a problem. He's a bad person, but even bad people hurt. When we pick him up in verse 10, he is on a lonely journey from home. He's got no friends, he's got no wife and really no future. He left his father's house and his father

God in disgrace. He won't ever see his mother again. He's supposed to be headed to his uncle's. Who knows how that is going to turn out? He's on the run from a dark place. He's done some things like some of you. He's done some things he's not proud of, and the only thing he knows to do is run.

This story is not so much for the victims sitting here today. This story is for those who cause the pain: the liars, cheaters and pretenders. You keep running and you keep losing. But more than being about Jacob, this story is about God and His electing gracious love...His pursuing love, a love that not only comforts the hurting people, His love pursues bad, hard and hateful people just like Jacob.

This story is a supreme picture of God's grace found in Jesus Christ. With the pain and hurt (that you have caused) and with the pain and hurt behind you and uncertainty in front of you, God has come to meet you. He has come to cleanse and forgive and restore you in the name of Jesus. This story becomes a defining moment for Jacob, and this day can be a day of change for you.

Last week I used a song lyric.

Our Sins They are Many, His Grace is More

Let's get to the story. Look at him there, he's had a hard trip, he's got a guilty conscience and he's lying on an uncomfortable bed. The first thing we see is...

God Loves Bottom Dwellers

And that is just what Jacob is at this point. See him there in verses 10-11. *Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran.* Left home. Esau is seething behind him and he's just running, but he can't outrun the sun. In verse 11, the sun is going down and he's nowhere. Night has caught him like Judas Iscariot when he betrayed Jesus. The Gospel of John tells us that Judas went out and it was night. This sunset marks the beginning of Jacob's dark journey.

Don't romanticize Jacob yet just because you know how it ends. He's not thinking of God. He's thinking of survival. But even still, God is thinking of him. Look at Jacob there in verse 11. *And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep.* He's not even in a town. He lay down to sleep and put a rock under his head for a pillow. How uncomfortable. No sleep number, no memory

foam here, no body pillow for your joints. It's hard ground and a rock for a pillow. That's what sin has brought him – darkness and hardness. Nothing is going right for Jacob. His brother hates him, his mother mourns him and his father doubts him. He's homeless, helpless, landless, directionless, sightless and witless, and God is grinding him down to get him ready for grace.

What's it going to take for you? What will God need to do to you to put you flat so that all you can do is look to Him? To see Him there, see Jesus hanging on the cross, arms stretched out, taking the punishment so that sinners can quit running? Maybe you've been addicted to pornography or strung out on drugs or drunk with anger or just filled with pride. Our God is working in the pain of your life to turn your face to Jesus. God loves the bottom dwellers.

Most Of Life Is Not About You

It's about God and His glory. Let's join the story. Jacob's asleep and has a vision. There was no Bible. That's how God spoke. Listen and see that this vision is not centered on Jacob and all his hang-ups. Let's read verses 12-14 and let me point out some things and then maybe apply them.

And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! ¹³ And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. ¹⁴ Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

A ladder, stairway. This vision is getting Jacob's eyes off the low things of earth and getting his eyes on God. This is Jacob's first encounter with God. He always wanted blessings but never wanted God. Here is a ladder, a stairway. This is not the first stairway to Heaven. In Genesis 11, all the people of earth gathered together and used all their ingenuity to build a tower to Heaven, trying to work their way into Heaven— and God destroyed it because all our works are like filthy rags. Instead, God is making the stairway. God takes the initiative. Jacob wasn't seeking God. He was a liar and cheat and a deceiver. He even used God. This encounter with God was unsought, unexpected,

undeserved and unearned. Jacob had done nothing in life to deserve God's favor. All he was looking for was a place to lay his head on his journey. And what the people of Babel strived for and worked for in vain, Jacob was graciously given.

It's important to notice that Jacob didn't come to *God*. *God* came to Jacob. He came to bless a man who deserved no blessing, a man who was on the run, a man who couldn't go home, a man who wasn't seeking Him.

God found *you* when there wasn't anything good or attractive about you. That's grace. This isn't about Jacob's virtue or potential. This is about God's goodness. What about the ladder in verse 12. What was it? Well God is holy and man is a sinner and there is no way to get to God unless He provides a way.

I want you to read verse 12 again and now draw a straight line to John 1:51 when Jesus called Nathaniel. Look what he says. *And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."* Jesus is saying, I am Jacob's ladder. I lay down my life on the cross in place of sinners so that all who believe in me can see God. God's grace is fully seen in Jesus Christ, His life lived perfectly with a righteous nature and an earned righteousness, and then takes our sin and gives us His righteousness so that everyone who repents and believes is delivered across Jacob's ladder.

Notice now the promises in verse 13-14. I need to move quickly. Verses 13 -14 are the same promises made to Abraham and Isaac. This is basically saying I do not change. And the end of verse 14 is the Messianic prophecy that people from every tongue and tribe and nation will be blessed and saved in Christ. Those were the general promises. Now in verse 15, God makes specific promises to Jacob that are ours when we are in Christ. They are all right there in verse 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 promised you."*

I am with you. I am with you when you are threatened. I am with you in your tragedy. I am with you when you are trying to get away from me. This promise right here upholds all other promises. In Christ, you are never alone.

I will keep you wherever you go. Keep guard, protect, watch over. What does the Psalmist say in Psalm 91:1-2?

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.*

*² I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."*

I will bring you back to the land. God promises him a homecoming. Every person who dies in Christ is promised the Glory of Heaven, a homecoming. God shows himself to Jacob like He's shown himself to you in Christ, so that on judgment day you are without excuse.

Let me show you some of Jacob's responses. He woke up and realized God was doing something in his life. Wake up and see.

He quit playing in verse 17. He was afraid. Maybe for the first time Jacob is actually coming to grips with the fact that he's a sinner in the presence of God. The first step is seeing your need and sin.

He realized the significance in verse 18. He built a pillar in remembrance of this day. We do it with The Lord's supper. We feed our souls by remembering what Christ has done for us at the cross.

He made a commitment. In verse 20-21 is the longest vow in the Old Testament. In his vow, he simply recites what God has said. And trusts in what God has revealed about Himself. God, in His grace has revealed Himself in Christ and there is no other name given under Heaven by which we must be saved. Today, I'm asking you, like Jacob, to turn from your sin and, by faith, turn to Christ.

(Pastor prays)