

**Genesis 35:1-15**  
**How Great is Our God**  
**8/19/18**

*God said to Jacob, “Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.”<sup>2</sup> So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments.”<sup>3</sup> Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.”<sup>4</sup> So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem.*

*<sup>5</sup>And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. <sup>6</sup>And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, <sup>7</sup>and there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother. <sup>8</sup>And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So he called its name Allon-bacuth.*

*<sup>9</sup>God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. <sup>10</sup>And God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.” So he called his name Israel. <sup>11</sup>And God said to him, “I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. <sup>12</sup>The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you.” <sup>13</sup>Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him. <sup>14</sup>And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it and poured oil on it. <sup>15</sup>So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.*

(Pastor prays)

When we meet Jacob again in chapter 35, he's just coming out of the toughest year of his life. It's back in chapter 34. It's a twisted and complicated tale. It's fitting that in chapter 34 God is never mentioned, because it sure feels like he's not there.

Remember, Jacob made a vow back in chapter 28 (when he was running from Esau) that, if God would protect him, then Jacob would serve God. God kept His promise, but

Jacob is a lot like most people: once the crisis was gone and the passing of time and the fact that he had money sanded down the sharp edge of his intensity.

Back in chapter 33, near the end up to chapter, he makes a good *financial* decision that was a horrible *spiritual* decision. Like Lot, Jacob is living where he shouldn't be living. And something horrific happens. His only daughter Dinah (you know he has all sons and only one daughter) is doted on by her brothers. She was off with some girls from the community and a spoiled rich boy saw her, wanted her, took her and raped her. It's a terrible thing. It knocked Jacob off his footing. He lost his equilibrium and he hesitated. But not his sons.

When they heard of it, they wanted blood and through deception and trickery they got it. They killed every man in that town and stole all the money. Remember Jacob and his family are foreigners and Jacob knows that on top of his heartache and his daughter's anguish, he is in now in danger of being attacked again. Chapter 34 is painful and confusing and depressing. In chapter 34, there is no God, and it feels like no hope. And some of you came in today with your own version of chapter 34, and I want you to walk out of here hoping in the God of chapter 35. When you've spent some time in chapter 34 without God, the God of chapter 35, the God of Bethel, is calling you home.

## **There is No Hope Like Real Hope in Our Good God**

Let's take the Bible and look at God.

### **Our God is the God Who Calls**

After all he's been through and the mistakes he's made, God is relentlessly staying after him. You can feel it in the language of verse 1. There are 4 imperatives and they all carry great hope for a hurting soul. Let's look at them.

The first imperative is the word *arise*. It's a word of hope. Get up. Don't stay down. You've made terrible mistakes and people are hurt because of it, but I'm not done with you, now get up. It's the God of grace. Jacob had stumbled and failed terribly in the last chapter. For God to come to Him shows grace and hope and love. God's not putting burdens *on* you; our God in Christ lift burdens *off* of you.

Ligon Duncan says, "Like Jesus coming to Peter, asking three times, 'Do you love me?' God is restoring Jacob." All four words are words of future and hope. *Arise, go up* (not

down) *build*, (not destroy)  *dwell*, (not run away). Our God is the God who calls us in Christ. Romans 8:30-31 tells us the whole story of our joyful God. *And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.* <sup>31</sup> *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* Our God is the God who calls us in Christ.

## **Our God is the God Who Loves the Unlovable**

Look how God describes Himself at the end of verse 1. *God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.* In other words: when you were lying, self-centered and a coward, when you were selfish and lazy, a sinner and running in the opposite direction, I am that God! That while we were *yet* sinners Christ died for us. You and I should be much more thankful that God allows Himself to be called the God of Jacob. Any beating you are getting is *you* beating yourself up. Go to the cross and see Jesus there, taking the full wrath of God in the place of sinners, and trust in the finished work of Jesus. Our God is the God who calls. Our God is the God who loves the unlovable.

## **Our God is the God Who Demands Purity**

Jacob knew it. You can see it in his response to God's directive. Notice in verse 2 and again in verse 4. There were foreign gods in Jacob's household. Little household idols. Remember back in chapter 31 when Jacob and Rachel left Laban? She had taken her father's household idols. It was a small thing, not a big deal, and Jacob just didn't pay much attention to it. And over time, he just let things go unchecked.

Idolatry happens in degrees and often unnoticed. A luxury becomes a hobby, then a necessity and, eventually, a tool of Satan to keep you from the one true God.

Jacob uses strong language because he knows he's been in the wrong and needs to change. *Throw out. Get rid of.* Idol smashing is easy compared to the next command. *Purify yourself and change your garments.* This means to be *cleaned*. That's a significant problem, not just for Jacob and his family, but for us, because we are fallen people living in a fallen world. Never mind our sins; the Bible says that even our righteousness is like filthy rags.

The metaphor of a garment is used throughout the Bible. Psalm 104 says, The Lord clothes Himself with light as with a garment. Jude 23 says we are to hate even the garment stained by the flesh. In Matthew 22, Jesus tells a parable about the kingdom of heaven - likening it to a wedding feast. Matthew 22:11-14 *But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. <sup>12</sup>And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless.<sup>13</sup> Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' <sup>14</sup>For many are called, but few are chosen."*

We are not pure in ourselves, and our God demands what we don't have. That's why we must put on the righteousness of Christ. It's not just His atoning death that saves us, it's His righteous life. We are covered by Christ. You are loved by God just as Christ is loved by God. Our God is a God who calls. Our God is a God that loves the unlovable. Our God is the God who demands purity.

## **Our God is the God Who Protects Us**

How much do you love verse 5? You know what that is don't you? Mercy. Read it again with emphasis on the end. They did not pursue the sons of Jacob. Those sons had slaughtered an entire town back in chapter 34. They deserved to be killed. They deserved far worse than they got.

Small pains on earth are a reminder of God's mercy, that without Christ we would spend an eternity suffering where the worm doesn't die and the fire is not quenched. And Lamentations 3 tells us the Lord's mercies are new every morning. You thought yesterday's sins were more than God would forgive. But you woke up this morning and there was fresh baked *mercy* sitting on your night stand. He kept and protected Jacob when Jacob didn't deserve it. Just like He has you and me. Do you know that you are completely immortal on this earth until God says otherwise? And if He says otherwise, then we can trust Him. Jacob was bought to repentance by God, and the New Testament reminds us in Romans 2: 4, it is God's kindness that leads us to repentance. Our God is the God who calls. Our God is the God who loves the unlovable. Our God is the God who demands purity. Our God is the God who protects us.

There are other attributes about our God to see in this text. He reveals himself - I am God Almighty.

## **Our God is the God Who Saves Sinners**

Jacob has come home now, and this is the first thing God said to Jacob since he's come home. Although it's been 20 years since he's been gone, people in this town just don't forget. Jacob was his name. It means "a cheater." Look at the grace of God in verse 9 through 10. Jacob is no longer his name. People in this town are going to bring up your past and say nasty things. That's not who you are anymore. I changed you. And I named you.

Do you know 2 Corinthians 5: 17? You should. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* Maybe you need reminding: you are not who you were. In Christ you are different. You need God to change you in Christ. Turn from your sin and, by faith, turn to Christ.

*(Pastor prays)*