

Genesis 28:10-17

Lent 2; February 28, 2021

It was the last place that Jacob expected God to be. Jacob had messed up and was running for his life. It's not surprising that he'd be exiled from his home. In the Bible, Jacob's name means "deceiver," and he had lived up to it--swindling his brother and tricking his father. Now he was on the run to Haran, where he would later learn how to deal with the deceptions of his Uncle Laban.

As Jacob stopped one night after running from his home, you can't help but wonder what was going through Jacob's head. How in the world had he ended up here? Look at him. **"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."** He was thirsty, hungry, travel weary and foot sore. He had only been on the road for a few days with about 70 miles behind him, but over 400 miles to go. He was in such a God-forsaken land that the best thing that he can come up with for a pillow is a stone. As Jacob laid on that stone in the dark, it was the last place that Jacob expected God to be.

The consequences of his mother's sin and his sin were beginning to sink in. Jacob had been sent away from everyone and with everything that he owns and on a long and lonely journey. All he has is the staff in his hand and the verbal blessing given to him by his father, Isaac. By his actions, he had won the hatred of his brother. His brother was just waiting for their father to die so that he could kill Jacob because of what Jacob had done to him. When you look at Jacob laying there in the dark of the night, his head on a stone, you can almost feel sorry for him. How could Jacob's heart not be filled with anything but loneliness and fear and despair? He was exhausted. He was mad at himself. *"God had promised me the birthright! He had promised me the inheritance! He had promised me the blessing! Why couldn't I wait?! Why did I have to take matters into my own hands?!"* He had worked so hard to get Esau's birthright, and now he had nothing but a rock to sleep on.

Jacob should have known better. Jacob was not some impressionable young man when these deceitful shenanigans took place. He was a 76-year-old runaway man. There he laid -- a 76 year old man being crushed by his sin, his guilt, his loneliness. It was the last place that Jacob expected God to be. Even God seemed to have forsaken this place.

We've all been there with Jacob, with the guilt of knowing that the hurt and heartbreak is our fault. Maybe you or someone you know is right there now. You fell into some sin, and you may be suffering the consequences. You may be suffering, not because of anything you did, but because we live in a sinful and broken world. We look around and feels like this would be the last place where God be. It feels like God has left us alone to suffer. God would have every right to leave us alone in our suffering. In reality, we deserve nothing less. However, nothing could be further away from the truth.

God knew that Jacob was a broken man. Jacob could not reach up to God -- because no sinful human can. So God reached down to Him! God would be exactly where Jacob needed him the most. Listen to what happens next. **"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."**

Even though Jacob had lied, cheated, and stolen, the promise God made to Abraham and Isaac was still true. God was still in this place. God was still with Jacob. Look at Jacob's response: **"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it."** God wanted Jacob to know that in spite of all the sin he had done, in spite of all the deception and lying, in spite of his running away, God was still with him.

What is meant by this dream? Who is the ladder? To answer that question, we need to look to the words of Jesus. After Jesus had called Nathaniel to follow him, Jesus says to him: ⁵⁰ **Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.”** ⁵¹ **He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ the Son of Man.”** (John 1:50-51)

Jesus is the Stairway to heaven. The angels ascend to take your prayers up to God and they descend to provide protection to God’s children. There has to be a Stairway because in our sins, we humans have separated ourselves from God. Our sins and rebellion have created a huge gulf between the holy God and sinful human beings. Last week, we stood on the beach of the Pacific Ocean and looked out over the waters. All you can see is water. Even though you know that there is land out there somewhere, I can’t cross it on my own. If I wanted to cross it, I need something else to do that. I need to be on a ship or a plane. I can’t do it on my own.

Since Jacob could not reach up to God, God would have to reach down to him. Jesus is also your Jacob’s ladder. Jesus connects you to God and to heaven through what he accomplished for you on the cross. He commands His angels to guard you in all your ways. He is the one who has promised, and **“surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age”** (Mt 20:28).

We’ve once again have begun that journey with Jesus to the cross. When you at the cross, it might seem like that is the last place for God to be. It might not seem like God should be in human flesh nailed to a cross. Yet, as he hangs on that cross, he is suffering our hell. He is suffering for our sins. He breathes his last breath because of what you and I have done. Why? That question can be answered in one word: **“GRACE.”** Jacob didn’t deserve God’s love. We don’t deserve God’s love. But he gives it to us anyway. God wanted both Jacob and us, to know that he will always be exactly where we need him to be. For it is Jesus, that we have a stairway to the glories of heaven. May God grant it. Amen.