

Revival: Jacob at Bethel

Revival

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Bible Text: Genesis 35:1-15

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A few Sundays ago we examined a story from the life of Jacob when he fled from his brother Esau and he stayed over night in a barren spot and he had a dream, a dream of a ladder that went from earth to heaven. And we studied that picture because it pictures for us the Lord Jesus who himself spoke of that occasion from the life of Jacob.

Well, when he fled from his brother he went to his mother's people who lived in a place called Haran, H A R A N which is now part of Iraq in our modern day. He stayed there for several years. While there he accumulated two wives and numerous slaves and many flocks and herds. Became an extremely man.

While there God spoke to him. You can read about it in Genesis chapter 31 verses 11 to 13. God spoke to Jacob and said, "Jacob, I want you to go back. I am the God who spoke to you at Bethel. Remember that? Remember how I spoke to you? I am that God. I want you to go back home."

Not very often can we go back home anymore, can we? Things change. We change. Other people change. But God called Jacob to go back home. Go back to the land of your fathers and go back there.

In obedience to God Jacob gathered his family together and all of his possessions and he headed back to Canaan, the land of his fathers. When he got back there were numerous events that occurred in his life. One of them was meeting God and wrestling with him. God changed his name. We will look at that in a moment. His sons committed some heinous crimes. And God spoke to Jacob again. And we find it recorded in the passage that I have printed for you and we will read this occasion when God spoke to Jacob again. This now marks the third time that God had spoken to Jacob. And we read in Genesis 35 verses one to 15, we read this.

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."

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. 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.”

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. 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.

And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, 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. And Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So he called its name Allon-bacuth. God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him.

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. 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. 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.”

Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him. 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. So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.¹

God called to Jacob, “I want you to go Bethel. Remember Bethel? That is the place where I spoke to you. That is the place where you had that dream and I appeared to you and I gave you promises and I gave you a blessing. I promised I would not leave you. I would go with you wherever you went and that I would bring you again back to his land. Go to Bethel. And when you get there I want you to build an altar and worship me there.”

Jacob gathered his clan about him and said, “We are going to Bethel. Give me your idols.”

Jacob knew about the idols. For how long did he know about the idols? Did he know that his favorite wife Rachel had, in fact, stolen them from her father? Did he know that his sons when they destroyed all of the men in Shechem and took possession of all of their goods and everything that they gathered, that they gathered with them the household

¹ Genesis 35:1-15.

gods and idols that they had? When along the lie did Jacob know about it, because he obviously knew about it. And I wonder how long Jacob would have let time pass before he would have collected the idols.

Well, when God came to him and spoke to him and said, "I want you to go back to Bethel and worship me there. I am the God who spoke to you there," Jacob remembered and he remembered that time when God appeared to him and he thought, I had better get rid of the idols.

So he gathered all of the idols and you notice it says the earrings. It was common in that day that people also wore earrings, gold earrings in honor of gods of various kinds. And Jacob said, "Give them all to me. We are going to destroy them."

We need, because of who God is, we need to get rid of everything that comes between us and him. We need to get rid of it. Whatever it is, we need to get rid of it. You notice he said, "Clean yourself. Get dressed for meeting God. God is worthy of it." God is worthy of our purity and of our obedience.

So he gathered all of the gods together, the idols and rings, the earrings and he buried them, destroyed them. And then they progressed on to Bethel.

We read that when he got to Bethel he built an altar. Bethel had fame because of its altars. When Abraham first came into the Promised Land, he came to Bethel and built an altar. Later on in his life as he and Lot had come out of Egypt with many goods and they decided to separate for the good of all of their clans, it says that Abraham went to Bethel.

We see Jacob fleeing from his brother went to Bethel. And now he is there again. Bethel was a place where God had met his people, where he had revealed himself to Abraham. He had revealed himself to Jacob on a previous occasion. Now he was about to reveal himself again to Jacob.

When Jacob gathered the idols and the earrings from his clan, it gives to us a picture of the true condition of mankind. It is almost as if when we can't see the God we love we love the God that is near. And we somehow believe that that is ok with God. God understands.

No, God doesn't understand. God is a very exclusive God. And he taught that to Jacob on his first visit to Bethel. He said, "When you go there, I will go with you." That was contrary to all of the beliefs of that day. All of the religious beliefs of that day was that a god was only a god of a given designated territory or of a certain kind of activity of life, like farming or crops or fertility. And they had thousands of gods.

You know, we kind of lay claim to the fact that we are a pluralistic society. We have got nothing on Jacob. We have got nothing on centuries of history. Mankind has always been pluralistic. He has always wanted other gods than God, starting in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. God was not enough. And now God brings Jacob back to

Bethel and in bringing him back to Bethel, he reminds Jacob of who he is. He reminds him of who he is. He is a God who is sovereign over all things. He is a God who is faithful. He kept his promises to Jacob. "I will be with you while you are there." And Jacob even made the statement to his wives and family as he planned to leave Laban. He said, "I was here and Laban tried to cheat me hundreds of times and God protected me. God protected me. God protected me." He knew God's presence and intervention in his life even in that distant land. God proved faithful to him. He was sovereign. God was gracious to Jacob.

Why was Jacob in Haran in the first place? Because of his lies and his deceits to his father and mistreatment of his brother, stealing his birthright from him. And he was fleeing for his life.

Oh, God is a God of grace and a God of mercy. He cared for Jacob. And even though he had sinned grievously against God, God was with him, drawing him back, speaking to him, correcting him, reminding him of who he was. "I am that God who met you at Bethel the first time, remember? Remember, Jacob?" And it says there that Jacob remembered.

"We are going to go back to Bethel and we are going to build an altar there. We are going to worship the God who met me there and who was with me wherever I went."

Oh, what a vivid description of humanity, of mankind as well as a description of God by contrast.

While at Bethel God spoke to Jacob again, fourth time, fourth time that God now spoke to Jacob. Notice what he said to Jacob? What he said to Jacob is very revealing in the panorama of Scripture. He said to him, "Be fruitful and multiply."

Where does that first appear in Scripture? That was the command that God gave to Adam and Eve before they sinned. Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth. Not just with human bodies, but with my presence. I am with you and as you go, take me with you. My presence will be with you throughout all the earth.

And God repeats that mandate that he gave to Adam and Eve and he repeats it to Jacob. Why to Jacob? Because Jacob was part of the line that God had chosen through whom he would provide his Savior that he promised to Adam and Eve when they sinned.

He told Adam and Eve and he told the serpent, "I will provide a Savior. This Savior will come and he will trust the head of the serpent."

That was the first indication of God's plan to redeem sinners and to provide relief for them against the evil one. And then he chose Abraham, the family through whom he would ultimately provide his Messiah. Jacob was in that line. Jacob didn't belong in that line. He was the second born, remember? Esau belonged in the line. He was the first born. And it was this birthright that Jacob stole from him and deceived their father that

he might get the blessing. And what was it that God promised to Jacob at Bethel and then here again at Bethel? The first born blessing, the first born blessing, the blessing that belonged to the first born.

See, Jacob, he didn't have to steal it. God had it in mind for him all along. He didn't have to deceive and lie to get it and scheme and plan and fear and fret and flee. No, God had it in mind for him all along. And the Scriptures tell us that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And through Jacob would come the lie of the promised Messiah.

Talk about grace. Talk about mercy. God displaying it to Jacob in bucket loads.

Well, after God spoke to Jacob this fourth time, he made a memorial, a marker, a reminder of his meeting and the presence that he enjoyed with God.

Prior to coming to Bethel I mentioned to you that one of the times that God appeared to him God wrestled with Jacob. They had a wrestling match. And they wrestled all night. And it says that Jacob prevailed. He was holding his own for a while, for a while, until it says God touched his hip.

Now, some of you know what that is like to have your hip touched. It hurts. Some of you, perhaps, have even had replacement of a hip, because of its failure along the way.

God touched Jacob's hip and he fell and he limped the rest of his life. Didn't have replacement surgery in that day. It says he leaned on his staff.

When he wrestled with God and God with him, in the morning Jacob said, "I am not going to let you go until you bless me."

God said, "I have got to leave. Daylight is coming."

"I am not going to let you go until you bless me."

And he wouldn't let go and wouldn't let go and God touched his hip and while he is leaning on his staff God said to him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob."

Now, do you remember what the name Jacob means? Literally it means heel grabber, because that is what he did at his birth. He grabbed on to the heel of his brother. It also describes for us someone who is a schemer, a planner, someone who works things out to his own benefit. That is Jacob.

God said to him, "Ah, you are not going to be Jacob anymore. Let me give you a new name. Israel."

Israel means one who has contested with God and has shown himself strength. Oh, what a name. At Bethel God reminded him. Remember your name used to be Jacob. It is now Israel. You are a new man now, Jacob. You are not the old man anymore. You are now a new person. You are now Israel. You have strength with God.

Why do you think God moved upon Moses to record this, these events from the life of Jacob? Well, for starters, he wanted the children of Israel to know some of their background and history. He also wanted them to know the weakness, frailty, wickedness, hopelessness of mankind without God and the propensities of mankind without God.

We will scheme and plan and worship idols. We will do anything other than worship God all by himself. We will try and find some other way.

God through Moses wanted his people to know the truth about themselves. He also wanted them to know the truth about himself, God, the sovereign God, a God who bows to no one, no other God, a faithful God, a God who keeps his Word.

When he makes a promise it is as sure as the person who made the promise. It is as sure as God himself, faithful. A God of grace, God of mercy. Look what he did for Jacob, that schemer, that scoundrel fleeing for his life. God was gracious to him and merciful to him, brought him back, brought him back to a place of remembrance, a place of renewal, a place of revival where he could begin anew, where God would remind him of what he had done for him in the past and how he had changed him and how he had presented himself to Jacob and how Jacob enjoyed his glorious presence.

It was a time of renewal, a time of revival and the life of Jacob.

Another reason why God moved Moses to write it is because this came to the children of Israel while on the way to the Promised Land. What awaited them in the Promised Land? Multitudes of gods, thousands of gods, thousands and millions of godless people. And God told them that when you go there, I will be your God. And you are to destroy all of the other gods that are there. And even destroy all of the peoples who are there who inhabit that land that I am going to give to you because I promised it to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob. And he wanted to prepare his people for the entrance into that Promised Land, to remember that God was sovereign, that God was faithful, that God was all powerful, that God was gracious and he was merciful and he would provide for them everything that he promised he would.

So God moved upon Moses to write this record of Jacob and God's dealings with him so that it might encourage them as they went into the Promised Land.

Well, how does that correlate to us? How does that fit in with us in our day? To see how it fits in, we have to go back to the beginning. We have to go back to God in creation. When God spoke creation into existence, why did he do that? To display his glory. And why did he create mankind, humanity, Adam and Eve? He created them to oversee the land that he had created and also to fellowship with him and he with them. And he came

down and he fellowshiped with them. He manifested himself to them. They enjoyed that presence. They knew God. They walked with him. They talked with him. He taught them. And he gave them what is called in theological terms the creation mandate. He said, "Go throughout all the earth, be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth, subdue it." His presence would go with them.

Ah, then came that day when Adam and Eve decided they knew better and they yielded to the temptation of the evil serpent and they sinned and they ate of the fruit that God had forbidden. Everything changed. Everything changed. God had told them, "In the day that you eat, dying you will die." They died that day.

You say, "Oh, they lived."

Oh, let me count for you some of the ways they died. No more fellowship with God. No more free access to God. No more glorious presence of God walking with them in the cool of the day. No more guiltlessness. They now feared God, the one with whom they had communed they now feared. And they hid from him.

Oh, some people try to tell me they seek for God. No, you really don't. You may try and convince yourself that you do, but you really don't, because in the very beginning we see described for us the first actions of Adam and Eve upon their sin was to what? Flee from God, hide from him. Dying you will die. And even physical death began to work within their bodies. Ultimately they died physically.

God made the promise to Adam and Eve. "I will bring a champion." He further revealed how he would do that through Abraham and through Isaac and then through Jacob. And you follow the line through Jacob, through his children, through Judah and down through David and down through the history of time until you come to Jesus. Jesus is of the line of Jacob and Isaac and Abraham. He is the one that the Scriptures describe who would come. He fulfills every single one of those descriptions to the minutest detail, to the place of his birth, to the time of his birth, to the year of his birth, to his parents.

Jesus fulfilled it all. This scene that we see in the life of Jacob merely provides a glimpse of the progression of God's plan of redemption that we now see fulfilled in Christ. For when Christ came what did he do? He brought the presence of God again. He brought the glory of God. We read in John chapter one says that we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth. Not a god, as many people try to call him today. No, no, no, no. God. There is no a in there. God.

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God."

And he took on human flesh. The glory of God once again on earth, once again inhabiting human flesh. And Jesus through his life and his death and his resurrection provided the means of reconciliation for sinners like you and like me to be reconciled back to God.

Jesus then prayed, “Father, send your Spirit. Send your Spirit to come and live within them. Live within all those who love me and who obey my commandments. Send your Spirit to live within them.”

The very presence of God now living within sinners like you and me. All made possible because of the work of Christ and what he did on the cross for people like you and me. And Jesus himself said, “I came from the Father, the Father sent me, and that whoever believes on me shall not perish, but have everlasting life. I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me. For there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.”

So you and I can experience a revival, a spiritual renewal. We can experience the living reality of God’s glorious presence in our lives on a day to day basis. And collectively as the people of God gathered together that says he will be there and he will manifest himself there and that is my prayer as we begin our services every week. God manifest yourself to us. He is here. He is here. Have you sensed him this morning? Have you heard him? Have you felt him? Has he spoken to you? Has he touched you? He is here.

Oh, my prayer is that he will manifest himself to you with great glory and wonder.

How can the Holy Spirit use these truths in your life today? He can refute error. No, there is not many ways to God. There is one way to God, through Jesus Christ his Son and him alone. He can reveal to you the truth. Open your eyes to see the truth about yourself. Have you got some idols you need to bury? You have got some things in your life that you hope are pleasing to odd, that really are interferences, intrusions into your relationship with God? You need to bury them.

He can reassure you. He can remind you of the day like he did Jacob where he reminded Jacob of when he spoke to him and he can remind you of when he spoke to you and when he called out to you and how you responded to him and he can reassure you. He can also rebuke you because of your failure to trust in him alone.

What changes do you need to make in your life today? Well, you can reject. You can reject it all. You can put it off until tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow. Tomorrow never comes, you know. You only have today. You don’t have tomorrow. Tomorrow never comes. You can reexamine yourself in light of the truth. You can rely and trust upon God and his provision in Jesus Christ on behalf of people like you and like me.

I pray that today the Spirit of God has manifested himself to you, has opened your eyes to see the truth about yourself, about God and about his provision for people like you and me in Jesus. And how by calling upon Jesus you can experience his glorious presence and that glorious presence you can experience on a day to day practical experience.

I pray you will call on him today. And if you have called upon him in some time in the past and today, make today a time of like Jacob where you make remember what he has

done for you and where you give him thanks and praise and honor for what he has done in your life.

Let's close in prayer.