



JACOB – FROM BROKENNESS TO BLESSING PART 3: BETHEL, THE HOUSE OF GOD

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BIBLICAL TEXT(S)

TEXT: *“Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. 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 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. 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. 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. 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 character and promises are not transactional. Jacob needed to know that.”

-Pastor Randy

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” 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.”

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. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

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 so that I return safely to my father’s household, then the Lord will be my God 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.”

(Genesis 28:10-22)

MESSAGE SUMMARY

If you look at a map of Jacob’s journey (28:10), you’ll notice it’s the opposite direction of Abraham’s journey. As Abram, he made the journey trusting God. Jacob is doing the opposite of trusting God. In Ancient Near East culture, the presence of the god you worship was solely in the place you lived. They had no concept of a god being ever present, even in a far away land. Jacob must have thought that in leaving his family and the land he lived in, he was leaving the presence of God. But despite not trusting God, Jacob still has an encounter with Him. And God said “I am with you...” (v. 13). Jacob discovers a couple of things about God:

1. God’s character - God met Jacob while Jacob was on the run, because God does not wait until we’re at spiritual maturity before He meets us. Even when we are faithless, God remains faithful.
2. Awareness of God’s presence - God is there, even when we are in hard circumstances.
 - Jesus is the stairway to the presence of God (John 1:51, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”).
 - Praise is the gateway. “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise give thanks to him and praise his name.” (Psalm 100:4)

God reveals Himself as the God who initiates and the one who desires relationship with you. His desire is for you to encounter Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are designed to help you lead your group through a progression of engagement with the Bible passage and the speaker's message, helping them understand and apply the teaching.

LEAN IN

These are icebreaker/warm up questions, mostly just to get the group talking and start the flow of conversation. Choose one question and talk it over for 5-10 minutes.

1. When you stop and take inventory of what your mind is usually occupied with throughout the week, what would you say it is?
2. What stood out to you in Sunday's sermon? Why was it significant to you?

LOOK DOWN

These are questions on the passage and observations about what's been read.

Spend about 15-20 minutes on three questions max

1. What is it that God says to Jacob when He addresses him? (v. 13-15)
2. How does Jacob respond? (v. 16-22)
3. God met Jacob when He was not at his greatest level of spiritual maturity. It was a low moment in Jacob's life. What is the hope we can cling to when times are hard?
3. Look at Psalm 23:4, Genesis 28:15, Genesis 18:16. What do you notice?
Answer: God is WITH us!
4. What is the significance of John 1:51 when we look back on Genesis 28:12?
Answer: Jesus is the stairway to God's presence.
4. If Jesus is the stairway to heaven, what is the way we enter God's presence?
Look at Psalm 100:4 for the answer

LOOK OUT

These questions help connect the world of the Bible to today.

Spend about 15-20 minutes on three questions max

1. What is the most common perspective you can see in our culture of God's attitude towards those who are spiritually at rock bottom? How does this story of Jacob meeting God alter that understanding? For example: "I wouldn't step into church because I don't want to get struck by lightning," or "I haven't been to church in ages; I bet God is mad at me."
2. What is it that usually gets in the way of people encountering God?
3. When people are going through difficult circumstances, where do you imagine they believe God is?
4. Who are some examples of people who despite times of suffering, consistently entered the presence of God with thanksgiving and praise? This could be examples of people in your own life, or people you admire from a distance.
5. Who are some people in your community/family who need to hear that God is with them, despite how they feel or what they are going through?

LOOK IN

These are questions that help you consider personal application.

Spend about 15-20 minutes on three questions max

1. What usually prevents you from bringing your attention to an awareness of God's presence?
2. When you find yourself in a low place, how readily are you to drawing near to God knowing that He is already with you?
3. Some people may say "Oh, all the time! When life is hard, my prayer time increases." Some may say "When times get tough, I feel like I can't bother God with my issues. He's probably mad at me for not being a better Christian."

**DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS,
CONT.**

4. What often gets in the way of living with thanksgiving and praise in your life?
5. What in your life are you thankful for that you can bring before God in praise?
6. What could your life look like if you were to take a moment every day to bring your attention to an awareness of God's presence (for He is all around and, through Jesus, we have constant access to Him) and praise Him for all the good He has done? What difference would it make in your life?

LIVE IT OUT

These action steps help apply this week's message to day to day life.

Choose one question and talk it over for 5-10 minutes.

1. How can you this week remind yourself to pause for a couple of minutes, bring your attention to the presence God (for He is with you) and praise Him?