

# God's Calling – Jacob's Ladder

**Preached by:** Matthew S. Black

**Text:** Genesis 28

**Date:** September 18, 2011, 5pm

**Series:** Genesis

**Introduction:** Open your Bible to **Genesis 28**. We're going to get to know Jacob tonight. Jacob and Esau are not godly. Neither is saved at this point. But tonight we are going to take a look at "God's Calling". We are going to see how God calls a sinner out of this wicked world and begins to do a work of transformation.

**Genesis 28:10–22** (ESV) — "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."

In this passage, Jacob gets a vision of Jesus. As we saw in our Scripture reading tonight in John 1, Jesus Christ is Jacob's ladder.

## **Esau**

Esau is the man's man. He hunts. He fishes. He doesn't believe in bathing. He's that guy, right? He's a man's man, but he hates God. He's got a couple of wives who are of questionable morals. They are from the world through and through. There's not a lot to work with there.

## **Jacob**

The other son, Jacob is basically a mama's boy. He would never beat Esau in a fist fight, but he finds other ways to get his way. He's a manipulator, a deceiver. His name literally means "heal snatcher or deceiver". He's a farmer, and he's *not* into hunting like his brother.

This is all God has to work with. Like Jacob and Esau, Romans 3:10–12 (ESV) — "None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." So God chooses Jacob, and he's going to save Jacob, and he's going to work through Jacob, and he's going to bring about three generations of faith.

### **Overview of Jacob's Problem & Transformation**

Here's the problem with Jacob. The only thing he's good at is lying and stealing. He's ripped off his brother twice. He's lied to and deceived his blind father. I mean, this doesn't look like a patriarch, right? What's the deal? Ultimately, if you continue reading in Genesis, this guy, Jacob, he gets his name changed to what? Israel, That's pretty amazing, right? He gets a country named after him. That's a big deal right there, Israel. It means "prince with God". God's taken a man who was a manipulator and only deserving of eternal separation from God in torment to a monarch with God!

So how does he go from Jacob to Israel, from this trickster and deceiver to this worshiper of God? How does he go from this pathetic guy to this Godly guy, and tonight when we get to know him, he is a loser. Some of you say, "Well, that sounds harsh." No, he's an utter failure.

This guy's in his 70s and he's still at home! He hasn't taken a wife or gotten a job. He's not yet left home. He's a classic underachieving, spoiled brat, rich kid from a believing family. We get no indication that he's ever worshipped God. It seems that he's still in his sins. How in the world is God going to work with this guy?

How God works with this guy Jacob or any person that He draws to Himself is found in Romans 8. Turn there if you would.

**Romans 8:28–30** (ESV) — "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."

Let's look at the life of Jacob and consider God's call. What's it look like? First it looks like this:

### **I. Running away from God (vs. 10-11)**

## **Jacob Leaves Home**

And that's where we pick up the story in **Genesis 28:10** (ESV) — "Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran." Now why is he leaving home? Because he ripped off his brother, and his brother Esau is going to kill him. He's not going out and accomplishing God's will. He's running from harm. Aren't we a lot like that? When we were lost we were not following God's call, we were running for our lives. We were trying to survive!

## **Jacob "Running", Living on Borrowed Faith**

So Jacob's running away from home, and this is the first time he's away from home, and what God's going to do here is separate him from his mom and dad and work on his faith because up to this point he's borrowing their faith, but he doesn't really have much of his own.

Some of you are in this same phase of life. Maybe mom and dad made you read the Bible, pray, go to church a little bit. As soon as you moved out of your parent's house, you said: "I get to do what I want. I don't know if I have my own faith, my own beliefs, my own church." Statistically, most people go to church until they graduate from high school, and they don't show up again until they get married, and they fear for their kids, and they want to get them fixed. So they're like, "I'm going to make them go to Sunday School and see if that works."

So **verse 10**, "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."

Okay, so he's on his couple day journey, runs out of daylight, just stops wherever he happens to be.

"Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep." This is not impressive, we have a guy out in the woods on his own running for his life, and he doesn't have a place to sleep. He grabs a rock, uses it as a pillow. Then something extraordinary happens. God shows up.

## **II. Meeting God (vs. 12-16)**

### **Jacob Meets God**

**Verse 12**, "And he dreamed". This is a prophetic dream about Jesus Christ that God gives to Jacob. God wants to get to Jacob. So God sends Jacob a dream with angels, and a prophecy of Christ. Most people today are caught up with angels and visions and healings and gifts of the Spirit, but they don't know Christ. That is the problem. Do you know who God is?

There are counterfeit angels. There are counterfeit signs, wonders and miracles, and false preaching from false teachers. Not everything spiritual is good. That's why the Bible always tells us to be discerning and to test the spirits, to accept that which is good, to reject that which is evil.

You believe in angels. You believe in life after death. Praise God. Do you know who God is? That's the most important thing, and Jacob finds out who God is in **verse 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.'" He says, "I am the God of your grandfather and of your father.

### **Application**

How many of you could say my father and grandfather knew the true and living God. How many children in our country today could say, if God showed up: "Oh, I know all about you. They told me all about you. You loved them, helped them, healed them, saved them, forgave them, empowered them, changed their life. My family worships you. I heard a lot about you."

See, we are in a day where God could show up to a lot of people in our city but they would say: "Which God are you?" There are not too many families with multigenerational faith.

But it's beautiful because God is the God of Abraham. God is the God of Isaac, and now God is going to work on Jacob and become the God of Jacob.

### **Jacob's "Borrowed Faith"**

Jacob needs to have his own faith, his own relationship with God. It's something that his dad and his grandpa had, but he, thus far, Jacob has only borrowed their faith. That's where some of you teenagers are at, right? You borrow your parent's faith. You borrow their understanding of God. You go to their church. You say their prayers. This is not necessarily bad, but *do you have your own faith, your own relationship with God?* Do you have your own convictions, or you're not just borrowing theirs?

### **God Pursues Jacob**

Let me ask you this. In this event do you see Jacob pursuing God or God pursuing Jacob? God is clearly pursuing Jacob, isn't he? This is the pattern of faith through the whole Bible.

- **Adam** sins; God comes calling for him.
- **Abraham** is a godless Babylonian; God comes to him.

And so it is with all of us. Here Jacob isn't looking for God; God is looking for Jacob. What Jesus said is that "the Father is seeking worshippers." (**John 4:23**) The Bible says that "no one seeks after God" (**Romans 3:10-12**).

This is where we get words like predestination and election. This is all the theological nomenclature that the New Testament puts around these kinds of stories. Don't let it trouble you. Here's what it means. You're hopeless unless God finds you. You're

hopeless unless God shows up. You're hopeless unless God tracks you down. You see, God is not lost. We are. We don't find God. God finds us.

If you've lost your seat, I can help you find it. If you've lost your soul, only God can help you. When my kids get lost, I go find them. That is the pattern of faith. The children of God have sinned and run away from the Father, and they're lost, and the Father goes looking for them. That is the Christian Gospel. Christ is looking for the lost sheep. **Luke 19:10** (ESV) — “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

### **Jesus is the Ladder**

We read what Jacob saw in the dream: “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”.

That's what we'd all say, “How awesome is this place!” That's what you felt when God first met with you. God is drawing Jacob. God came down to meet with Jacob. The truth is that God comes down to us, and that's the whole picture of the ladder. That God humbly comes down to be with us. According to John 1, Jesus Christ is the ladder.

### **Babylon's Religion**

Babylon's religion is a religion of works. The Bible teaches that we cannot arrogantly rise up to God's level on our own. God's not in heaven in heaven calling to us saying, *“Here's a ladder. Climb like crazy. You don't want to go to hell.”* And we make it. *“I did it. Look at me. I made it. Let me in, God. I'm so good. I achieved it. I've obtained salvation. I've earned it. I've merited it. I've worked for it.”* No, we believe in grace. We believe in a God who doesn't command us to rise to His level.

### **Through Christ Alone**

We are not able to rise to God's level. Isaiah tells us “Our righteousness is like filthy rags.” God knows that we're sinful and incapable. He's a God who in the form of Christ, humbly stoops and comes down to our level, and this is the beauty of Jesus. He humbles Himself, becomes a man to come down here and be with us, and Jacob sees this.

And so through this dream, Jacob gets this tremendous insight. God is a loving, merciful, compassionate God. He'll reveal himself to me. He'll embrace me. He'll care for me. He's letting me know who He is. He stooped to come down and be with me. And here's what God says. God then makes a series of promises to him.

**Verses 13-14.** “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”. Does Jacob have a wife yet? No.

But he’s apparently going to have a lot of kids, right? So his life is going to take a turn for the better here pretty soon, but it’s going to get a little messy. You’ll see how he gets his two wives, the one with the crooked eyes and the other one.

That’s coming up. But God is wanting to choose and transform this man Jacob, and through Jacob, **Jesus Christ the Messiah is going to be born!**

### **Abraham’s Seed**

This is the doctrine of Abraham’s seed, it starts in **Genesis 3**. Adam and Eve sin. God makes a promise that through the birth of the woman would come a son, the offspring or seed or descendent of the woman. He would crush Satan. Though Satan would harm him, he would liberate his people – Jesus. It’s reiterated later in Genesis 12 to Abraham, Jacob’s grandfather. “Your descendent,” – your offspring, your seed – “will be a blessing to the nations of the earth.” It is reiterated to Isaac and here to Jacob. What is this seed?

Is it the collective, plural Israel, or is it the singular one person who’s a Jew from the nation of Israel? That would be Jesus. That’s who he’s talking about. The world is blessed by the greatest seed to come through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which is JESUS.

**Galatians 3:16** (ESV) — “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is **Christ**.”

So God calls Jacob to walk with Him. It seems that in this chapter Jacob actually turns to the Lord in faith. God is calling and drawing him. Certainly by chapter 32, Jacob is showing the evidence of conversion, wrestling with God.

God calls Jacob and through Jacob, God is going to bring Jesus! Jesus is the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that will bless all nations.

We come to another way we see God’s call in a sinner’s life...

### **III. Godly Fear** (vs. 17)

#### **Jacob Awakes**

“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.”

We have special places in our life, but truly it wasn’t the place that was special, it was the experience. He wanted to remember that place he met with God.

**Illustration:** I was talking with Muneera, and she was telling me how she visited Mount Sinai. And she actually watched the sun rise from the top of Mount Sinai. But on

the way up there were people trying to sell her camel rides, and chips, and water! It's a money maker today.

### **Application**

Here's the point. While we do have sacred experiences, God is Lord overall, and we don't need to travel to sacred places to be near the presence of God. What we need is Jesus to come and be with us; that's what we need. As Isaiah said, "The whole earth is full of His glory" (**Isaiah 6:3**).

### **Jacob is Afraid**

**Verse 17**, we read, "And he [Jacob] 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.'" Jacob recognizes that now God has come to be with him in this **ordinary** place. Now, it's an **extraordinary** place.

He was afraid. Why is Jacob afraid, saints? Because he realizes he's a sinner. Some of you say, "I wish I could see God." No, you don't. He wouldn't even blink, and if you are without Christ, He would smoke you. I mean, you're a sinner; He's God. God could destroy you. So Jacob's afraid, and you know that people understand who God is when they're scared of him.

Sometimes people come across like, "God is my buddy." Listen, you better duck, because that guy has no idea who he's dealing with, right? "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". It's a respect for God. Like, God's holy; I'm not. God's God; I'm me.

- Isaiah said in **Isaiah 6:1, 5** (ESV) — "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and ... 5 And I said: 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!'" Like Jacob and Isaiah, we need a healthy fear and reverence for God.

## **IV. Our Ebenezer (vs. 18-22)**

### **Jacob's Memorial Pillar**

We come to **Genesis 28:18-22**, "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.'"

What is Jacob doing now? Well, this rock was his pillow. It wasn't anything significant, but now that God has showed up it's going to be a monument and a stone of remembrance, and it's going to remind him, "God showed up here. God loved me. God

spoke to me. God revealed himself to me. It's a miracle." And so he wants to memorialize it.

### **What's an Ebenezer?**

Okay. Occasionally we'll sing that song. What is it? "**Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing**", and the line in there is, "Here I raise my Ebenezer." People always say, "Here I raise my Ebenezer." "Who's Ebenezer? Why are we lifting him up? What did he do?" That sounds like an old man that has a funny name.

An Ebenezer is another word for stone of remembrance. It's a monument. It's a memorial. That's what this is. Here's what he's doing. He's saying, "Today God revealed himself to me. Today God spoke to me. Today I met God. I need to remember this. I need to memorialize this."

It might be your first Bible or the church you got baptized or a date on the calendar, and you remember what God has done for you. These are memorials. These are remembrances. Some people turn these into superstitious things. They should not do that, but it's good to have memories, isn't it? One of the ways we "raise our Ebenezer" is to give our testimony of salvation.

Genesis 28 seems to be Jacob's conversion. He's certainly awakened to grace at this time. We see God's calling on his life. He recommits himself again in Genesis 32, just like we do often. But what a joy to hear Jacob's testimony of salvation.

**Conclusion:** Close with several giving their testimonies of salvation briefly.