

Genesis 28:10-22

Surely the LORD Is In This Place!

I am thankful that the Lord does not wait for us to initiate contact with Him

- I am grateful that He initiates His work

The Bible tells us that as unredeemed sinners, we have neither the desire nor ability to come to God on our own

- “**There is none righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God**” (Rom 3:10b-11)

We see this illustrated throughout the Bible

- I will use two examples in the book of Acts

The first is the example of Lydia in Acts 16:14, “**And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul**”

- Notice that she didn’t open her heart to God
- Notice that she didn’t make the first step

We are told that “**the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul**”

- The Lord began that work of salvation

The second example is none other than Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9

- He would be equivalent to a Saddam Hussein or Osama bin Laden of our day
- He would be compared to a spiritual terrorist who hates Christians to the point of killing them

As a matter of fact, Saul was on his way to arrest and kill Christians when God initiated contact with him in Acts 9, “**And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; ⁴ and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ ⁵ And he said, ‘Who art Thou, Lord?’ And He *said*, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, ⁶ but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do’**” (9:3-6)

- Saul was intent on killing Christians
- Jesus Christ confronts him and tells Saul that he was actually persecuting Him!

This, of course, is the story of Saul’s conversion

- He came into direct contact with the Lord Himself
- And he was changed forever as a result

This morning, we will look at another example of how God initiated His work in the life of another

- And this revelation from God will change him as it did Saul

Let’s read Genesis 28:10-22

This passage teaches us two (2) aspects of our relationship with God

- God’s revelation to His people
- The response to God’s revelation

I. God's revelation to His people (28:10-15)

¹⁰ Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran.

The past few chapters of Genesis have revolved around the area of Beersheba

- This is the place where both Abraham and Isaac entered into covenants with Abimelech (21:31-33; 26:23-33)

But now there will be a change in geographical focus

- Jacob is heading toward Haran

From the immediate context, we know that Rebekah has sent Jacob back to her homeland in order to obtain a wife

- Jacob's twin brother Esau had married three women
 - o Two Canaanite women
 - o One daughter of Ishmael
- Obviously, these were not the best choice for a spouse

Rebekah doesn't want Jacob to end up like Esau

- She doesn't want him to marry pagan wives

Back in Genesis 24, Abraham sent his servant to a faraway land in order to obtain a wife for his son, Isaac

- This was the area of Haran
- It was here that the LORD had prepared a young woman, Rebekah, to be Isaac's bride

So it shouldn't surprise us to see Rebekah send her son back to her own homeland and to her own people when Jacob needs a wife

- After all, that is who she trusts, right?

So we will embark on a journey from Beersheba to Haran

- This journey would be several hundred miles¹

Most of it is skipped over

- Most of it is passed over in silence

But there is one major event that takes place on the journey

- That encounter will consume our thoughts this morning as we prepare our hearts for the Lord's Table

¹¹ And he came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place.

After being on the road for a few days, Jacob has to stop for the night

- In that day and age, when the sun went down, it was time to stop!

From what we know, Jacob is entirely by himself on this journey

- Perhaps he had an animal to ride on
- But no human accompanied him

¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *NICOT, Genesis 18-50*, 238.

Imagine making such a long trip without any other humans

- It would tend to make you lonely
- It would tend to make you think that you were alone

We have to keep in mind that Jacob was “a peaceful man, living in tents” (25:27)

- He was used to staying close by the camp
- He was not used to being out in the wilderness by himself for long periods of time

But here he is, making this long journey by himself

- Not to sound overly simplistic, he was definitely out of his comfort zone

Verse 11 tells us that “he came to a certain place and spent the night there”

- The word “place” is used three times in verse 11
- The word “place” is used a total of six times in this second half of Genesis 28²

In other words, this was not a really significant place

- There was nothing about it that was very special
- It was just a “place”

But this ordinary “place” would soon become very special and significant

At the end of a long day of traveling, Jacob prepared himself for sleep, “he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place”

¹² And he had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven;

Jacob is now fast asleep

- He must be worn out from traveling

But Jacob has a dream

- A dream in which God would personally communicate to him

This story is very familiar to us

- Those of you who grew up in church probably remember this story about Jacob’s ladder

The first thing that Jacob remembers about his dream was “a ladder”

- This is a Hebrew word that only occurs here in the OT
- So we can’t go to other places in the Bible to see how it is used in other passages

Most versions have “ladder”

- At least one version has “stairway”

Regardless of what word you choose, the thought is still the same

- Jacob saw some type of apparatus

But this was a ladder like none he had ever seen

- This ladder “was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven”

² Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing*, 486.

This ladder or staircase descended directly from heaven itself!

- Imagine seeing such a phenomenon!

How different is this account from the Genesis 11 account of what took place in Babel³

- There, human pride and arrogance desired to build a tower that reached to the heavens
- It was a man-made effort that was doomed to failure

But here in Genesis 28, the LORD Himself initiates the contact with mankind

- The ladder starts in heaven and reaches down to earth

What did this dream mean?

- What was God attempting to communicate?

and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

After seeing this ladder, Jacob then notices “**the angels of God were ascending and descending on it**”

- As if it wasn't enough for Jacob to see this ladder that bridged heaven and earth, he saw angels!

These angels “**were ascending and descending**” on the ladder

- Some were ascending from earth to heaven
- Others were descending from heaven to earth

Once again, imagine experiencing this!

- This wasn't real life
- But it was what God was conveying to Jacob in a dream!

The motion and movement of the angels was intended to communicate the idea that the angels of God were not always visible

We have seen a few references to angels in the book of Genesis thus far

- In Genesis 3, God placed cherubim at the east entrance to the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve were banished (3:24)
- We have seen multiple references to “**the angel of the LORD**” Who is none other than the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ (16:7, 9-11; 21:17; 22:11, 15)
- Two angels visited with Abraham prior to destroying Sodom and Gomorrah (19:1, 15)
- An angel was sent to guide Abraham's servant as he looked for a wife for Isaac (24:7, 40)

From other passages of the Bible, angels are presented as Divine emissaries who carry out the plan and work of God

- Hence, the reason why they are ascending and descending on the ladder
- They are constantly going from and returning to their base which is in heaven

The book of Hebrews makes this startling realization about angels, “**Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?**” (Heb 1:14)

- Angels are ministering to believers
- Did you realize this?

³ Kenneth A. Mathews, *NAC, Vol. 1B*, 449.

I can't think of many instances where angels are dealing with unbelievers

- The predominant focus of angels is how they do the work of God in their ministry toward believers

But as great as the sight of the ladder and angels is, there is something else that captures the attention of Jacob

- A Divine Person is the central focus of this passage⁴
- We read about Him in verse 13

¹³ And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac;

You can sense the amazement that Jacob must be experiencing, even in his dream

- He sees a ladder that stretches from heaven to earth
- He sees angels constantly ascending and descending from this ladder
- Then he is made aware of Someone on top of the ladder

This is the 3rd time that the word "behold" is used in verses 12-13⁵

- "behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven"
- "and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it"
- "¹³ And behold, the LORD stood above it and said"

Verse 13 informs us that "the LORD stood above" the ladder

- Remember, the ladder reaches from heaven to earth
- So the top of the ladder would be heaven

So it shouldn't surprise us that we see God in heaven

- That is the best part about heaven...God Himself!

This is none other than Yahweh, the Covenant-keeping God

- He created everything (2:4)
- He told Noah to build an ark before He brought destruction upon the Earth (6:5-7)
- He confused the language of the Earth when mankind tried to build a tower that reached heaven (11:5, 6, 8, 9)

He appeared to Abram on a number of occasions (12-22)

- He appeared to Isaac on a number of occasions (26:2, 24)
- *Now this same God was appearing to Jacob*

The manner in which the LORD speaks with Jacob is very meaningful, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac"

We have seen the LORD introduce Himself as:

- "the God of Shem" (9:26)
- "the God of heaven and the God of earth" (24:3)
- "the God of my master Abraham" (24:12)
- "the God of your father Abraham" (26:24)

⁴ Ross, 488.

⁵ W.H. Griffith-Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, 263.

The God Who has appeared to so many individuals now makes His first appearance to Jacob

- But it would not be the last appearance

The LORD is the God of Abraham and Isaac

- Now Jacob is the chosen seed of the Abrahamic line

the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants.

By this time, we should be very familiar with the Abrahamic Covenant and its blessings

- Land – the Promised Land
- Seed – descendants who would carry on the Covenant until the Deliverer comes to redeem sinful humanity
- Blessing – God’s favor displayed through this chosen family

Here in Genesis 28, the LORD promises Jacob all three of these blessings

Jacob is told that the LORD would give Jacob the land

- This is interesting timing, isn’t it?

Where is Jacob fleeing from?

- Beersheba, in the land of Canaan

So as Jacob is leaving Canaan, the LORD promises him that he and his descendants will possess the land

- What a promise!

¹⁴ Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south;

Why was Jacob going to Haran?

- To find a wife

Yet what does the LORD promise in verse 13?

- “*the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants*” (emphasis mine)

The LORD states further in verse 14 that Jacob’s descendants would be plenteous, “*like the dust of the earth*”

- This is what God promised Abraham back in 13:16!

Jacob’s descendants would spread out to the four corners of the earth

- To the west, east, north, and south

Jacob isn’t even married yet, let alone have any children

- And the LORD is already promising that he will have children!!

and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

Jacob is promised the land

- He is promised numerous descendants
- Now he is given the promise of a universal blessing

It would be in Jacob and his descendants that “all the families of the earth” will be blessed

- This must have been extremely humbling!

Thus far, we have seen Jacob getting the blessing

- Now the focus is on Jacob being a blessing⁶

¹⁵ And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land;

God assures Jacob of His very presence on his journey to Haran

- Not only the LORD’s presence, but His protection

What an amazing promise from God, especially at this point in Jacob’s life

- He is running from his twin brother who is set on killing him
- He is all alone on this long journey to Haran

And it is at this point that the LORD reveals Himself to Jacob

The last thing that Jacob had done in Beersheba was to obtain his father’s blessing through deceit and craftiness!

- Not exactly the best way to leave home!
- Yet God assures Jacob of His presence

And the LORD continues by promising Jacob to “keep you wherever you go”

- This is the idea of God’s protection for him
- God Himself would be Jacob’s shield and defender

Being by himself in a foreign land, Jacob felt alone

- Now he knows that God is with him
- Now he knows that God will protect him

Lastly, the LORD promises Jacob, “(I) will bring you back to this land”

- Jacob is leaving the land of Canaan

Surely, he thinks this will be a short trip

- Go up, get a wife, and return quickly
- At least that was the plan of Rebekah, his mother

Little did either one of them realize that it would be over 20 years before Jacob stepped foot back in the land of Canaan

- But the LORD knew
- And the LORD promised His presence and protection for Jacob during those 20 years

for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

This last statement of the LORD was equally amazing

- It is a further elaboration of God’s promised presence

⁶ Hamilton, 242.

God would not leave Jacob until He had performed His work in Jacob's life

- Of course, that would be for the rest of his earthly life

So, in essence, this was a Divine promise that lasted for the rest of his earthly days

- Amazing!

Up to this point, Jacob has been a crafty deceiver

- But he learned that he was helpless without God
- God revealed Himself while Jacob was asleep⁷

For Jacob, a crafty deceiver, we would not expect this

- We would expect God's rebuke
- We would expect God's reminder of what proper conduct is
- *Yet what we find is God's blessing⁸*

Is it really any different for us?

- Are we any more worthy of God's blessings than Jacob?
- Are we not deceitful and crafty like him?

Yet despite our sinfulness as those who believe in and trust in the LORD, what are we promised?

- *“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³ Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Rom 8:31-35)*
- *“‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,’ ⁶ so that we confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?’” (Heb 13:5b-6)*

God has not given anyone of us a dream of a ladder with angels

- God no longer communicates through dreams like this

Beloved, God has given us everything we need to know about Him in His Word

- He has revealed Himself in the pages of the Bible

What was communicated in verbal form to Jacob has been communicated in written form to us

- But the content is still the same

The same LORD Who revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the same God who reveals Himself to us

- Because we are His children, we have great assurances of His presence, protection, and other promises

But the real question becomes, “How do we respond to God's revelation of Himself?”

- That is the focus of the closing portion of Genesis 28
- Let's take a look at verses 16-22

⁷ Griffith-Thomas, 266.

⁸ Hamilton, 241.

II. The response to God's revelation (28:16-22)

¹⁶ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it."

All of a sudden, Jacob awoke from his sleep!

- Perhaps he was startled as he realized that he had been dreaming
- Even though I am sure that he felt that it was as real as real could be

And what was Jacob's first, initial response and reaction to the dream?

- Not comfort
- But conviction

Hear what Jacob said, "**Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it!**"

- He was shocked to hear that the presence of the LORD was in this ordinary place

It is easy for us to be hard on Jacob

- "Come on, Jacob, don't you know that God is everywhere?"

But then again, we have the entire Scriptures before us

- We have a privileged blessing that he didn't have at his disposal

Jacob's theology was very limited

- It would have been based on what his father and mother told him

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."

Verse 17 further explains the frame of mind that Jacob possessed, "**he was afraid**"⁹

- Adam was afraid for God see him after his sin (3:10)
- Abram was afraid when he saw God (15:1)
- Sarah was afraid after she lied about laughing (18:15)
- Hagar was afraid about the future of her child (21:17)
- Isaac was afraid of the men of Gerar (26:7)

Isn't it interesting that these individuals experienced fear?

- Some feared other men
- Most of these expressed fear when they came into contact with God

What was thought to be an ordinary place became a sacred, holy place

- Jacob exclaims, "**How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven**"

Little did Jacob know that this was the very "**house of God**" and "**the gate of heaven**"

- These are strong terms

Jacob had come into the presence of God

- And he was different as a result of it

⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 2, 223.*

How do you respond when you experience God?

- When you read the Word, how do you respond?
- When you pray, how do you respond?
- When you come to church, how do you respond?

One of my concerns for the Church – both this local church and the universal Church – is the lack of proper response to God

- We become used to hearing God's Word
- We become used to praying
- We become used to church

We have lost the awe, the respect, the reverence of God

- We have lost that aspect of fearing God
- In short, we have become comfortable with God!

There is a movement in the world that has contaminated many local churches

- It is a movement which presents the worship service as a place to entertain people
- The movement emphasizes that the worship participants be made as comfortable as possible
- The movement removes anything that might be offensive in the music and sermon

Honestly, the only way to make people feel comfortable in a worship service is to remove any contact with the living God!

- This movement had created this effect without realizing what they have done!

They have become like Samson¹⁰

- After telling Delilah the secret of his strength, he slept in her lap
- Without his knowledge, she cut off his hair

The result of this was that when he was awakened, he resumed life as normal

- But the Bible says that “**he did not know that the LORD had departed from him**” (Jdg 16:20)

Jacob had his focus on Haran

- He wanted to get there, find a wife, and return back to the land of Canaan

But God wanted to get his attention

- God was about to enlarge his theology

¹⁸ So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on its top.

We are not told whether or not Jacob could go back to sleep after this dream

- I think it would be hard to put those thoughts out of his mind long enough to think about his need for sleep

But we do know that early the next morning, he arose and did something unique

- He took the stone that had served as his pillow and “**set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on its top**”

¹⁰ Hamilton, 244.

Since God has manifested Himself so clearly to Jacob, he wanted to commemorate this event

- This act of pouring oil on something was to set that item apart as special to the Lord
- We often use the term “sanctify” or “consecrate”¹¹
- This was an act of dedication to the Lord¹²

This stone would serve as a reminder and a memorial

- Not only for Jacob
- But for future generations as well

¹⁹ And he called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz.

Not only did Jacob consecrate the stone

- He also renamed the place

We are finally told that the former name of this city was Luz

- But the new name of the city was “Bethel”

What does “Bethel” mean?

- House of God

Jacob had witnessed a dream wherein God revealed Himself

- Heaven literally came down to him in that dream
- The LORD Himself spoke to Jacob, reassuring him of God’s presence, protection, and promises

²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, ²¹ and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God.

So far Jacob has responded three ways

- He confesses his ignorance of the Lord’s presence
- He consecrated the stone that served as his pillow the night before
- He renamed the city to Bethel, commemorating the place as the very house of God

But then Jacob takes a vow

- He is the only patriarch to take a vow like this
- He is the only person in the book of Genesis to take a vow¹³

Oftentimes, vows were taken in a time of distress

- They were solemn prayers in which the worshiper promised to give God something in a time of need¹⁴

Some have looked at this vow and read it as a bargain

- They have interpreted this as another act of deception wherein Jacob attempts to trick God into doing something for him

¹¹ Derek Kidner, *Tyndale OT Commentaries, Genesis*, 159.

¹² Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 452.

¹³ Mathews, 454.

¹⁴ Wenham, 226.

But I see this entirely different

- I think that the LORD wants to change the very nature and character of this deceiver
- Jacob will be different as a result of this dream

The “if” at the beginning of his vow could very well be read as “since”

- In other words, because God will be faithful to perform certain duties, Jacob will do certain things in response

Jacob is assured that God will

- Be with him
- Keep him on the journey
- Give him food to eat and clothes to wear
- Bring him back to his father’s house

Jacob vows that the LORD will be his God

- This is the first time that Jacob refers to the LORD as “my God”

²² And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house; and of all that Thou dost give me I will surely give a tenth to Thee.”

Part of the vow is a reminder about the meaning of Bethel

- That stone would serve as a memorial to this dream and encounter with God

But Jacob also promises that when he returns back to the land of Canaan – some 20 years later – he will “surely give a tenth” to the LORD

- We have already seen this issue of the “tenth” enacted between Abraham and Melchizedek

Jacob promises to be generous and give back to the LORD for His provision

- At this time in Biblical history, the tithe was voluntary¹⁵
- It was an act of generosity in response to the LORD’s goodness and provision

Jacob would no longer be a grasper, but a giver¹⁶

Jacob has had an amazing night here at Bethel

- What he thought was an ordinary place turned out to be an extraordinary place
- It became a sacred place

When God reveals Himself, things don’t remain the same

- People are changed as a result of coming into the presence of God

We think of how Isaiah was made aware of his sin when the Lord revealed Himself in Isaiah 6

- He saw himself and others as very sinful people

¹⁵ John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison*, 244.

¹⁶ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 394.

We think of how Peter had worked all night at fishing with no success

- The Lord told him to let down his nets
- Peter politely informed Jesus that he had worked hard all night; however, he would obey
- The result was that the nets were so full that two boats' full of fish were recovered
- What was Peter's response?
- **"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"** (Lk 5:8)

How about you this morning?

- How do you respond to God's revelation?

Have you lost the awe and reverence that God deserves?

- Are you guilty of just going through the motions?
- Are you like Samson, ignorant of the fact that the presence of the Lord is not manifested in your life?

May God protect us from being too comfortable with Christianity!

- Other churches are removing anything that might be considered offensive
- They want the worship experience to be comfortable

But the Biblical model is that when we truly worship God and come into His presence, we will be anything but comfortable!

- We will be convicted of our sins
- We will be made aware of our irreverence
- We will be changed!

This morning, as we partake of the Lord's Table, may we not be guilty of taking this in a flippant manner

- May we truly worship Him for what Jesus Christ has accomplished!