

God's Grace Gets a Hold of Jacob

Text: Gen. 28:1-22

Introduction:

1. In this chapter Jacob departs from Beersheba at his father's command and travels to Haran to find a wife. The events of chapter 27 form the backdrop to Jacob's leaving home. As sad as the fractures in Jacob's home were, the Lord would use it for Jacob's ultimate good by taking him out of that situation to where He could begin to work more directly in Jacob's life.
 - Whereas 'deception' was a fitting one-word summary for chapter 27, the word that could summarise this chapter (Chap. 28) would be 'grace'. We see the hand of God's grace at work in Jacob's life to get him started on his own personal walk of faith. "That which is most prominent in the Divine dealings with Jacob was the matchless grace of God, shown to one so unworthy, the marvellous patience exercised toward one so slow of heart to believe, the changeless love which unweariedly followed him through all his varied course, the faithfulness which no unfaithfulness on Jacob's part could change, and the power of God which effectively preserved and delivered him through numerous dangers and which, in the end, caused the spirit to triumph over the flesh, transforming the worm Jacob into Israel the prince of God." (Pink)
2. What is recorded in this chapter is by no means the end of God's gracious dealings with Jacob. There was much work to go to transform Jacob into Israel but in many ways, it marks the real starting point, the first real milestone of Jacob's personal relationship with Almighty God.
3. We will divide the chapter into three parts for this sermon.

I. THE INSTRUCTION OF GOD'S GRACE (VS. 1-9)

God's hand moves through Isaac to begin directing Jacob along the path of His will. Take note of:

A. The Injunction to Jacob (Vs. 1-2)

1. The context of Isaac's charge (Vs. 1a; 27:41-46)

The context to this instruction is at the end of the previous chapter. Rebecca, fearing for Jacob's life approaches Isaac and appeals to him to send Jacob away to find a wife.

 - a. The truth in Rebecca's approach – Esau's wives were a grief to both Isaac and Rebecca (Gen. 26:34-35) so Rebecca was genuinely concerned that Jacob marry the right kind of woman.
 - b. The tactic in Rebecca's approach – the surface reason presented by Rebecca for sending Jacob away was not the primary thing motivating her. Her primary concern was that Jacob was going to be murdered by Esau. Again, this highlights the sad reality that as a wife, Rebecca is still operating in a less than honourable way in relation to her husband's headship.
2. The content of Isaac's charge (Vs. 1b-2)
 - a. Where Jacob's wife was not to come from (Vs. 1b)

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- i. Isaac was concerned that Jacob not repeat his twin brother's mistake and marry a woman from Canaan. He uses almost the same words his father Abraham had used concerning his own marriage (Gen. 24:3).
 - ii. Marrying the wrong spouse is a "grief of mind" to a godly parent (Gen. 26:35).
 - iii. Barnhouse rightly said, "A man can never be truly judged until you meet the woman he loves. One glance at her will reveal much of his character."
- b. Where Jacob's wife was to come from (Vs. 2)
 - i. Isaac was concerned that Jacob's wife come from the right household, the household of Abraham's brethren. In like manner, we should be careful to only marry a genuine believer from within the household of faith.
 - ii. Note: In order for Jacob to fulfill God's plan, he would need the right kind of wife.

B. The Benediction of Isaac (Vs. 3-5)

Isaac now pronounces a further blessing upon Jacob. This blessing has a much more spiritual tone to the last one.

1. The blessing of a plentiful lineage (Vs. 3)
 - a. "God Almighty" = Isaac uses the Name God revealed to Abraham in Genesis 17:1 – "I am the Almighty God". These blessings would come from El Shaddai, the All Powerful, Omnipotent, Mighty God of Abraham.
 - b. The first blessing pronounced was in reference to the multiplication of Jacob's seed, the blessing of children. Look at the three expressions of this:
 - i. "make thee fruitful"
 - ii. "multiply thee"
 - iii. "thou mayest be a multitude of people"
 - iv. Note: How little our world values the blessing of children but they are high on our God's blessing list. "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate." (Psalm 127:3-5). How the world and the devil have robbed so many of the blessing of children through abortion and indoctrination in family planning (banning?). In the Bible a fruitful marriage union was always a sign of God's blessing.
2. The blessing of the promised land (Vs. 4)
 - a. The blessing of the land is described as "the blessing of Abraham". Of course, this would also include the promised Messiah, the Seed of the Woman promised in Genesis 3:15.
 - b. The land of Israel belongs to Israel by Divine decree!

C. The Reaction from Esau (Vs. 6-9)

1. Why Esau Acted – this was Esau's response to these things (Vs. 6-8)

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2. How Esau Acted – Esau’s response was to go and take one of Ishmael’s daughters as a third wife (Vs. 9)
 - a. It appears that this was Esau’s attempt to court his parents favour and secure a blessing for himself. He provides a classic example of how a man of the world tries to come up with his own solutions to his problems.
 - b. “Esau is one of those who, as it has been truly and acutely said, tries to do what God’s people do in the vain hope that somehow or other it will be pleasing to God. He will not do precisely what God requires, but something like it. He will not entirely give up the world and put God first in his life, but he will try to meet some of God’s wishes by a little alteration in his conduct. Instead of renouncing sin he will cover it with the glory of small virtues; but it is one thing to conform to the outward practices of God’s people, it is quite another to be thoroughly and truly godly at heart.” (Griffith Thomas)

II. THE INTERVENTION OF GOD’S GRACE (VS. 10-15)

Jacob is probably about 3-4 days into his journey to Haran when he stops at a place originally called Luz but which would now be known as Bethel. We know that Bethel would have been 3-4 days journey as it took Abraham 3 days to go from Beersheba to Moriah which is the Jerusalem area (Gen. 22:4). Bethel is about 17 km north of Jerusalem. **God takes the initiative and reveals Himself to unworthy Jacob in grace.** We note the revelation of:

A. The Pathway of God (Vs. 10-12)

1. The lead up to the vision (Vs. 10-11)
 - a. Jacob was an undeserving candidate for God’s grace. We got a glimpse of Jacob’s Adamic nature in the previous chapter. He was a supplanter and a deceiver by nature. He had blasphemously used God’s Name to cover his sin of deception (27:20). He was on the run as a consequence of his sin. In like manner, we are all undeserving of God’s saving grace because we, like Jacob, inherited a sinful nature from Adam (Rom. 3:10, 23; 5:12). One author summarizes it well, “Here is Jacob a fugitive from his father’s house, fleeing from his brother’s wrath, with probably no thought of God in his mind. As we behold him there on the bare ground with nothing but the stones for his pillow, enshrouded by the darkness of night, asleep – symbol of death – we obtain a striking and true picture of man in his natural state.” (Pink)
 - b. Jacob was an unable candidate. Jacob was powerless and unable to change himself. Only the grace of God could lift him out of his state. Look at the hopeless picture of Jacob here. He lies asleep in darkness with only stones for a pillow. What a picture of the lost estate of the sinner without Christ.
2. The ladder in the vision (Vs. 12)

God speaks to Jacob through a dream. In those times before the canon of Scripture was completed, God sometimes revealed

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Himself through dreams. In this striking dream Jacob sees a ladder that reaches from earth to heaven, with angelic beings ascending and descending upon it. We know this ladder is a type and picture of Christ and salvation from Christ's words to Nathanael, "And he saith unto him, **Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.**" (John 1:51) The Lord Jesus was claiming that He himself was Jacob's Ladder, the one means by which one could go from earth to heaven. Let's look at some features of this staircase and how it speaks of Christ.

- a. The start of the staircase – "behold, a ladder set up on the earth". The ladder reached right down to where Jacob was.
 - i. We are reminded of the wonderful truth that Christ came all the way from heaven to earth and took on human flesh in order to save us.
 - ii. It also reminds us that no matter how low you may be in sin, God's salvation staircase reaches down to you to rescue you.
 - iii. "Right down to his deepest need the ladder came, right up to the presence of God the ladder reached, and the vision of the angels on the ladder was intended to symbolize the freedom of communication, telling of access to God, and of constant, free, easy communication between earth and heaven." (Thomas)
- b. The summit of the staircase – "and the top of it reached to heaven". Not only did Christ descend to earth but he also ascended back to heaven after His resurrection. Christ is the only way to heaven!
- c. The span of the staircase – "and the top of it reached to heaven". This amazing staircase spanned the huge distance between earth and heaven. Heaven seems too far away and unreachable to sinful man but salvation in Christ spans the distance. "Oh, the love that drew salvations plan! Oh, the grace that brought it down to man! Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary!" "The "ladder" pointed to Christ Himself, the One who spanned the infinite gulf which separated heaven from earth, and who had in His own person proved a way whereby we may draw near to God. That the "ladder" reached from earth to heaven, told of the complete provision which Divine grace has made for sinners. Right down to where the fugitive lay, the ladder came, and right up to God Himself the "ladder" reached." (Pink)
- d. The singularity of the staircase. There was only one staircase in Jacob's vision. Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. There is NO OTHER WAY! (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). WARNING! Any man-made staircase to heaven (i.e., religion) will in reality take you down to the fires of hell rather than the glories of heaven.
- e. The seraphs upon the staircase – "and behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it". The angels on the ladder remind us of the service of angels in our Lord's life during His

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earthly ministry. While salvation does not come through angels, Hebrews reveals that they are “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation”. (Heb. 1:14)

- f. The Sovereign above the Staircase – “And, behold, the LORD stood above it and said” (vs. 13). God speaking from the top of the ladder demonstrates in type that God speaks to us through Christ. He is the Incarnate Word through Whom the Divine message is declared (Heb. 1:1, 3; John 1:1, 14). We are also reminded of Christ’s role as our Mediator. It is only through Christ that we have access to the Father in heaven (Jn. 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5).

B. The Person of God (Vs. 13a)

1. God reveals Himself to Jacob as the God of Abraham and Isaac. No doubt Jacob knew of Almighty God from his father and grandfather but now the same God was revealing Himself to Jacob. The same God his grandfather had known and the same God his father knew could be Jacob’s God too!
2. God would eventually call Himself the “God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex. 3:6).
3. The good news is that God hasn’t changed and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob can be your God too through God’s saving grace.

C. The Promises of God (Vs. 13a)

Through the Patriarchal blessing of Isaac, Jacob was acquainted with the Abrahamic covenant which had been passed down to him but how much more significant it was for Him to hear these promises from God directly. Remember, repetition equals importance in God’s Word and the repetition of these promises emphasises that it is something firmly established by God (See Gen. 41:32).

1. The promise of land (Vs. 13b). The land promised to Abraham and Isaac would be inherited by Jacob and his descendants.
2. The promise of Seed (Vs. 14).
 - a. The natural seed (Vs. 14a). God would multiply Jacob’s seed. Jacob’s seed was multiplied in his life with 12 sons. Those 12 sons would go on to multiply rapidly in Egypt prior to the Exodus.
 - b. The Messianic seed (Vs. 14b). Jacob would have the privileged position of being the next link in the Messianic Seed line. The whole world would be blessed because of Jacob’s seed and how wonderfully that has been fulfilled in Christ our Messiah. Note: Our prayer should be “Lord bless me in order that I might be a channel of blessing to others.”
3. The promise of preservation (Vs. 15)

What comfort these promises must have brought to Jacob and how rich was God’s grace to one so undeserving.

 - a. The Presence of God – “I am with thee...for I will not leave thee”. Jacob would know the abiding presence of God in his life from this point. God’s presence would be with him and would never forsake him. It reminds us of the words of our Lord in the

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Great Commission, “and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” (Matt. 28:20).

- b. The Protection of God – “and will keep thee in all places wither thou goest”. God’s keeping power would be at work in Jacob’s life wherever he was.
- c. The Purposes of God – “for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of”. The grand purpose of God’s presence and protection in Jacob’s life was in order to fulfill His Divine purposes through Jacob. God’s grace had chosen Jacob for a purpose.

III. THE IMPACT OF GOD’S GRACE (VS. 16-22)

That God’s Revelation to Jacob had a profound and powerful impact upon him is evident by his sober, godly response to God’s grace working in his life. There was a new consecration to God in Jacob’s life from this moment onwards. Jacob would not become a mature man of faith overnight but his first responses to the vision say much about how deeply his life had been changed. Note Jacob’s new heart and attitude towards:

A. The Fear of God (Vs. 16-17)

Jacob gained a sense of:

1. The Omnipresence of God (Vs. 16)
2. The Awesomeness of God (Vs. 17)
 - a. As Jacob awoke, the enormity of what had just transpired dawned upon him and he was filled with the reverential fear of God – “And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! The word ‘dreadful’ here does not mean ‘dreadful’ in the sense of ‘horrible’ as we tend to use the word today. It is ‘dreadful’ in the sense of ‘fearful’ and ‘awesome’. The flippant, careless attitude that prevails amongst large sections of Christendom today where God is treated on the level of a buddy at the beach is not only blasphemous, it reveals a very sad ignorance of the character of Almighty God.
 - b. This is a good and healthy response to Almighty God! Prov. 9:10 “The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy *is* understanding.”
 - c. “Jacob awoke in awe after this visitation from God. The great God of creation, the God of heaven and earth, ruling an infinite multitude of angels, was also interested in him!” (Henry Morris)

B. The Witness of God (Vs. 18)

1. Jacob takes the stone he had used as a pillow and erects a pillar to commemorate this visitation of God in his life. This would be a visible and public testimony to what God had done there in Jacob’s life. Then Jacob pours oil on the top of this pillar. We know that oil in the Bible is often a picture of the Holy Spirit.
2. If the pillar represents a public testimony, and the oil the Holy Spirit then it speaks to us of the need to be a witness anointed with the power of God to declare to a lost world what God’s grace has done in our lives.

C. The House of God (Vs. 17b, 19, 22a)

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1. Jacob named the place “Bethel” meaning “house of God” because God had chosen to manifest Himself to him in a special way in that place.
2. As New Testament believers, the house of God for us is the local church. God is with us and meets with us in our private lives but God has chosen to manifest His presence in a special way in the “house of God” when the saints assemble together. We get several pictures of this in the New Testament:
 - a. The church is referred to as God’s house & household (Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15) The church is referred to as God’s temple (Eph. 2:20-21).
 - b. The church is referred to as God’s habitation through the Spirit (Eph. 2:22).
 - c. Christ is pictured as walking amongst his candlesticks (Rev. 2:1). Remember, Christ is not present in every place that claims to be a “church”. Christ is pictured outside the Laodicean church. Sadly, we are living in the Laodicean age where Christ is NOT present in the majority of churches.
 - d. Note: If you are going to grow as a Christian, you MUST spend time at Bethel (the house of God, the local church)! On a basic level we should be motivated by a sense of duty as a believer to attend church but on a higher level, we should be motivated out of a passion to meet with God!

D. The Worship of God (Vs. 20-22)

Jacob vows the first vow recorded in the Bible. He makes a godly resolve that:

1. God would be His God (Vs. 20-21)
 - a. Jacob’s “If” statement was not so much a bargain or a statement of doubt but coming from an assurance that God would fulfill His Word. Jacob’s response to the goodness of God would be to make a personal decision that God would be his God. Jacob went from knowing about God to knowing God personally.
 - b. Note: While Jacob’s commitment was honourable it represented his first baby steps in the walk of faith. We should not therefore be surprised that there is still a lot of “I” and “my” in Jacob at this time. He would have to learn the truth of “not I” and God’s faithful love would lead him to that point in the future to where He would cling to the Lord and say “I will not let thee go except thou bless me”.
2. Bethel would be God’s house (Vs. 22a)
3. He would give a tithe (Vs. 22b)
 - a. The forerunner of Jacob’s tithing – Jacob would follow the example of his godly grandfather Abraham, the first man recorded in the Bible as giving a tithe (Gen. 14:20).
 - b. The freeness of Jacob’s tithing – this was entirely voluntary on the part of Jacob. At this stage in Biblical history, there was no direct command concerning tithing. It was done as an expression of his thanksgiving to God. This should be the same

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spirit that motivates our tithing. We should give our tithes and offerings as an expression of love and thankfulness to God.

- c. The faith of Jacob's tithing – at this point in time, Jacob owned practically nothing but he resolved that as God provided, He would give back a tenth. The fact that Jacob dedicated himself to give a tithe shows the depth to which this encounter with Almighty God had affected him for good. Before Bethel, Jacob was a “getter” and not a “giver”. He was interested in getting all he could, not in giving. The grace of God changed that! The grace of God still transforms people from selfish to sacrificial; from getters to givers!
- d. The focus of Jacob's tithing – “I will surely give the tenth **unto thee**”. Jacob was giving to the Lord.

Conclusion: Will you respond to the intervention of God's grace in your life?