

God Comes Down To Us

Genesis 28:10-19 ¹⁰ Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. ¹² Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder *was* set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: "I *am* the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. ¹⁴ "Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall 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 spoken to 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 Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. ¹⁹ And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously.

If we aren't listening carefully, it is easy to misunderstand expectations. A wife might remark that we are low on bread and butter but have plenty of eggs, and the husband comes home with eggs and beer.

In our text this morning Jacob certainly is not listening and does misunderstand God's intention.

"I will go with you and be with you," says God.

Jacob's response is, "this place must be the house of God."

He completely misses the whole point, that God is with Jacob not in that place. That place is not Bethel, the house of God, but Jacob is the house of God because God has chosen to make Jacob one of his people and to make his home with him.

"I will be with you." What a wonderful promise from God. And yet Jacob misses it completely because he is not really listening. The question is are we listening to the promises of God or are we missing the point.

At the beginning of our text, Jacob sees stairs going up and the Lord standing on top. Why is the Lord standing on top? The natural, normal assumption if we see God standing on top of the stairs is to think, "ahh God is waiting for me to come up." But if we tried to climb up those stairs, we would find out very quickly that we are wrong. We would find that we like Jacob were not listening to the Lord.

The Lord is standing on top not because he is calling Jacob to come up but because he is about to come down. He makes this clear in our text.

"I am with you."

"I will be with you wherever you go."

"I will not leave you."

No where in our text does God call Jacob to ascend but clearly he promises to descend to be with Jacob. He does not even call Jacob to return to this place, but promises Jacob that he will bring him back to this place.

In the New Testament Jesus also makes it clear that the stairs which Jacob sees are the means by which God comes down to us.

John 3:13 ¹³ "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

Again, when Jesus was speaking to Nathanael he makes it clear that he is the stairs through which God descends to men. And if those same stairs are also how we ascend to God it is only after God has come down and carried us up.

John 1:51 And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

What Jacob saw was a picture of Jesus through whom God would come down to men and make his home with men.

"I will be with you."

This is God's unbreakable covenant with Jacob and with us. This is the promise Jesus made to his disciples.

"Lo, I am with you always."

The greatest mistake we can make in our lives is to think that when we have fallen into sin, we have to work our way out of that pit back to God. Attempting to work our way out of the hole we have made is only going to result in a deeper hole. And whereas digging a deeper hole is sometimes impressive it is not the way we want to be going. God lowers the ladder and not only lowers the ladder but comes down the ladder to live among us.

The Lord is standing on top about to come down not calling us up.

God does not call us up to see his marvelous works, but he comes down to do the impossible in our lives.

If we have something that we have done well, we might invite people over to our house to show it off. Come see my model train. But God does not call us to come up to see his marvelous works but again he comes down to shows his marvelous works among us.

This is what the kids learned in VBS this week. Not only that Jesus does the impossible, but that he does the impossible in our live because he is with us. Bethel, which means the house of God, is not a place in Israel but in our hearts. The house of God is with his people, and because he lives with us his impossible works are with us each and every day.

Jesus changed water into wine. There is no problem too small, no need that we cannot ask for his help.

Jesus walked on the sea and called Peter to walk with him. When Jesus is walking with us the storms of this world do not matter. We can walk right through the waves and the storms.

Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from death. Because Jesus came down to be with us, death is nothing more than a long sleep from which we will one day awake.

Jesus rose from the dead and showed himself to the apostle, proving that not even his own death would keep him from his people.

Jesus called Saul from a life of sin to proclaim to everyone the great good news that he is risen from the dead. Jesus works the same impossible thing in our lives calling us from sin to sing his praise.

All these impossible things and so many more Jesus still does among his people each and every day because he still lives with his people. Bethel, the house of God, is in our hearts.

This house of God is to be kept holy.

When Jacob thinks that this place is the house of God. What does he say?

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

He is amazed. He is humbled. He is astounded. How much more astounded would he have been if he had understood that the house of God was in him.

Jacob built an altar because he thought that this place was the house of God. Moses removed his sandals when he drew near to the burning bush. No one except the high priest was allowed to the enter

the holy of holies. No one was allowed to touch the ark of the covenant, or they would die. All of this is to teach us that what has been sanctified for God ought not to be defiled with sin. We ourselves feel instinctively that it is wrong to misuse or fool around in the church. If all of this is true, when we think of places or things as the house of God, how much more should we sanctify and cleanse our hearts when we understand that God's house is with us?

If Jacob set up a marker on a piece of land when he thought that was the house of God. How much more should we set up a marker in our hearts. Not of oil and stone but of thoughts and words and deeds.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Yet how should we do that? Not by attempting to climb the stairs ourselves that isn't going to work. We are right back again where we started. We are standing at the foot of those stairs to heaven. We are looking up at the Lord and wondering how to climb up to Him. We cannot climb the stairs up to God. But God comes down to us.

He comes to us in baptism, in the lord's supper, in the word of God, and in confession both private and public. These things are where that stair way to heaven touches earth. These things are where God comes down to live with us. By these means God comes down the stairs to us and sanctifies us and makes us Bethel, the house of God. By these things Jesus does the impossible to wash away the sin of our daily life and sanctify us as his temple.

We are Bethel. We are the house of God. Because Jesus lives with us, he does the impossible in our lives each and every day.

Amen