

Midweek Meditation November 25, 2020, week of November 22

Genesis 28:10-51. Jacob's ladder.

In order to completely understand the meaning of this passage, we have to take a step back and review where Jacob has come from. He is the offspring of Isaac. And at the time of Jacob's birth, it is made known to Rebekah and Isaac that Jacob is the one who will carry on this royal line that has now passed down from Abraham to Isaac, and now to Jacob. It appears to me that Isaac, during his lifetime, sort of put God's plan, for his offspring to inherit the promised land, on a pretty low priority. Remember Abraham and Sarah were so eager to see that promise fulfilled, that they tried to force it, using modes and methods that were not even God's plan. Now, here we are, in Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob's journey. And Isaac seems to have forgotten about the fact, that it was God's plan for Jacob to be the heir to God's promise. You will remember that Isaac, when the time of his death came near, sought to give Esau his blessing, even though he knew that it was God's plan for Jacob to be the heir to God's promise. And now, Jacob is near 70 years old, and it is only because Jacob is running away from the wrath of his angry brother that is causing Jacob return to his homeland and because Isaac is manipulated by his wife Rebekah. And, as a response to his wife's influence, Isaac's advice is, by the way Jacob, as long as you are going to the homeland, find yourself a wife from the offspring of your mother's brother Laban. Because, if you marry one of these Canaanite women from around here, your mother's life will absolutely not be worth living. And perhaps for Isaac, that means that his life will not be worth living either. You will remember that Abraham made his servant swear an oath that he would do everything possible to find a wife for Isaac from the people of Abraham's homeland. It was of extreme importance. And not just because Canaanite women drove him crazy, rather it was because he believed that a wife for his son from his homeland was God's will. For Isaac, it was simply to pacify his wife's dislike of Canaanite women, and because Jacob is going in that direction anyway. The point being, that Jacob might not quite understand the urgency of the need to be faithful to the call from God, and the need to be obedient to the direction that God gives him to go. And perhaps the reason that Jacob didn't understand the urgency is because his father, Isaac, had not understood the urgency of faith toward God in his life. And we really don't know if Rebekah understands God's will any better, or if she is just manipulating Isaac in order to protect her favorite son, Jacob, and get away from the crazy Canaanite women. Either way, God's will emerges.

That is the context of the story in this passage. For a bunch of reasons not even related to God's will, Jacob left Beersheba and set out for the land of his ancestors. He was headed toward Haran, a town that was named after Abraham's brother. We can see from what it says in the scripture, Jacob traveled one day, and then stopped because it was evening. That almost certainly means that he is still inside the bounds of the land that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob. He took a stone that was at the place where he stopped, and he used it as a pillow. Now, a stone would not have been my first choice for a pillow, but he may have put something soft over it. Who knows? But we will see later that this stone plays a part in this story.

The scripture says that Jacob has a dream. He sees a stairway, and in some versions of this story, it is a ladder, that is headed toward heaven. The stairway is resting on the face of the earth, and reaches all the way to heaven, and the angels of God are ascending and descending on it. There above the stairway was the Lord, and He said, "I am Lord, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac. I will give you, Jacob, and your descendants, the land that you are lying on. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the West and to the East, and to the North and to the South. All nations on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you, and will watch over you, where ever 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." 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." He then named the place Bethel. It had been a town called Luz. I think Bethel is an improvement to Luz.

Jacob took the stone that he had rested his head on during that dream, and made it into a pillar there, and he made a vow saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking, and give me food to eat, and clothing to wear, so that I return safely to my father's house, then the Lord will be my God, and this stone I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you gave me, I will give you a tenth." In this dream, God is affirming for Jacob the same promise that he gave to Abraham and to Isaac before Jacob. And because of this dream, I think there is a transformation in Jacob's life, not unlike a number of transformations in the Gospel. Zacchaeus climbed up into a tree to see Jesus better, and his life was never the same. What about the thief on Jesus' right? Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." The thief's life was changed for all eternity. Jacob had a transformation like that. Keep in mind, as far as we know, from the scripture, this is Jacob's first in-person encounter with God. The first 70 years, or so, of his life, he had only heard about this promised inheritance from his parents. This conversion experience prepared him to be the leader God ordained him to be. Abraham and Sarah needed to be nudged in one way; Isaac and Rebekah in another. And now, because of this dream, Jacob was equipped to take on his call, to serve God. This glorious dream, that was so vivid, changed Jacob's life, and every generation of believers that followed him, forever.

As is the case in so many stories in Genesis, this dream about a stairway to heaven, is a prophetic dream. Who is at the top of the stairs in Jacob's dream? It is the Lord. Let's wind the clock forward about 2000 years. In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, it says that Philip tells his friend, Nathanael, about Jesus. He tells him of the one Moses wrote about, the Messiah. Philip tells his friend that Jesus of Nazareth is the one Moses wrote about, the promised Messiah. And Nathanael says, "Nazareth, can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip simply says, "Come and see." And, that was all that was necessary. Jesus immediately sees the goodness in Nathanael, and Nathanael sees the goodness and truth and the true identity of Jesus, as the promised Messiah. Jesus says to Nathanael, basically, you have believed because of what you see now, but you haven't seen anything yet. You will see greater things. I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open up, and angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. The Gospel uses the same language that was used in this story in Genesis. Jesus tells Nathanael about the stairway where the angels ascend and descend in John 1:51. The stairway that Jacob sees in his dream is a prophesy of the Son of Man. In John 1:51, the Gospel tells about the same stairway, where angels ascend and descend. And it is the Son of Man; the Messiah who will be the descendant of Jacob. All generations will ascend to the Kingdom of God upon the shoulders of the Son of Man, Jesus Christ the Lord. You and I will ascend that Holy Stairway that leads to the Kingdom of God, because of the love of Jesus for you and me, and because of the blessing of His sacrifice for our salvation. Jesus' sacrifice leads us to the very same stairway that was prophesied to Jacob by the blessing of God, and the angels who ministered to him, in the blessing of that dream.

So, at 70 years old, Jacob's journey with the Lord begins. After a lifetime of lukewarm faith, and impure motives for the things that he did. With the image of a stairway to heaven imprinted on the path that would lead the rest of his life, he begins his journey by holding hands with his God. As with Abraham, and in our lives, the miracle of God's providence prevails, in spite of all of the impure motives, and the frail attempts at faith, by every generation of the children of God. God's providence prevails in our lives in the very same way, if we are patient and if we wait to behold the miracle of His will being done.

Well, that is going to do it for today, and by the way, Happy Thanksgiving!

Next week, we will talk about how Jacob's journey involves an encounter with his Uncle Laban. And how Uncle Laban makes Rebekah and Jacob's little prank on Isaac and Esau look pretty innocent.

For now, let us bow in prayer...