

Remember Where We Met God
Genesis 28:10-19
7/27/08

In this story of Jacob and his dream, we see first of all that Jacob is on a journey to another land. He's had to leave home to go to his mother's family in Haran because his brother is plotting to kill him. He's cheated his brother out of their father's blessing and so he gets sent away to let things cool off. But on the way to his uncle's house in Haran, Jacob stops for the night and he has a dream.

In this dream he sees a stairway leading from earth to heaven and the angels of God are going up and down this stairway. He sees the Lord standing above this stairway and the Lord speaks to Jacob. In the New Testament, in John 1:51, Jesus refers to himself as the stairway upon which the angels go up and down. He is the bridge between heaven and earth. In fact this whole dream and the message God gives Jacob points to the coming of Jesus Christ. But Jacob doesn't know all this. All Jacob learns from this dream is that there is a connection between heaven and earth and the God of heaven interacts with humans. The world of the spiritual and the world of the earthly are connected. And God is the God of both heaven and earth. As far as we know, this is the first time Jacob has had a personal encounter with the God of heaven and earth. This God had appeared to his grandfather Abraham and spoken with him and Jacob would have grown up hearing about this God. But now he's having his own experience with God.

In this dream God speaks to Jacob and tells him some pretty important stuff. He repeats to Jacob the same promise He had made to Abraham. He tells Jacob He is the Lord, the God of Abraham and Isaac, the one he's heard of all his life. He promises that He will give Jacob and his descendants the land that he is lying on. God had also promised Abraham land. He promises that Jacob's descendants will spread out in all directions. God had promised Abraham descendants too numerous to count. He tells Jacob that all people on earth will be blessed through him and his offspring, just as God had promised Abraham earlier. But then God says something to Jacob that He had not said to Abraham.

He says “I am with you and I will watch over you wherever 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.”

This is new. God was with Abraham, but when we look at the stories of Abraham’s encounters with God, it seems that God shows up at will and speaks with Abraham. There is no explicit promise from God to Abraham that He will be with him at all times. But here, God is saying “I am with you” even as Jacob is leaving home and going to another land. This is important because God is revealing something about Himself that has not been revealed before. God is the God who is with His people. The prophet Isaiah said that a virgin would bear a son and call his name Immanuel which means “God with us.” This was fulfilled when Jesus was born. He is God with us. And at Pentecost God sent the Holy Spirit to be with us always. But way before Isaiah’s time or Jesus’ birth, Jacob was told by God “I am with you and I will not leave you.”

What was so revolutionary about this idea for Jacob is the fact that the God he is meeting can travel. He’s not limited to one particular place. You see, during Jacob’s time, the people thought that the gods were limited to one particular place. So the gods of Egypt stayed in Egypt and the gods of the Hittites stayed in Hittiteville, or where-ever. When a person traveled from one territory to another, they came into the territory of new gods. But this God that Abraham and Isaac serve can go anywhere. This means that He has power and authority that the gods of the other nations do not have. Not only can He go with Jacob, but He has the power to bring him back to the land promised to him. This is amazing stuff.

So when Jacob wakes up, he takes the stone he was sleeping on and he sets it up as a pillar to mark the spot where he met God. This is the memorial stone and he calls this place Bethel, the house of God.

What about us? Where is our Bethel? Where is the place where we first had a personal encounter with God and understood that God was with us at all times and in all places and would not leave us? I have a friend from Regent who is a minister in Georgia who would say his Bethel was in a bar. He was an

athlete, making good money with a bright future, but he blew it with drugs and alcohol. It was when he was strung out in a bar that a Christian man came in and showed him who the God is who is with us. This man latched on to my friend and wouldn't leave him alone but took care of him and introduced him to Christ. Now the God of heaven and earth is with him and is fulfilling His promises in my friend's life.

Last week we shared stories about what God has done in our lives. The thing that was mentioned most often in these stories was people, relationships, friendships. We remember people who told us about Christ; people who modeled God's love for us; people who were Jesus to us. We talked about the faithfulness of God and how He has answered our prayers, given us strength and encouragement, how He never leaves us but is with us. We talked about what God has provided for us – healing of physical and emotional pains, providing for us in miraculous ways, assuring us that He is with us and will not leave us until He has completed His work in our lives and then takes us home.

We can live in relationship with an awesome God. He goes with us wherever we go and He is faithful to bring us to the place in life He has prepared for us, no matter how far away from that place we may get. Some people don't stray far from home. Isaac, Jacob's father, was a person who didn't go far from home. But Jacob did. Jacob messed up and had to go away from the land that had been promised to his family. He had to go stay with his mother's family who were strangers to him and who worshiped idols. Yet God went with him and stayed with him and brought him back to the land of promise. How far have we gone from God? And how faithful has He been in staying with us, even in the far places, and then bringing us back again?

In Psalm 139, the psalmist asks "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine

like the day, for darkness is as light to you.” There is nowhere we can go where God cannot also go. We can never get so far away from God that He cannot reach us. We might say, “Well there is too much darkness in my life. I’ve gone too far away from God and I can never get back to Him.” But our God is with us, wherever we go.

Today we remember the places where we have met God. We remember the things He’s promised and remember that He is faithful to fulfill those promises. He will not leave us until He does what He has said He will do.