

Scripture Reading: Genesis 28:10-22

“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, Jehovah stood above it and said: "I am Jehovah, 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 Jehovah 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, & 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. 20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, 21 so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then Jehovah shall be my God. 22 And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."”

“Jehovah Finds Jacob at Bethel”

Now my sermon title could seem a bit strange when we consider the story...

- **Would it not be better to say that Bethel is where Jacob found God?**

Yes, we do tend to want the stories to be about how we find God...

- **But as we stress at the baptism of our covenant children the real story of love in the Gospel is that we love God because He first loved us!**

Thus I want to make a case that it is very proper to see God finding Jacob and also how this relates to another account of our Savior finding one of His Disciples; & thus hopefully finding comforting implications for us today.

- **What I hope to show this morning is Jacob as a broken man...**
- **Then Jacob as a converted man...**
- **And finally next week we will consider Jacob as the worshipping man!**

There is certainly a lot to draw from here in this 28th Chapter of the Book of Beginnings and I can assure you that the early Fathers of the Church saw Jesus EVERYWHERE!

We could look at Jesus as the ‘rock’ where Jacob rested.

We can see Jesus as the ladder or bridge between God and man.

And of course it is Jesus as the 2nd Person of the Trinity who speaks to Jacob from on top of the ladder.

Thus we will spend at least a couple of weeks on this account and today I want to focus on how God meets Jacob.

Once again I must give proper credit to Pastor Robert Candlish for many of the insights I will share here this morning as he was the one who focused on the similarities with the account of Jesus finding His disciple Nathanael. In doing so Pastor Candlish rightly points out that this is certainly a crisis time in the life of Jacob and could even be considered as his conversion.

I use that term, not as it is used today in many revivalist circles, but rather in the rich way it is used in the Scriptures to show a time of change in a man or women's life. It can be a time when the person is fully converted from some form of paganism to service in the Kingdom of the One True God as would be the case with Rahab or Ruth here in the Old Testament or with Luke or Cornelius in the New Testament.

It can be a time of radical change in the life of a covenant person who has fallen into grave error as was the case with the Apostle Paul. Or it can be a time, like our story before us where a person born into God's covenant people realizes the seriousness of their calling and their true need for God's work in their lives. This could be seen in the calling of the disciples or our own children. [mention the night for our girls]

- When we understand Jacob in that last sense, we can see the wisdom of Pastor Candlish when he relates it to the calling of Nathaniel in the New Testament.

Jacob was born as the son of Promise with his parents told before his birth that the older would serve the younger. However, up until this point we have seen much striving and even deceit as he and his mom worked in the power of the flesh to carry out God's will.

- As will always be the case, this has left Jacob exhausted and alone!

Yes, he manipulated his brother into selling him the birthright... And yes he tricked his father into giving him the blessing... And yes, he had a mother who loved him as her favorite son and was willing to risk all to ensure his success.

- But now, he has left home alone, with little taken with him, going to a strange land.

The mother who loved him is left behind and the brother that he had outsmarted could now rule the roast with him gone having all of his father's riches and reputation at his disposal.

- Here on this lonely road we find Jacob finally in a place where he is ready to meet God, and it is where God finds Jacob!

Our text shows how Jacob had been brought to the end of his own means when we read:

“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.”

- Tired, exhausted and alone Jacob finds what comfort and protection he can with some rocks in the field and finally drifts off 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 & descending on it.”

The translation is a challenge with the Hebrew word used for ladder and I don't want you to have an image of our modern ladder for sure. It implies a mount or even a series of mountains ascending or descending. In fact the sixties rock band may have gotten it right when they spoke of a stairway to heaven because that is how the word is used to describe the stairs in Jerusalem leading down to the City of David.

We read at Nehemiah 3:15 how they, “repaired the wall of the Pool of Shelah by the King's Garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the City of David.”

- In any case I am sure it was a sight to behold!
- And now the Great I Am will speak directly to Jacob to assure him that he is the son of promise!

13 And behold, Jehovah stood above it and said: "I am Jehovah, 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."

- **There we see the promise of the Seed given to his grandfather Abraham and his Father Isaac.**

The Seed singular that the Apostle Paul assured us was Jesus, the true son of Abraham who would come to save His people from their sins!

- **And it is this Seed, this true Son who would one day find another man who would be called to serve Him as one of His disciples, just as He found Jacob there at Bethel!**
- **And it is the Apostle John who gives us that account...**

John opens his Gospel account with 'in the Beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God leaving no doubt about Who it was that he would be presenting! John shows how Jesus came in the flesh & some of the ministry of John the Baptist who calls Jesus the Lamb of God. Two of his disciples begin to follow Jesus and one of them, Andrew, goes to get his brother Simon who Jesus calls Peter. They travel to Galilee, and Jesus finds Philip and says to him, "Follow Me."

Then we read this at verse 45 "Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Now obviously there had been some discussions between Philip and Nathanael about the coming of Messiah because Nathanael knew that Philip was saying that Jesus was the Messiah... Of course there is no mention of a son of Joseph or even Nazareth in the Old Testament! This is what leads the skeptical Nathaniel to ask, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

- **Philip will not be dissuaded and says, "Come and see."**

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"

Those of you following along will notice that I reverted from our usual New King James text back to the King James use of guile! Guile is not a word we use much anymore so I have no problem with a more common word being used by other translations, but I did want us to stop for a moment to consider what it means... The other translations use deceit mostly or deceitfulness or having something false.

Keep that in mind as we go on to consider what many think is a strange exchange between Jesus & Nathanael:

48 "Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" [*Nathanael knows that Jesus made an insightful observation about him!*] Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." 49 Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Now Jesus is going to relate this encounter directly with our text in a moment, but first I want us to ponder why we see such conviction on the part of Nathanael because Jesus says He saw him under a fig tree. I agree with Pastor Candlish when he argues that having Nathanael simply sitting under a fig tree when Phillip found him leaves something to be desired, though it is certainly what I assumed for many years.

That might have brought a reaction like "how did you know that?" or his thinking that Phillip had said something to Jesus about him, but why would it cause Nathanael to declare:

- **"You are the Son of God?"**

Remember Phillip said they had found the Messiah and they knew that the Messiah would be addressed as the Son of God... A blasphemous title for anyone else which is why the unbelieving religious leaders would later crucify Jesus! So did Nathanael think Jesus was the Messiah because he knew where he had been earlier in the day or was there something more going on here?

- **I think that there was and to understand it we must put on our Jewish thinking caps with regard to that fig tree and a man being without guile or deceit.**
- **Being under a fig tree would often relate to special times of prayer in the minds of a Jew of that day.**

The reference to one being under the fig tree comes from the Prophet Micah and I want to read a bit of context so you can see that is relates to pondering the coming of the Messiah...

Micah 4: "1 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of Jehovah's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And peoples shall flow to it. 2 Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion the law shall go forth, And the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. 3 He shall judge between many peoples, And rebuke strong nations afar off; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore. 4 But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; For the mouth of Jehovah of hosts has spoken."

- **So the Jews saw under a fig tree as a time of prayer!**

But that still does not get us to Nathanael proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah rather than just asking if He is going to be the one to carry out all that is read there in the Prophet... For that we must go back to the greeting that Jesus gave Nathanael, saying 'a man in whom there is no guile.'

Was Jesus just saying nice things about a good man who was going to be one of His disciples? Was Nathanael some sort of super spiritual person who had achieved sinless perfection and was worthy to serve Jesus? I think we know that the answers to those questions have to be a resounding NO...

- **So what was Jesus referring to?**
- **We have other examples of major changes happening after such times of prayer in the New Testament & the dramatic ways in which God answered them:**
- **You could think of Zacharias praying in the Temple before the birth of John or Cornelius praying in his home before Peter was sent to them.**

Pastor Candlish submits that Jesus is referring to an experience that Nathanael had had recently in his time of prayer and reflection:

- **His time under the fig tree!**

Could Nathanael have been honestly meditating on a portion of Scripture, like a Psalm where we find a man with no guile? That Psalm of course is Psalm 32: It is a Psalm of David and one titled as a contemplation which would fits nicely with someone being under the fig tree!

The Psalmist begins with this bold proclamation:

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered.

- **2 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no guile."**

Wow, a man who has no guile, no deceit or falsehood...

That is not something I could claim in the flesh, I suspect it was not something Nathanael could claim in the flesh and it would certainly NOT be anything King David, or our Jacob could claim for sure!

Now again, Jesus greeted Nathanael with ‘behold a man in whom there was no guile!’ If we go on to see how the Psalmist teaches about how to be such a blessed man I think we will see how Jesus could say that about Nathanael...

- **Or to King David, to Jacob and any of us who come to Jesus in the way that we should!**

There is not one of us who can come to God honestly trying to make such a claim... It would be a falsehood to even attempt such a thing! So we know that we have sin in our lives and that we cannot approach God and this is what we see in the Psalm:

3 “When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. 4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.”

- **This is what Mr. Bunyan captured with the image of Christian carrying that heavy load of sin in the backpack that wore him down...**

We cannot bear up under them and we cannot make them go away.

- **Our only option is to give them to God which is what the Psalmist goes on to proclaim:**

5 “I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to Jehovah," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah 6 For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You In a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters They shall not come near him. 7 You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance.”

- **The Psalmist concludes right where he begins with the joy of being one in whom there is no guile, but rather righteousness:**

11 “Be glad in Jehovah and rejoice, you righteous; And shout for joy, all you upright in heart!”

Is it possible that we see the amazing response from Nathanael because he was a man who recently, perhaps that very morning had wrestled with his own sin and finally brought them to God as he was instructed by Psalm 32!

If so, Nathanael heard the Word of God proclaim he had become a man with no guile and NOW he meets the one who Phillip claimed was the Messiah and he hears God Himself proclaim the very truth he read in the Psalms.

- **This would account for his confident and bold response that Jesus was the Son of God!**

But Jesus goes on to tell Nathanael there will be much more and solidly relates this New Testament encounter with how God found Jacob at Bethel!

50 “Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." 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.”

- **Again every Jew would have been very familiar with the life of Jacob and his dream!**

And thus I believe we have a powerful lesson from the life of Jacob: As Pastor Candlish concluded: “It is something more, as I cannot but think, than a plausible conjecture – that Jacob may have been undergoing an experience very similar to that of David and Nathanael, when he beheld what the Lord intimates would be the high privilege of Nathanael also to see.” Pastor Candlish goes on to remind us that Jacob left home alone, with a guilty conscience and guile in his spirit.

He continues, “But it is altogether otherwise now. He is alone; self-confidence and self-complacency is at an end. His sin is now ‘ever before him.’ He can restrain his voice no longer from confession and prayer. He can no longer ‘keep silence.’ He can but say; -- “I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord!”

Next week we will see a renewed Jacob vowing to serve God with all that he has...

- And thus I think it is very proper to see this as a turning point, or conversion if you will in his life.

Certainly not sinless perfection as we shall learn as our story progresses but now as a man of God who matures in his walk with the Lord.

Jacobs serves in the confidence of God’s Word to him just as David and Nathanael would in later years...

15 “Behold, I am with you & 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.”

- So we have seen Jacob as a broken man.
- We have seen Jacob as a converted man.
- And next week we will see Jacob as a worshipping man.

I trust it is easy to see our applications for our own lives!

May God proclaim to us, behold there are men & women in whom there is no guile because we are always and everywhere bringing our sins to the foot of the cross where they belong!

Thus we always have the blessedness of knowing that our sins are forgiven!

Communion Meditation: Hebrews 10

“12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever sat down on the right hand of God;

13 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. 14 For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.

15 Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, 16 This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; 17 And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

18 Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. 19 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say , his flesh; 21 And having an high priest over the house of God; 22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”

- We approach as people in whom there is no guile!