

More Than Just A Dream Genesis 28:10-22

I was somewhere around 8 or 9 or 10 when I had an unexplained event happen to me. Sometimes I wish I could unwind the clock of time and go back to that moment and relive it just for the experience and for greater understanding of what happened. We were still living on Queensbury St. in Lake Orion. I was alone as I was walking home from where I don't recall. I was enjoying the warmth of a summer day not particularly thinking about anything that I can recall, when I felt the distinct weight of a hand on my shoulder. It wasn't forceful or gripping or aggressive, but gentle and reassuring. It was so real, I physically turned to see who was behind me but there was no one around. It was as real as my standing here today.

I have thought about that from time to time over the past five decades since it occurred. I can't explain it, but neither can I deny it. I wonder what or who it was. Was it an angel? Was it God? I don't know. I may never know, but I would like to know. Maybe someday I will.

You may have seen this picture of the young man sailing along, with Jesus behind him providing reassuring guidance as the sailor navigates his ship through a storm. A question to ask ourselves this morning is whether we are aware of God's abiding presence?

In our passage today Jacob, has an unusual encounter meeting God for the first time. He comes to realize the abiding presence of God. It is a meeting that will help shape the rest of his life. He hasn't quite come to the same conclusion as Job, who exclaimed **"My ears had heard of You but now my eyes have seen You. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes"** (Job 42:5-6) but he is learning.

For the first time in his life he will see the evidence of the wonder of God. He will hear firsthand the will of God as it is explained to him, and in the end he will express worship of God, though he has much more to learn about God.

Let's accompany Jacob on his journey of discovery in **Genesis 28:10-22** and note first the wonder of God is evident.

I. THE WONDER OF GOD IS EVIDENT – vs. 10-13a

Jacob's parents had no doubt taught him about God, but he had as yet to have a personal encounter with God. All he had to go on were the promises passed on by his parents to him. That is about to change.

Last week we looked at a family that was in spiritual chaos. No one was walking with God. Isaac didn't like God's will and wanted to give the covenant blessing to Esau.

Rebekah wanted the will of God but circumvented it with a deceptive scheme to make it happen.

Esau was rebellious to God's will. He didn't care about anything spiritual and spurned the birthright. He only wanting the blessing for the military and prosperity benefits he would receive. He didn't care that the Redeemer was promised through their family's lineage.

Jacob was willing to lie to his father to get what God had promised him.

Rebekah heard rumors about Esau's retaliation against Jacob for deceiving him again and feared for him. So she devised another plan to help Jacob flee to her family in Padanaram. Isaac confirmed the blessing on Jacob and sent him away.

In our passage today, Jacob is on the run. He wanted to put as much distance as possible between he and Esau not knowing if his brother was hot on his trail. He was traveling light, and was alone. He had no protection from the elements or from enemies. He was not an outdoorsman like his brother who knew how to live off the land. He was tired, it was late, and he needed rest. It would take him weeks to travel from Beersheba north to Haran. Stopping for the night, he has traveled for about three days and gone around 70 miles. He didn't realize that many years earlier his grandfather, Abraham, had arrived in the same area. We read in **Genesis 12:8** that he built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord, but that significance was

lost to Jacob. He was oblivious to that fact or its importance. The only thing on his mind was staying alive by escaping from his brother.

Our text tells us that **“he came to a certain place”**. It implies the random selection of a place that seemed as good a place as any to bed down for the night. Albert Einstein once said that God throws dice, meaning what He does is by chance. Folks, Jacob did not come to this place by chance, a place where He grandfather had once built an altar and called on God. It was part of God’s plan, so without realizing it he set up camp for the night. He didn’t have a pillow or a folded up blanket to put under his head. He did what was customary of the day, he used a large stone. Given what we learn from this chapter, I don’t think he slept like a rock.

My dad said that when he was in the army they would use their helmets for a pillow when they were doing field exercises.

He closed his eyes to go to sleep and at some point in the night proceeded to have a dream. We all have them, from the bazaar to the surreal. They can be a mishmash of the weird and the possible. In Jacob’s dream he had an encounter with God. It was his first, but it won’t be his last. There was a ladder that seemed to be a portal between heaven and earth. Some scholars think the ladder was more like stair steps that Jacob would have seen on ziggurats, which were places of worship. It was the way they climbed to the top where sacrifices were made. On these steps he saw angels. Artists have depicted this event in various paintings like these.

Some angels were going up the ladder while others were coming down the ladder. At the top of the ladder was God. I believe His position at the top is significant. The evidence of God’s wonder is seen in this dream. First, God’s supremacy is obvious.

A. God’s Supremacy Is Obvious

His standing at the top of the ladder shows us God’s authority – He is omnipotent.

1. God’s authority – He is omnipotent

God stands as the all-powerful Creator God who is in command of His angelic host who are seen doing His bidding. He tells them to go here and they go. He tells them to go there and they go. He has absolute authority over everything. Nothing is outside of His control.

His power directs the hearts of pagan kings.

His power created the universe from nothing with just the spoken word.

His power calmed the storm.

His power parted the sea and made dry ground for a nation to cross.

His power made the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, and the lame to walk.

His power raised the dead.

His power is undeniable and unlimited.

His power gives Him the ability to do anything that He wills that is in concert with His nature or to say it another way, in His power He won’t do anything that is contrary to His nature.

There is a word that is used 56 times in Scripture to describe the all-powerful nature of God. **Charles Ryrie says it is “the basis for the concept of His omnipotence.”** It is the word ***Almighty***.

God revealed Himself as God Almighty to Abraham in **Genesis 17:1**.

God revealed Himself as God Almighty to Moses in **Exodus 6:3**.

God revealed Himself as God Almighty to believers in **II Corinthians 6:18**.

God revealed Himself as God Almighty to John in **Revelation 1:8 and 19:6**.

Job acknowledged God’s omnipotence in **Job 42:2: “I know that You can do all things and that no plan of Yours can be thwarted.”**

Numbers 11:23 “The LORD answered Moses, ‘Is the LORD's arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you.’”

Psalms 33:6 “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.”

God preserves and holds His creation together with

His power. My theology teacher would say that if God were to stop thinking about you for even a second, you would cease to exist.

His power provides for everything we need.

In **Job 38:8-11** He sets the boundaries of the seas.

Daniel 2:21 tells us that it is God's power that restrains or unleashes governments and their leaders. Their actions are according to His plans. Jesus told Pilate that he would have no power if it hadn't been given to him by God (**John 19:11**).

As we read in **Job 1 and 2**, even Satan is bound by the constraints of God's power.

Numbers 23:19 “**God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?**”

Standing at the top of this ladder God showed Jacob that He has all authority to control the events of his life because He is omnipotent. His position was a way of confirming to Jacob that He had power to bring about the promise that up until then He had only heard about. He would make it happen.

God's power means that He can and will fulfill the promises that pertain to you. His power will keep you and help you in trouble and in temptation.

Next, we see God's accessibility – He is omnipresent.

2. God's accessibility – He is omnipresent

That simply means God is everywhere. That doesn't mean that He is in everything like the Pantheist believes. He's in your chair or in this plant or in my jacket. Omnipresence means He is present everywhere all the time. Pagan cultures in that day believed that when you left your home and went somewhere else, the gods you worshipped stayed behind. God was showing Jacob that He would go wherever Jacob went.

Psalm 139:7-10, 18

Jeremiah 23:24 “**“Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him,’ saith the Lord?**”

‘Do not I fill heaven and earth,’ saith the Lord?’”

Jesus said He is with us until the end of the age (**Matthew 28:20**).

Hebrews 13:5 says He will never leave us or forsake us.

Psalm 23:4 says He is with us every step of the way as we go through the valley of the shadow of death.

Rest assured that God is present with you all the time, everywhere you go. **Isaiah 40:28** says He never grows tired or weary. He is always on duty looking after you. Never mistake His silence for His absence.

The ladder that reached between heaven and earth was God's way of showing Jacob that He was accessible, that He was always available. He was always present with him. As Jacob traveled to an unknown place to people he didn't know, he could trust that God would always be with him. God's omnipresence tells us that He is accessible.

The third thing God shows us in this scene standing at the top is His awareness – He is omniscient.

3. God's awareness – He is omniscient

That means He knows everything. Because God is omnipresent, He is everywhere with us and so knows and sees what we are doing. But He doesn't just know our actions, He knows our thoughts and motives.

Psalm 139:1-4

King Solomon affirmed it in **I Kings 8:39** when he said **“For you, You only, know the thoughts of all the children of mankind.”**

I John 3:20 says that God knows everything.

Charles Ryrie writes that there isn't anything in our lives that takes God by surprise.

Standing there in authority God was telling Jacob that He would always be with him, always know and always be aware of what was happening to him. He would go with Jacob and He said so in **verse 15**.

Notice God's words. **"I am with you and 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."**

Never think for a moment that God ever forgets about you or doesn't know what you are going through or what you are thinking about what you are going through. Never forget for a moment that God doesn't know about your hurt or your trials or your cries for deliverance. Even though he hadn't cried out to God, God still saw Jacob on the run. Let the awareness of God's knowing bring you comfort. Let that fact give you peace. It is when we forget His omniscience that our spirit can become anxious and troubled, when we begin to fear the possibilities and the uncertainties.

Do not, dear friend and child of God, cower in fear about today or tomorrow, but stand in courage knowing God is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient over all your ways and in all your days.

There's not an hour that He is not near us –
No, not one! No, not one!
No night so dark but His love can cheer us –
No, not one! No, not one!

God standing at the top of this ladder reveals His authority, His accessibility, and His awareness. His supremacy is obvious. In this dream of Jacob, we also come to see that God's servants are obedient.

B. God's Servants Are Obedient

Jacob saw an unnumbered host of angels. Some were going up the ladder. Some were coming down the ladder. Those who were going down the ladder show us that their response is immediate.

1. Their response is immediate

Angels are the messengers of God. They obediently do His bidding and are happy to do so. They are the servants of God and like a faithful servant they obey the will of their Master. Those that are coming down the ladder have been sent out by God on some

mission here on to earth. That they are traveling up and down this ladder between heaven and earth shows us the swiftness with which they are able to carry out their mission given to them in the heavenly realm and carried out in the physical realm. It does not take days or weeks or years to go between heaven and earth. It's instantaneous. God says go and they arrive. Only in Daniel do we see that an angel was detained from bringing Daniel a response to a prayer because the angel had been hindered by Satan for a time.

Scripture tells us what these servants do on earth. **Hebrews 1:14** describes them as ministering spirits. They serve believers. It's the same word used for deacon or servant.

Psalm 34:7 says they encamp around God's people providing them with protection.

Psalm 91:11 says they provide protection.

In **I Kings 6** enemy troops had been sent to capture Elisha. His servant became very afraid when he saw the vast army, but Elisha told him not to fear. He then prayed to have the servant's eyes opened. Here's what we read: **"Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (I Kings 6:17)."** God had sent his angelic host for protection.

In **Daniel 12:1** we read that the archangel Michael serves as the guardian of Israel.

In **Daniel 4:17** they watch over the rulers of other nations.

In **Daniel 10:21 and 11:1** they influence leaders. As God's servants they are obedient.

Psalm 103:20

Revelation 22:8-9

Inscribed on an old church in Scotland is this reminder: "Though God's power be sufficient to govern us, yet for man's infirmity He appointed His angels to watch over us."

They are the unseen host of God responding immediately to His call for service. I would like to think some were assigned to watch over Jacob.

Then we also see that their return is important.

2. Their return is important

These messengers not only go out in obedient response to carry out the will of God, they return with a report and receive their next assignment.

In **Job 1 and 2** we read that the angels of God came to give an accounting and from what we assume in those two chapters it's a regular occurrence. God sent them out and they were returning with a report on what they did. The authority of God over these servants requires they give a report of their activity. Coming and going shows their obedience and faithfulness to the Lord. That must have been an incredibly awesome dream.

The wonder of God is evident in His supremacy, And then the will of God is explained in **verses 13b-15**.

II. THE WILL OF GOD IS EXPLAINED – vs. 13b-15

Jacob not only saw God, he heard God speak in his dream. Again, keep in mind that this is the first time Jacob has encountered God. God first confirms His favor on Jacob.

A. God's Favor On Jacob Is Confirmed – v. 13b

He was the promised heir to the blessings of God and while he had heard it from his father, Isaac, he, as yet, had not heard it from God, until this night on the run, in a dream. Jacob would have to come to a place in his life where he absolutely believed what God had revealed about Himself and His promise. He would have to learn to take God at His Word and trust Him implicitly without hesitation. He would have to come to understand what it meant to be favored by God. He wasn't there yet.

What we see here is God's unmerited favor toward Jacob. It is here we see God's grace. As far as we're concerned given the kind of deceptive character that Jacob displayed, we would conclude that Jacob didn't deserve a thing from God, yet God chose him to be in line to bring about the promised

Redeemer of **Genesis 3:15**.

It is a pointed and powerful reminder to us that none of us deserve what God has given to us. That's what makes grace so amazing and unique. Jacob had no merit of his own by which he could claim to receive these benefits from God. It was God's prerogative to choose him over his brother Esau.

Kent Hughes writes that Jacob was not expecting grace, he wasn't even seeking God, but God was seeking him and met him with grace. He was fleeing the consequences of his sinful deceit, but God met Him with unmerited favor. What is of vastly more importance than who he will meet in Haran, is who will meet Him along the way. You may be on a similar journey, on the run from some thing to somewhere and all the while God is seeking you, to extend His grace to you.

God's grace in salvation is extended to us not because we deserve it or can earn it, but solely because He loves us and we receive His grace through faith by which He gives us what we don't deserve instead of giving us what we do.

God's favor on Jacob is confirmed.

Second, we see God's future for Jacob is confirmed.

B. God's Future For Jacob Is Confirmed – v. 14

God has a future for those on whom His favor rests and He was now going to confirm that future to Jacob. It's a shortened version of the Abrahamic covenant, but the message is the same.

There is the promise of the possessing the land. There is the promise of his descendants spreading out like the dust of the earth in number. There is the promise of the blessing given to other nations through him and his offspring.

At the moment, all of that may have seemed like a pipe dream as he lay there on the run, away from the land and without any children. As far as he was concerned it all seemed impossible and unlikely. Yet here was God Almighty confirming his future. All he had to do was trust God, believe God.

We are also given the promise of a future in a land we will one day inherit. By faith we claim it because God promised it. If you are not yet sure of your future, by faith believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and receive the promise of eternal life and eternal life in heaven is yours. Just as the future of Jacob was secure, the future for the believer is secure as well. His omnipotence assures the promise of your future so that nothing can pluck you from His hand, nothing can separate you from His love. We have His confirmation.

The third thing that is confirmed is God's fence about Jacob.

C. God's Fence About Jacob Is Confirmed – v. 15

God is promising Jacob protection.
 God was with him and watching over him wherever he went and would bring him back safely to the land. God would never leave him until He had done what He promised. That's our promise as well. It's a promise throughout Scripture, especially as we read through the Psalms that God is our refuge and ever-present help in time of trouble. He is our shield, our fortress, our protector our rock.
 Know that about God.
 Believe that about God.
 Trust in that God.
 He will bring you safely to the eternal land He has promised. That is God's will for you, the believer.

Jacob learned some important truths about God that night, truths that we can learn.
 He learned that God could be his God
 He learned there is such a place as heaven
 He learned that God is personal
 He learned that God is everywhere
 He learned that God keeps His promises
 He learned that God is approachable

But Jacob isn't finished yet. He saw the evidence of God's wonder and heard the will of God explained. Now it's time for a response. The rest of the chapter shows us how his worship of God is expressed.

III. THE WORSHIP OF GOD IS EXPRESSED – vs. 16-22

Jacob woke up from his dream and said to himself that God was there, and he hadn't realized it. How many times do we go through the day and have to make the same admission? Somehow in the busyness of our day we aren't aware of God's presence. **"The Lord is here, and I wasn't aware."**

When he understood that fact, he called the place the house of God. That's what Bethel means.

Remember folks, that we are always in the presence of God. As a child of God His Spirit is always in us, so in that respect God is always with us or to say it another way, we are always in God's presence. So wherever you go, you are in the presence of God. And Jesus is the one who has made being in the presence of God possible. He is the ladder that bridges heaven and earth. He is the one who gives us access to God.

John 1:50-51

There is only one way to God, one way to heaven and that is through Jesus Christ. **Have you put your faith in Him alone? I Timothy 2:5-6** tells us that there is only one mediator between God and man and that is Christ.

Jacob was only beginning to see the reality of God and know the presence of God and begin a journey with God. God still has a lot of work to do, but then, that's the journey of faith for the person who will acknowledge God and receive His grace. And in his response, we see Jacob's attitude of worship.

A. Jacob's Attitude Of Worship

It was one of fear and wonder being in the presence of God. He immediately awoke overwhelmed by God's presence and the only thing he could do, the only right thing he could do was express his worship of God. That should be the attitude of anyone who sees God for who He is.

A right attitude of worship always leads to actions in worship.

B. Jacob's Actions In Worship

First, he made a dedication.

1. He made a dedication

He took the stone he had used as a pillow in the night and set it up as a memorial. Then he poured oil on it. That gesture had two symbolic meanings. The first is that it consecrated the memorial. It would always serve as a reminder of this momentous event in his life.

Second, it signified pouring out his life in devotion to God. It was an act of commitment to God, which leads us to his next action. God, I'm yours. I'll go where you want me to go and do what you want me to do. His dedication led to making a declaration.

2. He made a declaration

Our text says he made a vow to God. Some scholars believe this is a conditional vow – an if/then. If You do what You say You will for me God, then I will follow You. **Do we ever put conditions on God?** Probably more than we think.

Instead of the word "if", other scholars interpret the word "since" meaning that since You have made these promises to me God, then I will follow You. It goes with the dedication.

I think He's sincere. I think he really wants to follow God as best he knows how. He's got a lot of rough edges for God to sand away and in time we will see God shape his character. As best he knew how, he made a declaration to follow God.

That's the way it is with any of us. Our walk with God is far from perfect when we start out, but over time as we learn to live more in God's presence with greater faith, He transforms us into what He wants us to become. And that brings us to one final action in our worship. He made a decision.

3. He made a decision

Like his grandfather Abraham, he made the decision to tithe a tenth of all his possessions. He was going to give back a portion to God for His blessings. We

should do no less. His tithe was from the first fruits. He didn't give from what was left over. He promised to first give God a tenth of what he would receive.

An expression of his worship of God is seen in his attitude.

An expression of his worship of God is seen in his actions.

When we fully realize that we are in the presence of God, we will do the same.

Jacob has only just begun his journey, not just to get to Padan Aram, but to end up where God was taking him. It will be a journey of growing faith, one that will literally change him. **Are you willing to take such a journey as well?**

Let's pray

The presence of God has been made evident and the gate of heaven is open. Access to Him is available. He is standing there with an invitation for you.

It may be an invitation for you to receive His gift of grace for the very first time and trust Christ as your Savior. He is the only way by which we can enter heaven. You may be like Jacob running from something and all along God has been seeking you, and now He has revealed Himself to you. **Will you receive Him today? Is there someone today who needs His grace in salvation?**

You may already be a follower of God, so this invitation may be for you to follow Him in obedience, to choose to pour out your life in surrender and devotion to Him. Maybe you've been holding on to something that has kept you from complete surrender. Maybe like Jacob, you're tired of running and now while you're at rest you come face to face with the presence of God. **Will you respond today to His call on your life and pour out yourself before Him in surrender to His will?**

Jesus says come to Me all who are burdened and heavy laden and I will give you rest. The door to heaven stands open. He is both waiting and willing to receive you.