

Awaking to God's Presence

The journey so far.

We began with a couple named Adam and Eve living in a garden paradise with only one rule, "Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" ...

... although they were perfect, they did not keep that one and only command and because of their disobedience/rebellion against God the guilt of sin came upon all humanity.

They had 2 sons Cain and Abel but in the end Cain's ego compelled him to disobey God and then get mad at God when the Lord rebuked him, and he ended up killing his brother.

The population of the world grew but so did humanity's wickedness and violence,

... so God destroyed the earth with a flood only sparing Noah (who found grace in the Lord's eyes) and his family on an ark filled with animals.

After the flood Noah's three sons and their wives began to repopulate the earth but instead of spreading out in obedience to God,

... they congregated on the plain of Shinar in the area that would later be called Babylon, and began to build a tower to heaven,

... so God confounded the languages and the people stopped building the tower and spread out over the earth like God had previously commanded.

Then in time God called Abraham to take his wife and leave his home and go to a place that God would later reveal.

.... God promised that through Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed and those who blessed Abraham and his family would be blessed ... but anyone who cursed them would be cursed.

In a test to make sure that Abraham loved God more than even his son Isaac, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son on an altar on Mt. Moriah.

... Of course, Abraham was willing, and he was going to do it but God didn't make Abraham go through with it.

... God just wanted Abraham to be willing ... willing to give up his son if God asked.

Isaac married Rebekah and they had twins: Jacob and Esau.

.. Last week we saw Rebekah orchestrated a deception that required Jacob to stick goatskin to his arms and neck, pretending to be his brother

... and with that deception he stole the blessing away from Esau.

This is where we pick up the story today.

41 So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob." 42 Now when the words of her elder son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent and called her younger son Jacob, and said to him, "Behold your brother Esau is consoling himself concerning you by planning to kill you. 43 "Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise, flee to Haran, to my brother Laban! (Gen. 27:41-43)

Pray

Do you feel alone?

Lost?

Forgotten?

Well, here is Jacob having to run away from the only home and family he has ever known.

Yes, the situation that Jacob is in is the consequence of his own actions ... he did it to himself.

... But that doesn't make this terrible situation any easier

Jacob (no matter how flawed and broken he may be) he is God's child ... he belongs to God.

And as we watch God's behavior in Jacob's life, we are going to learn something of how God also works in the lives of all of those who have put their trust in Him.

(Gen 28:1-5) So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and charged him, and said to him, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. ² "Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and from there take to yourself a wife from the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. ³ "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. ⁴ "May He also give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your descendants with you, that you may possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham." ⁵ Then Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan-aram to Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.

At this point Jacob's life is out of control.

... he is not captain of his destiny.

His father doesn't want him to marry any of the local girls because they are idolaters.

... this however is really a non-factor because he must leave home or else Esau will kill him.

But his options of where to go are very limited.

And if he wants to find a place of food and shelter where he can survive and have a future then the only option is his mother's family.

In spite of all the bad, Jacob belongs to God and no matter how bad he messes up his life ... God is still in control ... God is still sovereign.

1. God Shapes Our Lives

There is more going on in our lives than we are aware ... and God is always working behind the scenes in the lives of His children.

I heard the testimony of an elderly Christian who was a professor at a Christian seminary.

He said that when he graduated from high school, he was already an exceptional golfer ...

... so, when he went to college, he didn't know what he wanted to do ... no clear career desires.

... He decided to choose a major that would leave his afternoons free to play golf.

... The only MAJOR left available that fit this plan was ancient Greek.

While studying the Greek New Testament, as part of his studies, he accepted Jesus Christ as his savior.

One thing led to another and after college he went on to theological seminary and eventually became the head of the Greek studies department.

God is working in your life even if you are unaware of it.

This is certainly the case in the life of Jacob.

There is no evidence, before Genesis 28, that Jacob loved God.

In fact, last week in Genesis 27:20 when Jacob was speaking to his father Isaac ...

... when Isaac questioned him about how he had killed his wild game so quickly said, “the Lord **YOUR** God” helped me.

There is no visible indication that Jacob loved God ... but God is working in Jacob's life and all of that is about to change

... Today Jacob comes to the place where he says in Genesis 28:21, “The LORD will be my God.”

You see ... that is where God is leading Jacob and that is where God wants to lead every one of us.

... to the place where we will confess that Jesus is Lord!

This path that Jacob is on ... IN FACT, that path that you are on ... is not by accident.

... where you are at right now—God is at work.

The old man Isaac now knows that his wife and son have tricked him ... and although he may have preferred Esau, he did love Jacob also.

... and Isaac doesn't want his son Jacob to marry a pagan woman and be doomed to a life of misery.

... And not only that ...

... Isaac tells Jacob that if he serves God, he will have a life of fruitfulness ... a passionate life of enjoying the very blessings God had in past promised to Abraham.

Interestingly Esau hears what his father Isaac says to Jacob ... look at how Esau responds.

(Gen 28:6-9)⁶ Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take to himself a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he charged him, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan,"⁷ and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Paddan-aram.⁸ So Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father Isaac;⁹ and Esau went to Ishmael, and married, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth.

These are the reasoning's of a sinner.

Esau hears Isaac's "goodbye" to Jacob ...

... he thinks that the only reason his father is making Jacob leave is not because of Jacob's lying and deception

... but because Isaac was afraid that Jacob will marry a pagan Canaanite woman.

Now, Esau was already married to a Canaanite woman.

... So now, in an attempt to please his father, Esau goes out and marries another wife—a non-Canaanite woman who was the granddaughter of Abraham the daughter of Ishmael.

Esau is hoping that by ACTING a certain way perhaps he would still get some of the blessings that now belonged to Jacob

... Esau was just adding a little religious gloss to the outside of his cold barren soul.

Let me “**locate**” Jacob and Esau for you.

Jacob is in a world of trouble because he has been deceitful, and his own brother wants to kill him so he is forced to run away from the only home he knows.

Esau is still desperately trying to win the love and approval of his father.

In different ways both Jacob and Esau’s world is falling apart.

... **Jacob** is trying to fix his life by running away

... **Esau** is trying to fix his life by “turning over a new leaf.”

Because of the events we talked about last week the lives of these two brothers have now been forever changed.

...It is in places and moments like this where you realize that you really have no control of your life.

But that’s OK because aware or unaware ... God is working to shape your life for your good and God’s glory.

(Gen 28:10-12)¹⁰ Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place. ¹² He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

2. God Goes With Us

I am reminded of a young man who said to his girlfriend, “I dreamed about you last night and I dreamed that I asked you to marry me.... what do you think that means?”

The girl says, “I know exactly what that means.”

“What?” He asked. “You have more sense when are asleep than when you are awake.”

Dreams are funny

So, Jacob leaves and is headed for Haran.

His only companions are his staff and his thoughts.

It's pretty obvious what Jacob's thoughts were about.

Certainly, he must have thought about how foolish it was for him to lie to his father.

... Perhaps he felt guilt and resentment toward his mother for pushing him into it.

... I imagine that the threats of his brother were still ringing in his ears.

.... Certainly, he had to be wondering about the reception he was going to get at his uncle Laban's house.

Whatever Jacob's thoughts were I believe it is safe to say that Jacob was at the end of his rope.

...here we find Jacob, tired, anxious, frustrated, and probably a little bit afraid.

... moments of fear and uncertainty can become debilitating.

Jim Cymbala is the pastor of Brooklyn Tabernacle Church in NYC and his wife Carol is the choir director.

They had three children the oldest one is a girl named Chrissy.

Jim says that around the age of 16 Chrissy started to pull away from the family and got involved with the wrong crowd.

There were many nights where Jim and Carol had no idea where Chrissy even was.

Jim says that as the situation got worse he begged her, pleaded with her, argued with her, tried to control her money...he did everything in his power to "make her" do right.

But, the harder he tried the more his daughter Chrissy fought.

As Jim put it, "Chrissy's boyfriend was everything we did not want for our child."

During that period of time Jim said that he would put on his suit every Sunday morning and make the 25-minute drive to church and on that drive, he would cry all the way to the church door.

In Jim's words, *it was as if the devil was saying, "You've got this big church but I'm going to get your children. I've already got the first one and I'm coming after the other two."*

Jim's wife Carol said, "I wanted to run away but God would not let me."

That darkness, that fear, that sorrow that Jim and Carol Cymbala were experiencing was probably very similar to what Jacob was feeling.

Have you ever been there?

Are you there now?

By the time we get to the end of today's story you are going to see that Jacob was never alone ... and neither was Jim and Carol Cymbala ... **AND NEITHER ARE YOU!**

Jacob is on this journey to the house of his uncle and night has come.

Jacob, as was the custom of shepherds, found a suitable spot took a stone to put his cloak on for a pillow and went to sleep under the stars.

...and with Jacob's sleep can an awe-inspiring dream.

He saw a ladder reaching from heaven to earth, with the angels ascending and descending and above this ladder was the Lord God who spoke to him:

(Gen 28:13-15) ¹³ ***And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. ¹⁴ "Your descendants will also 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; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth 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 promised you."

There are three very powerful things about this passage of scripture.

First, the blessing that Jacob had tricked his father to get...is now being confirmed.

Second, God promises to keep him and be with him everywhere he goes.

Third, God promises to one day bring Jacob back to his home.

For the next 20 years Jacob will be living in a foreign land, but he would never forget this dream.

... God is with Jacob everywhere, but God is also in the act of leading Jacob **to the place of God's choosing**.

... to be in the will of God you must be in the place of God's choosing.

That place can be a location ... but more importantly it is a relationship

The journey only has value if it leads you to Jesus Christ.

God is going with you and shaping your life for the purpose of bringing you into a full and passionate relationship with HIM.

...nothing matters more than that.

So, Jacob awakens from his dream and in this moment we see that the whole of Jacob's outlook has been transformed.

(Gen 28:16-17)¹⁶ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." ¹⁷ 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."

3. Awakening to God's Presence is Revival

This is what we need!

We need to awaken from our spiritual slumber and realize that God has not abandoned us, God has not forgotten us ...

GOD IS AT WORK right now as much he has ever been.

This may not look like Acts chapter 2 but God is as much here in this place as he was when the disciples were together praying ...

... even they weren't aware of it until God acted ... until the Holy Spirit came.

We need to awaken to God's presence.

... and when you awaken to God's presence ... action is required.

(Gen 28:18-19)¹⁸ So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. ¹⁹ He called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz.

4. Make and Mark Your Commitment to God

The first thing Jacob does after this encounter is **he sets up a pillar** ... a monument ... a landmark.

... as if to say this is where my life was changed forever.

Is there a place/time in your life where you can point to and say this is where I was changed forever.

The second thing Jacob does is **He declares his love for God.**

(Gen 28:20-21)²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, ²¹ and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God.

Notice the “if” in this verse.

Some have supposed that Jacob was trying to strike a bargain with God but that is not the case at all.

The word “if” here is actually the Hebrew word that means “since.”

Although Jacob’s faith is certainly new and immature, he is not using language of uncertainty or bargaining.... this is the language of confidence.

“Since God has and will.... He will be my God.”

It is about time that God’s people set up a landmark and declared their love for God.

I want to take you back to the story of Jim and Carol Cymbala and their wayward daughter Chrissy.

It was in the month of February, which is cold in NY and it was during the Tuesday mid-week prayer meeting.

Jim said an usher handed him a note upon which a lady in the church had written. “Pastor Cymbala, I feel impressed that we should stop the meeting, and all pray for your daughter Chrissy.”

Jim said he hesitated.

(Was it right to change the flow of the service and focus on his own need?)

But he said he felt something was true about this moment.

He picked up the microphone and said, “The truth of the matter, although I haven’t talked much about it, is that my daughter is far from God these days.

... She thinks up is down and down is up; dark is light and light is dark.

... But I know God can break through to her ... so I want to ask all of us to join hands across the sanctuary and pray for her.”

Jim said in during that prayer the most unusual thing happened.

He said the only way he could describe it was that ‘the church turned into a labor room.’

There arose a groaning, a sense of desperate determination,... as if to say, “Satan, you will not have this girl. Take your hands off of her!”

Jim said that he was so overwhelmed that the force of that mighty church crying out to God almost literally knocked him over.

When they got home Carol, Jim’s wife looked at him and said, “It’s over.”

“What’s over?” “It’s over with Chrissy. If there is a God in heaven this nightmare with Chrissy is finally over.”

Thirty-two hours later, on Thursday morning Jim said that while he was shaving his wife Carol burst through the bathroom door, her eyes wide. “Go downstairs! Chrissy is here.”

“Chrissy is here?”

“Yes, Go down!” “But Carol—I—“Just go down. It’s you she wants to see.”

Jim said he wiped off the shaving foam and headed down stair with his heart pounding.

As he came around the corner he saw his daughter Chrissy on the kitchen floor, rocking on her hands and knees, sobbing.

“Chrissy.”

When she heard his voice, she grabbed his pant leg and begin pouring out her heart.

“Daddy—Daddy—I’ve sinned against God. I’ve sinned against myself. I’ve sinned against you and mommy. Please forgive me.”

Jim, crying grabbed Chrissy pulled her up off the floor and held her close.

Suddenly she pulled back, “Daddy, who was praying for me? Who was praying for me?”

He said she sounded like a cross-examining attorney. “What do you mean Chrissy?”

“On Tuesday night, Daddy—who was praying for me?” [He didn’t say a thing.]

... “In the middle of the night, God woke me and showed me I was heading toward this abyss.

... There was no bottom to it—it scared me to death.

... I was so frightened. I realized how hard I’ve been, how wrong, how rebellious

... But at the same time, it felt like God wrapped his arms around me holding me tight to keep me from sliding any farther away ...

“Daddy, tell me the truth—who was praying for me Tuesday night?”

Just like Jacob, Chrissy met the Lord, and her life was forever changed.

She went off to college. Today she is a pastor’s wife, and they have three children.

Like Jacob, not only did she have a **point/place/landmark** that signified her life was changed, but **she also declared her love** for God.

But there is one more thing that Jacob did in response to his changed life.

(Gen 28:22)²² “This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God’s house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.”

Jacob set up a memorial, he declared his love for the Lord, and **proved that love by dedicating a tenth of all that he had** and was to God.

Tithing is not a law ... it is a grace.

The truth is that where we put our money, our time, and our talent, is where our heart really is.

Jacob has awakened to God!

Jacob is sold out to God!

Where are you today?

Do you feel like Jacob with your life is out of control?

... does it feel like everything is crumbling

Then now is the time for you Awaken to God's presence

... today needs to be a landmark day

... today needs to be the day you finally declare your love to God

... and surrender everything you **have** and **are** to him and say ... "Lord, you have bought me with your blood, I belong to you."