

This morning, we are continuing in our series “Jesus in the Old Testament,” looking at the stories of the Old Testament and how they point us to Jesus. There’s this great scene at the end of the gospel of Luke where the resurrected Jesus joins two downtrodden disciples on the road to Emmaus who are kept from recognizing him. They share with the hidden Jesus all that has happened, and Jesus tells them that this had to happen according to the Scriptures. And then it says in ***Luke 24:27: And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*** Basically, Jesus shows them how the whole of the Old Testament points to Him, even though it never once mentions His name.

It is important to understand how the whole OT points to Jesus because many of you have been taught to read the Old Testament like they are stories about moral examples – trust God like Noah did, even when people think you’re nuts. Worship God like David did, no matter who disapproves. And there are some examples to follow, of course, but truly **the Old Testament is primarily about the redemption God is bringing into a broken, fallen world that culminates in the giving of His Son Jesus for the sins of the world.**

**The first week** I preached about Adam and the promise that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. **In the second week, I talked about** Abraham and the promise that through his descendants the whole world would be blessed. The third week, we looked at Isaac, the son who was almost sacrificed, and how it points us to God the Father’s sacrifice of His son Jesus on the cross. This morning we will be looking at the life of Jacob and how it points us to Jesus. **From Abraham onwards, a big theme in Genesis is the child of promise,** the descendant through whom that seed will come. For Abraham, it is Isaac, not Ishmael. And now Isaac is about to have two sons:

***Genesis 25:21-26 - Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. <sup>22</sup> The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. <sup>23</sup> The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger." When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. <sup>25</sup> The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. <sup>26</sup> After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.***

According to God, the younger one will be the child of promise. Jacob means “heel-grabber” or “supplanter” – one who wrongfully seizes the place of another. What we see often in the Bible is God continually choosing the second born, the barren woman, the outcast, the moral outsider. **From the beginning, it is about His grace** – God does not operate as the world does. He works through weakness, through the rejected and the outcast.

There is so much to Jacob’s story that I will not be preaching on today, but if you are interested in learning more, visit our website, as I preached a whole series on Jacob back in 2007.

So God has declared that Jacob, the younger, will be the child of promise, but Isaac fights against this, wanting his other son Esau to be the blessed one. And Jacob won’t just believe that what God has promised, God will do. Instead, he wants to supplant it, wrongfully seize Esau’s place. Jacob tricks Esau into getting the firstborn birthright, and then tricks his blind father into receiving the blessing - he would get twice as much property and become the head of the family. Instead of trusting God, he tries to deceive his way into getting it. **As a result, his brother wants to kill him, and he has to flee.** **Genesis 27:41** - *Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob."*

Pick it up in Genesis 28:

**Genesis 28:10-19** - *Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. <sup>11</sup> When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. <sup>12</sup> He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. <sup>13</sup> There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. <sup>14</sup> Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. <sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." <sup>17</sup> 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." <sup>18</sup> Early the next morning*

*Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. <sup>19</sup> He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.*

Jacob is on the run and finds himself as the sun goes down in the middle of nowhere – “when he reached a certain place.” He couldn’t even find a place to stay for the night and has to use a stone for a pillow. He has lost his family, his brother wants to kill him, and he’s in the middle of nowhere sleeping on a stone. Jacob is certainly at the bottom, and it does not seem that God’s promises are going to come to pass in his life.

And then he has a dream – he sees a stairway between earth & heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it. The significance of the angels is that they are **ministering spirits** serving those who believe in God, as Hebrews 1:14 says (**Hebrews 1:14** - *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?*). Seeing the angels coming and going from heaven to earth tells Jacob that God is at work, that his messengers are at work, ministering to those who believe in God. God is at work, even though Jacob couldn’t see it before. He also sees the Lord standing over Jacob and the stairway – God is watching over Jacob and protecting him, even though he couldn’t see it before, and God says three things to him: I will be with you wherever you go, I will watch over you whatever happens, and I will give you a land and bless you – you will not be alone, you will not be in danger, and you will not be without blessing. God is at work, even though Jacob did not feel it. What a great thought – the power of heaven is at work, but we can’t see it. **The veil is removed**, and Jacob realizes that he is not out of God’s will.

**Notice also that the promise parallels promises God has made to Abram**, most notably **Genesis 13:14-16** - *The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. <sup>15</sup> All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. <sup>16</sup> I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.*

The parallels show that Jacob is the chosen one, in line with God’s blessing of Abraham. He probably knew this from his mom, but now, for the first time, Jacob hears this for himself. **Whatever unexpected turns Jacob’s career may take, the Lord will be with him, saving him from disaster and ensuring the ultimate triumph of what he had promised.**

Listen to this promise for yourself. Jacob had hit bottom – no family, no possessions, nowhere to stay, not sure where he is going, not even an assurance that God is still with him. He has blown it and probably lost whatever promise God had for him. And without even seeking God, God comes to him and lifts the veil to show him that He is indeed at work, watching over him, protecting him, and blessing him. **There are so many times when you may feel that God is absent or not at work in your life.** If you ever need a reminder that He is at work despite his seeming absence, look at the cross. If ever God seemed absent, it was when Jesus was hanging on the cross, crying out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” But the truth is that God was never more at work than he was at that moment. Do not let God’s seeming absence mislead you into thinking that He is not at work.

**Jacob says “this is the gate of heaven”** – this is the very entrance to heaven, the very place where heaven is open to earth. This stairway is the way that God has come to earth and the way we get to heaven. What is this stairway? Well, the stairway shows up one more time in the Bible. Turn to John 1:43-51, where Jesus meets a man named Nathanael.

**John 1:43-51** - *The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." <sup>44</sup> Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. <sup>45</sup> Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote-- Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." <sup>46</sup> "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. <sup>47</sup> When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." <sup>48</sup> "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." <sup>49</sup> Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." <sup>50</sup> Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." <sup>51</sup> He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."*

Listen to what Nathanael says when Philip tells him that they have found the Messiah - Nazareth? Can anything good come from a small, nowhere town like that? There is no mention of Nazareth in the OT or any other Jewish writings of the time, for that matter. It was a nowhere town. Nothing good comes from there, Nathanael argues. God doesn’t go to nowhere places like Nazareth. He doesn’t work in nowhere places or with people of no account, like poor lost Jacob. That’s not the way God works.

But Jesus did come from Nazareth. And God does work with people like Jacob. And more than that, listen to what Jesus says - you will see angels ascending and descending on the son of man. The Son of Man is of course one of Jesus' favorite ways of referring to Himself, as the fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel about the Son of Man. **Jesus is saying that he is the stairway that Jacob saw.** Jesus is the stairway to heaven – He is God reaching down to earth and the way we get to God. There are no steps to Him; He is the steps; he is the way. You will see heaven open and God at work because of Jesus. **This is so important to see, that this stairway to heaven is not something constructed by man, but it is Jesus.** Ever since the tower of Babel, men have been constructing ways to get to God, ways to experience the divine. As you look around at the world religions, they are essentially man-made ways to God – do this and you will be blessed, follow these rules and you will get to heaven. But Christianity says that Jesus is the stairway to heaven, and there is no way to God except by Him.

*John 14:6 - Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

*Acts 4:12 - Salvation is found in **no** one else, for there is **no other name under heaven** given to men by which we must be saved."*

I love that line – **"surely God was in this place and I was not aware of it."** God is at work and His angels are at work even when we can't see it. He is especially at work when we are alone and weak. Jacob doesn't pray or look for him, but God comes anyways. He is at His lowest and God comes to bless Him. Take heart that God is at work even when you feel alone and weak, and that God comes to nowhere places like Nazareth and places in the middle of nowhere to reveal himself to people of no account. Surely God is at work and we are not aware of it.

Jacob and the stairway to heaven points to Jesus, the stairway, the way that heaven touches earth, God touches humanity. Jacob, struggling all his life for blessing, already has it in God.

Jacob continues, and for the sake of time I'm going to breeze through the rest of his life: he marries Leah & Rachel, deceives Laban after being tricked by him, then heads back to Esau, wrestles with a man who just may be God, and won't let go until God blesses him. And God changes his name to Israel – he who contends with God. So many amazing experiences. Which of these would be pointed to as the supreme example of faith in his life? We find out in Hebrews 11:

**Hebrews 11:21** - By faith **Jacob**, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

Why is that the example of faith? Joseph brings his sons Manasseh, the firstborn, and Ephraim, the younger, to his father to be blessed by him.

**Genesis 48:13-20** - And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Israel's left hand and **Manasseh** on his left toward Israel's right hand, and brought them close to him. <sup>14</sup> But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though **Manasseh** was the firstborn. <sup>15</sup> Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, **the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day**, <sup>16</sup> the Angel who has delivered me from all harm--may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth." <sup>17</sup> When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim's head he was displeased; so he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. <sup>18</sup> Joseph said to him, "No, my father, this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head." <sup>19</sup> But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations." <sup>20</sup> He blessed them that day and said, "In your name will Israel pronounce this blessing: 'May God make you like Ephraim and **Manasseh**.'" So he put Ephraim ahead of **Manasseh**.

So why is this the greatest moment of faith in his life? I think it is because it shows that something has radically changed in Jacob so that he is no longer walking by sight but by faith. Jacob is seeing the world through the eyes of grace now. He is seeing the world as God sees it. He has finally realized that God is a God who loves the outcast, the downtrodden, the forgotten. God is a God who loves to bless the younger over the older, the scoundrel who does not deserve it, just to show how full of grace he is. Jacob finally gets it – God is a God who loves to bless those who don't deserve it, to forgive those who don't deserve it, to use those who don't deserve it. And now that Jacob finally gets it, he does the same. By sight, he would have blessed the older child, but by faith he does what God would do – he blessed Ephraim, the younger child. **He blesses the one who does not deserve it.**

Let's look a little at Jacob's prayer. Notice that he refers to God as his shepherd. This becomes a common way of referring to God in the Bible, but **this is the first time in the Bible that God is called a shepherd**. Of course, by calling God his shepherd, he is acknowledging that he is a sheep – stupid, dirty, losing his way, in need of constant care and protection. Jacob is acknowledging that he needs a God who comes after him and gives him constant care, because on his own he gets lost too easily. This of course brings to mind Jesus, who in John 10 calls himself the good shepherd, the one who lays his life down for his sheep, his followers.

Jacob may have been a scoundrel, losing his way and making stupid decisions, but as he looks back he sees the grace that has been over him, that God has been his shepherd every step of the way. And now, in the greatest act of faith, he starts to see the world as God sees it, blessing those who do not deserve it and showing favor to the rejected, the ones the world does not bless. The greatest indicator that you have understood the **grace of God** is that you see the world as God sees it, blessing those who do not deserve it and favoring those whom the world does not favor.

In Jesus we are offered grace and blessing beyond anything this world could offer. Stop your striving and working to find it elsewhere and receive what He is offering to you by faith.