

# The House that God Builds

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[ 0 : 00 ] That was my drive time this morning and I had a wonderful drive. I love coming up here with the waters on the sides of the road and really glad to be here.

! Greetings on behalf of First as well as the rest of classes, Wisconsin. We're so glad that you have called a pastor and that he has accepted.

I know Pastor Keith Beist who is coming. I know him quite well because he pastors in the region where I am and you have a good man coming and I'm so glad for you.

It's quite a wait for most CRCs who are looking for a pastor these days. So I'm glad you found someone and I'm glad he's coming. I think he'll do a great job here with you all from everything I know about Pastor Keith.

Besides being, just a little bit about myself, besides being blessed with a wonderful wife, Sarah, who has been, as long as I've been a pastor, been very involved in the churches I've served at in a number of ways.

[ 1 : 19 ] These days, these days, most of our kids out of the home now, she's working part-time at Fox Lake Correctional that has just an amazing BA in biblical studies that they offer inmates who are accepted into the program.

She works there in administration and also teaches there. And I've taught a couple of courses in that program, too, and it's just a tremendous blessing to serve in that way, people in prison.

I also am blessed with four daughters, ages 25 down to 15. The 15-year-old is the one that's still in the house with us.

She's a freshman at Central Wisconsin Christian School in Waupun. My 25-year-old is married and has two little daughters in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which means I'm a grandpa.

My second daughter, who is 22, is also married and lives in the southwest suburbs of Chicago. I came to Waupun from the west suburbs of Chicago.

[ 2 : 34 ] She's in the southwest suburbs, Tinley Park, Illinois. She lives there with her husband. And then I have a daughter. Our third is a freshman in college studying nursing.

And our youngest is involved in a whole variety of things, most recently playing soccer for the first time on the JV team at CWC.

And she's the goalie, and she seems thrilled with it. So I also have a connection with Pastor Mark, your previous pastor. The first Classes Wisconsin meeting I went to, he was, you know, sometimes people serve up front in different roles, whether leading classes, pastors take turns doing that.

And he was up front at this particular Classes meeting. And I'm like, I know that guy. We played basketball a lot together when we were both in seminary. Three days a week, there's a dozen of us, Monday, Wednesday, Fridays.

And Pastor Mark, maybe you didn't know this, he was a very good point guard and a very good shooter. And just a wonderful guy. I always appreciated him.

[ 3 : 49 ] I appreciated seeing him at classes. So, yeah, little connection there. Our scripture reading today, I'm really blessed again to be here to lead in God's word and lead in the sacrament afterwards.

Our scripture reading is from Genesis 28, beginning at verse 10, reading through verse 21.

Let's listen together to God's holy and infallible word. Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran.

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.

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.

[ 4 : 58 ] 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.

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.

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.

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, surely the Lord is in this place. And I was not aware of it. He was afraid and he said, how awesome is this place?

This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven. 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.

[ 6 : 05 ] And he called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz. And then Jacob made a vow saying, If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the Lord will be my God.

And this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house. And of all that you give me, I will give you a tenth. That's God's word for us this morning.

If you've gone to Sunday school or were blessed to have been read a children's Bible at family devotions growing up, you've heard this story about Jacob's ladder.

It stands out among the history that we read in the Bible. The African American spiritual, We are climbing Jacob's ladder is based on these verses.

You know that one probably. We are climbing Jacob's ladder. I won't sing the whole thing. But this passage is well known for good reason.

[ 7 : 28 ] No one else in the Bible experienced anything quite like this dream where God came to Jacob.

God showed him a stairway going from heaven to earth. We read that angels are going up and down it and that the Lord himself stood at the top and spoke these amazing promises.

It's really quite incredible. And then after he woke, he declares Jacob, This is none other than the house of God.

And so he had this recognition that God was present there in a special way. God was present. And we know more than that, scriptures have been moving forward from the very first words of the Bible. In the beginning, God created. We know that God was active too. All along, gathering a people, building for himself a household of faith.

[ 8 : 41 ] This text is about Jacob. It's about Jacob's ladder. But it's especially about God's house. And it gives us a vision of the house God was building back then and that he continues to build today.

What about this house that God builds? Can we discern from our verses? For one, the house that God builds is based on a divine, sovereign blueprint.

What's been happening from our first parents, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, to Abel, to Seth, to Noah, to Abraham, to Isaac, and now Jacob is all part of God's plan.

He's building his Old Testament church. He's gathering his people. God made the promise to Jacob's grandpa, Abraham, that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. And then his grandpa, Abraham, Abraham and Sarah, his wife, had just one child of the promise, and that was Isaac.

[ 10 : 02 ] Isaac and Isaac and Rebekah had only two, the twins, Jacob and Esau. Small family so far. But as this story goes on, we'll see that with Jacob and his acceptance of the promise for his very own that we see here, things are going to explode.

Jacob will have 12 sons, and from them the 12 tribes of Israel would be established. And out of them, eventually, Jesus would be born.

Right after the fall into sin, already in the Garden of Eden, God promised that he deal with sin through the woman's seed, crushing the serpent's head.

The crushing of Satan and sin and death is what we celebrated last weekend. Of course, we do every Sunday, but in a very special way, Good Friday and Easter, Jesus' death on the cross, his resurrection.

Jesus would be that great son of the woman, the child of the promise, and he'd come out of the line and offspring of Jacob.

[11:17] Jacob, God is following his eternal blueprint to draw people to himself and to glorify himself through his son.

This great work of salvation could only be of God and could only be accomplished through his sovereign initiative because we can't get ourselves out of the mess of sin and the death it leads to. That it's God's initiative is made very clear in our verses because the Lord comes while Jacob is sleeping, of all things.

Jacob was a pretty active guy. Every other time you read about him in Scripture, he's always busy. He's always planning.

Whether he's plotting against his brother Esau earlier, strategizing later in his life how to get the girl of his dreams, or wrestling with God even later in his life.

[12:23] But the most profound event of his life happens when Jacob is doing nothing. He's sleeping.

All he can do is receive. All he can do is listen to God. God has his plan for his child Jacob and he accomplishes it by his sovereign initiative.

And all of us busy Jacobs today are invited to stop our striving and our doing, trying constantly to make this or that happen.

And we're invited to rest in God's perfect plan for us. For our salvation, for our ultimate security in this life and the next, we need only receive with open hands.

He's got the blueprint for the sweep of history and he's got the blueprint for each one of our lives today too. Second, we see the house that God builds is constructed with crooked sticks.

[13:39] Jacob was a crooked stick if there ever was one. In this sense, this guy had some character flaws.

He's busy, always planning. Well, the planning was more conniving. This guy was a rascal. He was a twin, but the second born, which meant in those days that the inheritance would go to his brother Esau, who came out of the womb first.

Jacob and his mother hatched a plan to trick Esau, his blood brother, out of his inheritance. And it involved Jacob lying to his blind elderly father, Isaac.

And this is the reason that we find Jacob alone in our verses, far from his family, when he has this dream because he had to flee his brother who wanted to kill him.

He had nothing, though he should be getting an inheritance. He was nowhere, though he was supposed to be getting the promised land, according to what God said.

[14:58] And he had nobody, though he was going to have many descendants. And all of this was because of Jacob's sin, because he lied and he deceived.

His character flaws showed up later in life, too. He showed favoritism to one of those 12 sons he would have, Joseph. He gave him this extravagant gift of a coat of many colors that made the whole family jealous of Joseph.

So Jacob was a terrible brother, a bad son, and he was a very poor father, too. And yet, it comes to him, when you read, something, yet, it comes to him.

As he was with his father, Isaac, and his grandfather, Abraham, he was also going to be with Jacob. Jacob, this guy who was more than a rascal, he was a sinner, big time. But you know, God is in the habit of working with crooked sticks like Jacob.

[16:15] Because he's full of grace, he does not treat us as our sins deserve. The Bible says it, we experience it ourselves, and we see throughout biblical history that God's people are filled with the unworthy, the prostitute, Rahab, the outsider, Ruth, the adulterer, David, Jacob, the deceiver, you, me, as well.

God loves to show his grace, especially to those who need it the very most and who realize their need for the Lord.

Those who aren't familiar with the people of God may think, when they see churches, that the church God is building in this world is filled with perfectly together people, that God always chooses the best and the brightest, people who have always made the very best choices in life.

But the fact is, the church is filled with crooked sticks. God builds his house with the weak things of this world, with jars of clay, as 2 Corinthians 4 says.

It shows his glory all the more because then we know that it's about him, not as much about us.

[ 17 : 50 ] It's about his grace and loving acceptance in spite of the fact that we fall short, in spite of the fact that we all have warts.

It means today that no matter how inadequate and unworthy you feel, you too can be part of what God is building.

God says, you're a sinner, but you are mine for Jesus' sake. You've made some mistakes. Maybe you even completely messed up your life.

But I choose you. I love you. My promises are for you too. God takes the initiative and then, like Jacob, we're called to receive and to accept God's grace for ourselves.

Third, the house that God builds contains a stairway to heaven. there's this stairway that we often call a ladder.

[ 19 : 04 ] We think it may very well have been a ziggurat, which is what is displayed in front of you behind the point, words of the point. That was, these were giant structures in ancient Mesopotamia, and that was the region that God's ancient people lived in, where they were almost like temples of some sort where people built them to try to connect somehow to heaven.

This one in particular was, is a prominent one that was in the city of Ur, U-R.

And you might know that city because that's where God called Jacob's grandpa Abraham from, out of Ur and the false gods that were worshipped there, all the way west to Canaan, the promised land where God's people would eventually dwell and settle.

This stairway that we read about, again, very well, doesn't mean it has to be, but it very well could have been something like this structure.

This stairway, we read, connected heaven and earth. What, what's, what's that about? Well, God, we read, was at the top.

[ 20 : 32 ] Angels were climbing up and down, and that was likely a picture of the grace and love of God being brought down to Jacob, and Jacob's needs and weaknesses being brought up to the Lord.

And what's going on in this up and down in this ladder, the stairway to heaven, that Jacob, is that Jacob is experiencing communion with God.

Communion means fellowship, special connection. And it's what the Lord's Supper is about, union with the Lord in a special way. there's a place in the New Testament when Jesus walked on this earth where Jesus himself talks about Jacob's ladder.

I don't know if you knew that, but in John 1, verse 51, Jesus alludes to Jacob's ladder as he looks to the end of time when he says this in that verse.

You shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

[ 21 : 52 ] Which is kind of a curious thing to say. Angels descending and ascending on the Son of Man. Is that correct?

But it is. It's saying ascending and descending on Jesus. Jesus is the Son of Man, the Son of God. And so, Jesus is calling himself there the ladder, the stairway to heaven.

Because he brings us into union with God. Jacob's dream is a pointer to the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises that Jesus would come to bring us into fellowship with the heavenly Father.

It's only the house that God builds, friends, that has this stairway to heaven.

Only in the household of God can you have a relationship with God and enter heaven and have eternal life. you've heard the song or that phrase knocking on heaven's door.

[ 23 : 07 ] Well, that's only as far as any other religion or human idea will get you. None of the world's religions or the philosophies of humans will get you in.

Only Jesus can. Only by being part of the people that the Lord through sovereign grace is gathering and building. Fourth, the house that God builds evokes wonder and devotion.

Jacob got what he was going on. He got it. He wakes up and says, surely the Lord was in this place and I was not aware of it.

How awesome is this place? This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven. He goes on, he sets up that stone as a monument, he pours oil on top of it.

This is a reminder for him. It's an act of worship and truly when we see what God has done through history and what God is doing today, our response is wonder and it's worship.

[ 24 : 24 ] all the glory to him for his salvation, for including us, for blessing us, for eternal life, for a life of purpose and fulfillment on this earth.

And the response of faith continues as we devote ourselves to the Lord. Jacob makes a vow, he commits to give God a tenth of everything God gave him, and we read throughout the Bible of that guideline for giving as God's people, a tithe, 10% of what he gives us and that's one of many, many ways that we as his people devote ourselves to our God who has come to us with his grace in Jesus.

God is sovereign, God takes the initiative in election, in working his grace in our lives, Jesus makes the way, but we don't do nothing, we respond.

We're invited to make a response of faith. We're called and invited to receive with open hands and then to live the life of faith, devoting ourselves to God's service in all that we do.

Finally, this morning, the house that God builds will fill the earth to bless the nations. He gave that place the name Bethel, which means house of God.

[ 26 : 04 ] That was a long time ago. Is that still where Bethel is? Where is Bethel now? Where is this house of God that we've been talking about?

after Jesus came to this earth at Christmas and suffered and died and rose again, he opened wide that gateway to heaven.

He sent the Holy Spirit who would empower God's people to go to the nations so that what God's ancient people in the Old Testament failed to do would now happen.

so all people on the earth would be blessed. In Jesus, that promise God made is fulfilled and we should view the entire earth as a Bethel in which we serve the Lord.

And since we have the Spirit in us, we can serve the Lord anywhere on earth in all that we do. It's Sunday today, churches everywhere are worshiping, and the Lord's Supper we will celebrate today as we come in faith.

[ 27 : 18 ] The Holy Spirit unites us in a special way to the Lord, yes, communion with God, but also to one another here and also beyond that to believers everywhere.

The house of God truly fills the whole earth and we're called to be part of God's great building project, calling people home, home to Jesus.

That's our mission until the end of time when Satan and all who have not wanted to be part of God's house are once and for all sent to everlasting destruction.

But in that day, all who have given their life to Jesus will dwell in the house of the Lord forever in the new heavens and the new earth. life and mine is part of this big picture, this big plan.

You maybe wonder sometimes, how can that be? How can God use me? I'm small.

[ 28 : 30 ] I'm not super gifted like some people. I'm inadequate. I'm a sinner.

I've messed up in life. if you want to picture yourself in this great plan and the blueprint of God and the building of the household of faith, think of a puzzle once.

Every single piece, I'm not a big puzzler. My wife is and some family members are but I just, I wish I was.

I wish I could just sit there and nicely do it but I don't have the patience. But we all know what a puzzle is. Every single piece that you look to connect with the rest of the puzzle is unique.

Every single piece is a little odd and a little crooked and that's kind of like all of us. But all the pieces come together to make a beautiful picture that the maker intended to have.

[ 29 : 44 ] And I pray that we would all be discovering our place in God's beautiful plan and that you would hear even at covenant and beyond even the four walls of this church.

Let's pray. Lord, thank you for the house you are building. Thank you for your plan throughout all of history that continues today.

Your plan of grace, your plan of salvation, even for people like Jacob, even for people like us. Show us how to devote our all to you in service and in thanksgiving for all that you've done for us.

I pray a special blessing on Covenant CRC today. Thank you for the people you are gathering here and have over the many years that Covenant has been here.

Bless them as Pastor Keith comes and starts his ministry and may be very fruitful. And bless the people here as they encourage Pastor Keith and his wife and support them.

[ 31 : 01 ] And would they hear from him your will for their lives. Keep us growing, keep us living for you, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.