

Saturday Morning Preparatory Service

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[0 : 00] We can turn back to the chapter we read there, Genesis 28, and I'd like us to think about this incident described there when Jacob had that dream from verse 10 onwards.

Now, as we know, Jacob is a very prominent character in the Bible, and there are lots of incidents given involving him.

One of the important features about Jacob is that God identifies Himself by him.

I mean, many times in the Bible, God calls Himself the God of Jacob.

It's almost as if God is using Jacob to introduce Himself to others. As if somebody was to say to God, well, who are you?

[1 : 40] And God would reply, I am the God of Jacob. And that, of course, tells us that God loved Jacob, obviously, but it also tells us that He's saying to others, if you want to know what I am like, look what I did in the life of Jacob.

We know that there's very dark features in Jacob's life.

If we had read the previous chapter, or we had read a part of it, but if we had read all of it, we'd have seen a very dark side to Jacob's nature when he deceived his brother, Esau.

And so he deceived his father, sorry, and took the blessing that his father had planned to give to Esau.

But despite what we could say these dark features of Jacob, God still calls Himself the God of Jacob.

[2 : 55] And that's a reminder to us, not only of God's love, but of God's faithfulness. And we can put it this way, God is not embarrassed to be known as the God of Jacob.

I'm not too sure what we would have said if we had been the friends of Jacob and we had discovered his ruse.

I'm not too sure that the next day we would have gone out and said, we're the friends of Jacob. But God never said He didn't want to be the God of Jacob.

So He's faithful, not only when Jacob is faithful, but God is faithful at all times. Now, this incident here in chapter 28 where Jacob has this dream, a lot of people take that as his conversion.

They look at the previous behavior of Jacob and they assume that because these details that are given to us are not very good ones, like for example, not just the time he deceived his father, but also previous occasion when he asked Esau to give him the birthright for the bowl of soup, basically.

[4 : 45] People look at these details and they say, well, that could not be the actions of a believer. And therefore, they assume that here in chapter 28 we have Jacob's conversion.

That may be the case, but for what it's worth, it's not how I would read it. Jacob at this time is 75 years old.

This is not a novice. This is a man who's been around a long time. And it's impossible to assume that he was not aware of the plans that God had for him.

We remember that before he was born, Rebecca, his mother, was puzzled by what she was feeling inside her.

She was waiting for her to give birth. And she did a very wise thing. She went and asked God what was significant about this unusual sensations that she was feeling.

[5 : 59] And God told her that she was about to give birth to twins. And that the second one to be born, that's Jacob, that God would bless him.

That in contrast to the normal customs, which would have been that the firstborn would get the father's blessing, that in this particular case, it was going to be the secondborn.

And I suspect that Jacob knew that. And the first occasion when he asked Esau to give him the blessing, the birthright, which happened 30 years before 1 chapter 28, chapter 87, sorry, that was Jacob's spiritual desire.

He was wanting what God had promised him. And Esau was refusing to give it.

And Jacob asked him for it. So I think personally that Jacob has been a believer for a long time.

[7 : 21] But in chapter 27, he shows us that believers can do things that are not appropriate.

And here he is, having done that wrong action in chapter 27, when he deceived his father. So what happens here in chapter 28 is the consequence of that.

And we see from chapter 28 that the consequences are varied. I just want to look at the incident by asking some questions of it.

And the first one I want to ask is, well, why is Jacob here? Why in verse 19 we find he's in Luz? Why is Jacob there? We could say he's there for two surface reasons, and he's also there for a reason below the surface.

[8 : 36] What are the two surface reasons? Why is Jacob now in this place called Luz? Well, one surface reason is that he's there as a consequence of his sins.

I mean, that's so obvious, isn't it? Esau is going to try and kill him. We read that in chapter 27, verse 41. And he has had to flee from home. That's a consequence of his sin.

Although he's the recipient of God's blessing, although God has revealed his will about him, because of his sin, Jacob has had to flee from home.

The consequences of his own sin. That's one surface reason. A second surface reason is that he is in Luz because he has listened to the advice that others have given him.

And, of course, that advice has come from his parents, from Rebecca and from Isaac. They are aware of the situation.

[9 : 53] And Rebecca has got a second reason. She doesn't want things to go wrong with Jacob if he marries one of the people of the land. So she comes up with this desire that Jacob go back to Haran and get a wife there from Abram's relatives.

So these are the two surface reasons. His sin and the advice he's received from others. So Jacob's on this journey for these two reasons.

And I would say that's where each of us is today. We may think we're miles away from Jacob. But wherever we are today, spiritually and in other ways, we're there for these two same reasons.

Wherever we are, we are here because of the consequences of our sins. We have made decisions in the past, and some of these decisions affect us.

They have led us down certain roads. And where we are today is a consequence of sins that we have committed.

[11 : 25] That's just a fact. We're also here today, no doubt, because of advice we've received. Jacob himself, as we've read from verses 1 to 4, chapter 28, he's here because of the advice, the blessing that his father Isaac has given to him.

So despite the fact that Jacob had sinned against Isaac, Isaac had still given to Jacob this advice that he should make this journey to Haran.

The one that Jacob had sinned against had given him the advice. And is that not the case for ourselves?

Quite often, the persons who have responded to our sinful behavior have been the ones that we knew best, who knew us best, and who gave advice to us.

And we find ourselves, despite our sinfulness, gathered under the sound of God's Word. These are the two surface reasons for Jacob.

[12 : 50] And they're also the two surface reasons for ourselves. That's what marks our lives. Where our sin has taken us, and where spiritual advice of others has taken us.

And here we are. There's also a reason under the surface. And under the surface, there's the providence of God.

If we had asked Jacob at this particular moment, what's happening to you, Jacob? He'd have had probably to say, well, I made a mistake, and I'm having to flee from my brother because he's angry. If we asked Jacob, later on in this life, towards the end of his life, what he estimated, how he would have estimated this situation, well, he would tell us, as he does in Genesis 48, verse 15.

He says, the God, he's blessing Joseph, and he says, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day.

[14 : 09] as Jacob looked back, and as he looked back on his long life, and as he rehearsed the various incidents that he had gone through, this is how he surveys them all.

That wherever he went, even when he was facing, having to do actions because of his sins, or even when he was following the advice of others, behind it all, he knew this wonderful reality, that God had been a shepherd, that God was going ahead of him, that the one who had arranged this journey that he was making from Beersheba to Haran, was the God who had been a shepherd, that God was leading him and guiding him.

God was doing it every day of his life. And of course, that's marvelous. Did Jacob deserve God to do this?

Of course not. But that's the way God is. God had his eye on Jacob.

There wasn't a moment, a second, when Jacob was out of God's providential working. And however strange this situation might have been for Jacob, and however unexpected it might have been for Jacob, God was arranging it all.

[15 : 56] The God who had been his shepherd every day. Isn't it marvelous to know that? God doesn't get rid of bad sheep.

But instead, he leads them. God has his own agenda. Jacob had his agenda.

Rebecca had her agenda. Isaac had his agenda. But behind them all was God's agenda.

God's agenda. And what was true of Jacob is true of all of us. Who's working in our hearts today? We think things. Others say things to us. But who is working? God. God. God. And Jacob, why is Jacob here?

[17 : 08] Sleeping in the open air in this location. He's there because God's got a plan. Why are we here?

We're here because God has a plan. That's the first question.

Why was Jacob there? Second question we can ask is, what did Jacob feel? We're not exactly told in detail what he felt, but we can work out from the passage some of the features that would have inevitably been there.

And one is that Jacob thinks he's alone. Remember, he's 75. For these long decades, he has seen familiar faces around him.

I mean, Jacob, as we're told in previous chapters, is a man who liked to be at home. In contrast to Esau, who liked to be away out in the field. But here's Jacob now when he's alone.

[18 : 26] Or perhaps he thought he was. In addition to being alone, I suspect he was afraid. He was afraid of what might come from behind him.

Perhaps Esau would appear behind him. He was also afraid of what might be ahead of him. How would his relatives, whom he had never seen, how would they react to him?

And of course, as you read further on in Genesis, and we note the intrigue of Laban, then if Jacob, whether he knew it or not, he had plenty of reasons to be afraid of what was ahead of him.

So here's poor Jacob, and he's alone. And he's apprehensive. Everything seems so uncertain. His familiar life has been turned upside down.

And of course, he's been turned upside down by his own fault. It's also been turned upside down by the advice of his parents. And it's also been turned upside down by the God of Providence.

[19 : 51] Why has God done it? Why is Jacob alone? And why is Jacob apprehensive? Because, from a third point of view, if we're to make any progress with God, God has to bring us into a situation where he can deal with us face to face.

And where he can deal with any fears that we have. And of course, we see from what God said to Jacob in his dream that God does deal with his fears.

fears. But, the point I want to stress at this moment is that God had arranged things so that he and Jacob would be face to face and no one else there.

why do things happen to us? Why do we find ourselves sometimes with a sense of isolation?

For some reason, which we can't explain, we find ourselves alone. and it may be at the same time that the things which we imagine will give us security have gone.

[21 : 36] And behind us, there's threats coming. And ahead of us, well, we're apprehensive. What's happening?

Well, at one level, what's happening is that God is preparing to meet with us face to face. And he's taken Jacob into this situation where Jacob doesn't know anything about where God is going to speak to him.

So that's why Jacob is there and that's what Jacob felt. But thirdly, where did God deal with Jacob? What place did God choose to deal with him on this occasion? And of course, the answer to that question is given in verse 19.

he chose to deal with him in the place called Luz. Now, we might think that detail is of no significance.

[22 : 58] But it would have been of significance to the original readers. And for two reasons. the first one is that, and we know this from archaeology, that the city of Luz was a place that was dedicated to pagan worship.

If there was one place where a believer in God would find it very uncomfortable, it was Luz.

And yet, here of all places, God met with Jacob. What's Jacob discovering?

Well, I think he's discovering what the psalmist says in Psalm 23, that God prepares a table for us in the midst of our enemies.

I don't think Jacob anticipated anything would happen in Luz, because Luz was not the place where such things normally happen.

[24 : 16] But right there, in the midst of everything that Jacob and his family were against, God met with him.

that's one significant thing about Luz. A second significant feature about Luz, and this comes from the history of Jacob's own family, is that it was a place of previous spiritual recovery.

family. If we remember the story of Abraham, that there in Genesis chapter 12, God said to him to go round the country of Canaan, explore the inheritance I've given to you.

And everywhere that Abraham went, he built an altar. And these altars were built to signify that he was claiming the land that God had given him.

And Genesis 12 tells us that one of the places where he built an altar was Luz. And of course, that's very challenging, isn't it?

[25 : 31] Because at the place where the enemy was strongest, Abraham built an altar. But sadly, in Genesis 12, we're told that he got news when he was at Luz that there was a famine in the land.

and foolishly, Abraham decided to go down to Egypt. And of course, we know what happened there.

He made that mistake. But where did he have to go back to, both geographically and spiritually? He had to go back to Luz.

We're told that in Genesis 13. He had to go back to the place where he had previously met with God. And there in Genesis 13, at Luz, Abraham experienced spiritual recovery.

so here's Jacob. And he finds himself physically in the place where his grandfather had enjoyed spiritual recovery.

[26 : 51] And it's fairly obvious from the story here in Genesis 28, that it's also the place where Jacob experienced spiritual recovery.

So there's these two features of where God did it. What has that got to do with us? Well, both these features are true of us today, aren't they?

God provides spiritual provision for us in the midst of our enemies. We live in a society that is opposed to everything we believe.

But where does God provide the table for us? He provides it right in the midst of our enemies. Where are these enemies? Are the world?

The flesh or the devil? We might find a precious society coming upon us as they try to show to us from their perspective that the Christian faith is finished.

[28 : 14] And how weak Jacob's faith would have seemed in blood with all its signs of pagan worship. God and how small our faith seems today in the big wide world out there in comparison.

But right there in Luz where the enemies seem strong, God met with Jacob. God and that's what he does with ourselves, isn't it?

The enemies of our souls seem so powerful that can they stop God meeting with us? No, they can't. Even where they are most powerful, they can't stop it. And of course that's very encouraging because it means we can expect God to do what he wants.

Second reason, as I've mentioned, was that Jacob found himself in a place where he was experiencing a similar spiritual experience as his grandfather had of spiritual recovery here at Luz.

[29 : 46] And of course, where are we this weekend? We're at a communion season and such situations in the past have been places where those who have gone before us and where we

ourselves no doubt previously have experienced spiritual recovery.

The Lord brought Jacob into a place where he had enjoyed something similar to what Abram had. And he's brought us here together at this time to experience something that he has given to previous believers when they met with God.

We're here for spiritual recovery too because we need it. Jacob got it from God and so do we. Luz, this place mentioned in verse 19 which Jacob renames and calls it Bethel, Luz tells us that nothing can stop God blessing us.

And Luz tells us that there's always spiritual recovery. What a marvelous city, Luz, is, isn't it? Not from what normally happens there but from what God can do when he comes. comes.

[31 : 22] And for Jacob, this dire city was turned into the house of God. God's presence was so real.

And that can be our experience too. We may think we're in a terrible world. And from a spiritual sense we are. And we may think that we're in a terrible state.

And that may be the case. But with Jacob we can find ourselves experiencing God's rich provision in the midst of our enemies.

And we can find ourselves experiencing spiritual recovery as that same psalm says, he restores my soul. So that's where God did it.

And of course, Luz tells us that God can do it anywhere. But the next question I want to ask is, what did Jacob discover?

[32 : 39] Now he had a dream. and I think it's possible for us to take the wrong emphasis from a dream. We can put it this way.

God communicated to Jacob in the way that would be most effective for Jacob. Jacob had no Bible. There were lots of other things that Jacob didn't have. But the Lord wanted Jacob to know that it was possible to have a connection between the place where Jacob was at that moment, that there was a connection from that place right up to heaven.

So there in Luz, of all places, there was a ladder in this vision, dream that he had.

There was a ladder that went from right where Jacob was up to heaven. And of course, that's telling Jacob that God could come down to you wherever you are.

[34 : 09] And as Jacob saw this ladder, he saw angels going up and down it. And what would that have told Jacob as the ladder comes down to his feet and he sees all these angels going up and down it?

What does that tell Jacob? Well, it tells Jacob that the whole activity of heaven is focused on him. He may think he's alone, but in reality, the God who stands at the top of the ladder, he's directing all his angels to go up and down it on Jacob's behalf.

God. This vivid picture says that all of heaven's resources are being constantly utilized for Jacob's benefit.

What a marvelous ladder. He not only discovered that, that God could come down to where he was. He discovered that God's resources were being fully used for his benefit, but he also discovered that God wanted to speak to him.

And there in verse 13, God says amazing things to him. He tells him, I know about your past, Jacob. I know your grandfather father, your father.

[35 : 49] I know about your past, Jacob. I know the promises I made to them. I know about your present, Jacob. In verse 13, the land on which you lie.

Yeah, you look round it and you see laws and you see all its pagan shrines, but the land on which you lie, I will give it to you. It's going to be yours, Jacob.

And all it's going to be to you, yours, it's going to be for your descendants. And of course, Jacob's not married when he says this. That's a marvelous comfort for Jacob, isn't it?

I mean, why is he going to Haran? He's going to Haran to get a wife. And here's God saying to him as he takes his first steps on this journey.

I'm going to bless your offspring. So God is telling him that his search in Haran is going to be successful. I've no doubt that Isaac saw that Jacob would be wondering about, well, is there someone there in Haran for me?

[37 : 08] And here's God saying, you're going to have offspring. And eventually, Jacob, you're here by yourself.

That's the case at the moment. But eventually, your descendants are going to come from everywhere. They're going to come from the west and from the east and from the north and from the south.

And whether we know or not, storn away is in that verse. Because we're the spiritual descendants of Jacob.

And here's God telling this man lying on a rock in a place that has long gone into ruins.

He's telling him that your spiritual descendants will be everywhere. He also says to them, not only will you have all this innumerable descendants, but from your offspring is going to become one who's going to bless the world.

[38 : 31] God says to him, and that's Jesus. What a marvelous message he gave. But that's not all.

God says to him in verse 15, I'm going to be with you wherever you go. So all the subsequent details of Jacob's life recorded in Genesis, all the ups and downs he's going to experience, God is with him.

And God gives this marvelous promise there at the end of verse 15, I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

And of course, that promise is not limited to earth. because these promises have not yet fully been completed.

And of course, where's Jacob today? He's with God. When are these promises going to be finished?

[39 : 54] They'll never be finished. but until then, God will be with Jacob.

What a marvelous words that God addressed to this man who had sinned so blatantly.

But that's God, the God of grace. Jacob realizes, he says elsewhere, we're not worthy of the least of his mercies.

things. And here we are, where God has placed us in providence. And what's he got to say to us?

We have far more than Jacob had. We may think these promises that God gave to Jacob are marvelous, and so they are, but how few they are in contrast to the many great and precious promises, as Peter puts it, that God has given to us.

[41 : 21] And we come to this place in the midst of our enemies to be spiritually restored, and to receive from God fresh assurance that he is for us, that the one that he predicted would be descended from Jacob, that's the Savior, that we from other families of the earth, that we have been blessed through him.

And as we gather at the Lord's Supper, we know how this blessing was going to come, that this descendant of Jacob was going to die, to die in our place.

Jacob, who was afraid of dying at the hand of his brother, would not die in that way. But his descendant would die, and he would die to get rid of the sins of Jacob, and our sins.

Jesus, as he tells Nathaniel in John chapter 1, he's the fulfillment of this ladder.

And just as the ladder in the dream came right down to where Jacob was, so Jesus, in a very marvelous way, comes right down to where we are, and assures us that all of heaven is working on our behalf, and that we've got a marvelous future.

[43 : 05] It's a wonderful place to be, is it not? As we close, just a few comments about Jacob's response. response. How did Jacob react to this?

Well, he realized that he was in a special place. Verse 17, how awesome is this place.

This is none other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven. He's afraid. But what's he afraid of? He's afraid of a God who has got so much grace that our minds can't cope with it.

And of course, anything that's greater than us, we should be afraid of it. That's our normal reaction. It's stupendous.

We can't control it. God's sin. There's nothing inappropriate about that. Who wants to sin against such a marvelous God?

[44 : 25] Jacob's beginning to understand that here. sinned against the God of grace. He does something else, of course.

He sets up a pillar. Why did he do that? Because he wants to remember it. He doesn't want to forget this moment.

He didn't have a diary to write it in. He could only use what things he had, and the only thing he could do was set up a pillar. Why did he set it up? So that when he came back to the land of Palestine, he would go to the place where he had met God.

And if we turn to Genesis 35, we find that's what he did. And then, thirdly and lastly, he dedicated himself to God.

We may read verse 20 as implying doubt, but he's not doubting anything. When he says, if God will be with me and will keep me the way that I will go and bring me back to my father's house in peace, he doesn't know what God will do for him.

[45 : 39] He doesn't know if his father will still be alive when he comes back. So he has to say if. But whatever God does, he will be dedicated to God.

And of course, that's what we should be. As we think of God's goodness to us, we should show our dedication. Jacob made a pillar.

This weekend, the obvious equivalent of the pillar is to go to the Lord's table and there to dedicate ourselves to God.

God. May God bless these thoughts to us. Thank you. Well, have a done.

Thank you.