

GENESIS

28:1-22

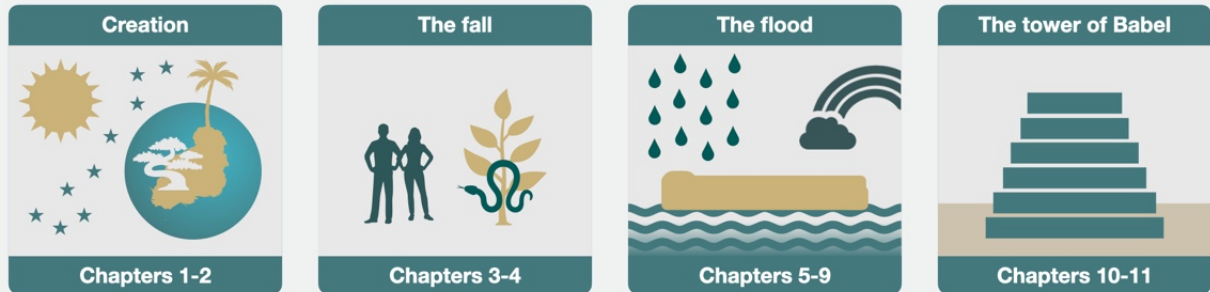
Genesis 28:1-22

Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 3rd March 2023 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

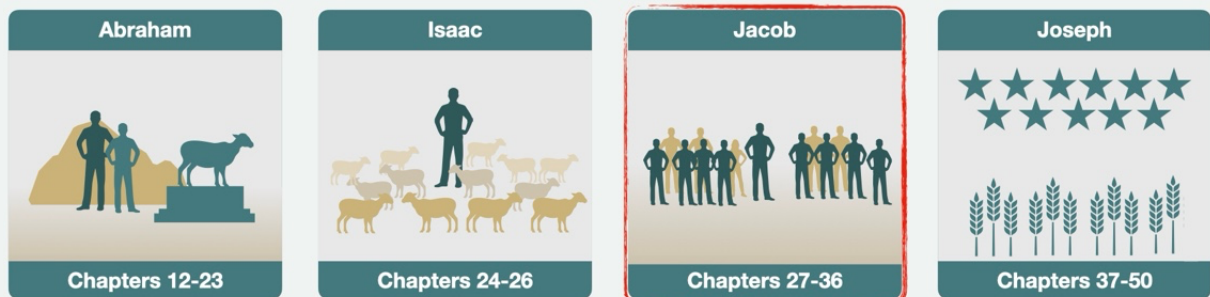
Introduction

The events of Genesis



We have come as far as chapter 28 of Genesis, the first book in the Bible, having already read about the Creation of the world, the fall of man, Noah's flood, and the tower of Babel.

The patriarchs of Genesis



And we've see the lives of Abraham and his son Isaac play out – seeing both their victories and their mistakes. Last week, our focus turned to Isaac and Rebekah's twin sons — Esau and Jacob — seeing how Jacob deceived his father into blessing *him*, rather than Esau. And as we pick up this account in chapter 28, we'll see the first of the repercussions from that. Then, from next week on, our attention will be turned fully to Jacob and *his* children, leading us into the final focus of Genesis which is Jacob's son, Joseph.

Overview of chapter twenty eight

Breaking *this* chapter down, there are three main sections, each of which we'll look at this morning:

Overview of chapter twenty eight

- v1-5 — Isaac's command, Jacob obeys
- v6-9 — Esau tries to find favour
- v10-22 — Jacob encounters God

In the first 5 verses, we'll see Isaac give Jacob clear instruction, and Jacob obey that instruction. Then, in verses 6-9 we'll find that Esau, looking on at this situation unfolding, and how *Jacob* is favoured by his parents, tries to find favour himself. And finally, from verses 10-22, we'll read how Jacob himself was spoken to by God, much like his father, and grandfather.

Chapter twenty eight

So then, as we get going, let's remind ourselves of how we finished the prior chapter:

Genesis 27:41-45

So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, "The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob." And the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said to him, "Surely your brother Esau comforts himself concerning you by intending to kill you. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice: arise, flee to my brother Laban in Haran. And stay with him a few days, until your brother's fury turns away, until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereaved also of you both in one day?"

So then, Esau is furious at his brother, Jacob, for deceiving their father into blessing him — even though Esau himself had treated his birthright with such contempt before. And he is intent on killing his brother as soon as their father dies, which he believes (as does Isaac) will be soon.

But their mother, Rebekah, who favoured Jacob, moves to protect him, first telling Jacob to flee to her brother until Esau has calmed down. But then, I believe considering what would *become* of him while away from the family home, and perhaps knowing deep down this wouldn't be a matter of just a few days (for she'd travelled that long journey *herself* once before), now talks to her husband, Isaac, to urge him to speak to Jacob as to whom he should *marry*. And she does this for Jacob's own good, and also because she needs Isaac to see the merit in sending Jacob away. We read:

Genesis 27:46

And Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these who are the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?"

So again, this points back to the end of chapter 26, where we learned that Esau's wives — Beeri and Basemath — were a grief of mind to both Isaac and Rebekah. Not because of their ethnicity, but because of their ungodliness. And we see that this appeal of hers to Isaac works, for as we begin chapter 28 we read:

Genesis 28:1

Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan."

So, Isaac continues to bless him — there is clearly no animosity here, despite Jacob's actions. There is no attempt to undo the blessing he had given before. And rather, in doing this, he makes it abundantly clear that the birthright *should* indeed pass to Jacob, and *not* Esau, *despite* it being obtained through deceit. And following this blessing, Isaac tells Jacob in no uncertain terms that "you *shall not* take a wife from the daughters of Canaan". Not only speaking of a wife *singular*, but also echoing the words Abraham spoke to *his* servant, when instructing him to find a bride for *Isaac*.

Of course, Isaac knew full well what a blessing Rebekah had been — a woman that was willing to pray, and to listen to God — even though she had acted rashly in these last 24 hours. And for reference Isaac could see the kind of women Esau's wives were, having come from these idolatrous nations, and it was the polar opposite. Now, the parallel is clear, as it has been in recent weeks, that the Bible leaves no doubt that a Christian should only marry another Christian. And there are many reasons for that, not least of which is how it so consistently pulls the Christian away from the Lord.

I've seen that too many times among my friends. I've seen it too many times even within our small fellowship of believers here. But lest you think that I'm somehow labouring this point to excess, let me read to you from J Vernon McGee, a faithful Bible teacher who pastored for over 40 years in the US in multiple churches, some of them thousands strong. He said:

Intermarriage always leads to godlessness. I say this as a caution. I recognize that we are living in a day when young people are not very apt to take advice from an old preacher. They wonder what he knows about it all. Frankly, if you want to know the truth, I know a whole lot about this particular matter. I've done years of counseling and have had many, many couples come to me and have been able to watch them through the years. The story is pretty much the same.

A young lady or a young man will say they have met the right person, the one they wish to marry. That person is not a Christian. However, they want to marry that person and win him or her for the Lord. May I say this, young lady, if you cannot win him for the Lord before you get married, you will not win him after you are married. May I say this, young man, if you cannot win her for the Lord before you get married, you will not win her after you are married.

God forbids the godly to marry the godless. It always entails sorrow. I have seen literally hundreds of cases, and I have never yet seen a case where it has worked. Never yet! You can't beat God! God has put it down indelibly all the way through the Word that the godly are not to marry the godless. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14). The New Testament strictly tells Christians that they are not to be unequally yoked. You don't get unequally yoked by sitting on a platform with an unbeliever, as some critics have accused me of doing! You do it by intermarrying. That's the way you join up with them. And God strictly forbids it.

Friends, we get one go at life. Just one. So how are you going to live? It's very easy to see the wise and foolish choices from the outside, but harder to see in our own lives. That's why we need God's Word (so we know which way to go), that's why we must pray (so we might be led by the Lord), that's why we must remember Christ's great sacrifice for us (that nothing is too great for *us* to sacrifice — that it's not about our rights!), and that's why we must fellowship (for rebuke, correction, and exhortation) — we need godly people in our lives.

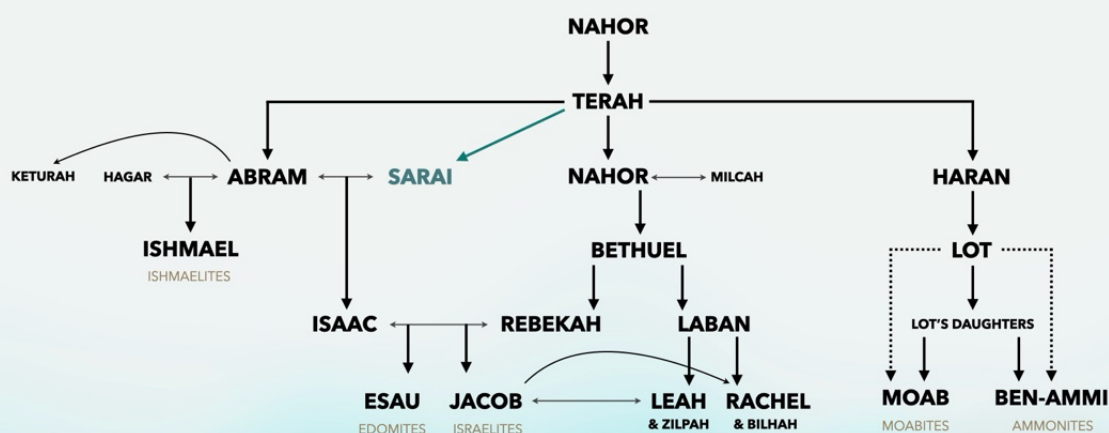
Here, Isaac is the one providing that Godly instruction to his son, Jacob, and he says:

Genesis 28:2

Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother.

So then, Jacob is to find a wife — just one wife! — by going back to the land where Rebekah came from, and specifically to her family there, choosing a wife from her brother's daughters. And we know this family well, having met them in chapter 24:

Abraham's extended family



Laban was the grandson of Abraham's brother (Nahor), and Rebekah was the granddaughter. As we get into chapter 29 next week we'll see that Jacob, ends up marrying *both* of Laban's daughter's (as he is served up a taste of his own medicine, so to speak). And we'll come back to this family tree later this morning. But, next, Isaac continues:

Genesis 28:3-4

"May God Almighty bless you, And make you fruitful and multiply you, That you may be an assembly of peoples; And give you the blessing of Abraham, To you and your descendants with you, That you may inherit the land In which you are a stranger, Which God gave to Abraham."

Speaking of the most powerful, the almighty God, of El Shaddai, Isaac reconfirms the promise made to Abraham and to himself, now to Jacob. And we'll see some of this fulfilled in Jacob's life, as he will indeed return from Mesopotamia in chapter 32, where we read:

Genesis 32:9-10

Then Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the LORD who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you': I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies.

But we'll also see much fulfilled throughout history, and even yet still into the future as God fulfils all his promises to Israel.

Genesis 28:5

So Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Padan Aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.

So having received this blessing, this command, and this promise, Jacob obeys his father and leaves home. He doesn't loiter, nor does he choose a wife from the land around them. And watching all this take place is his brother, Esau. We read in verses 6-7:

Genesis 28:6-7

Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan Aram to take himself a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan," and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Padan Aram.

We read then, that green-eyed-Esau sees that Isaac blessed Jacob further, but also saw how Jacob had been obedient to his parents. Furthermore:

Genesis 28:8

Also Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac.

So Esau reflects on what Jacob had done, and what he had done. But rather than reverse course, he tries to look good:

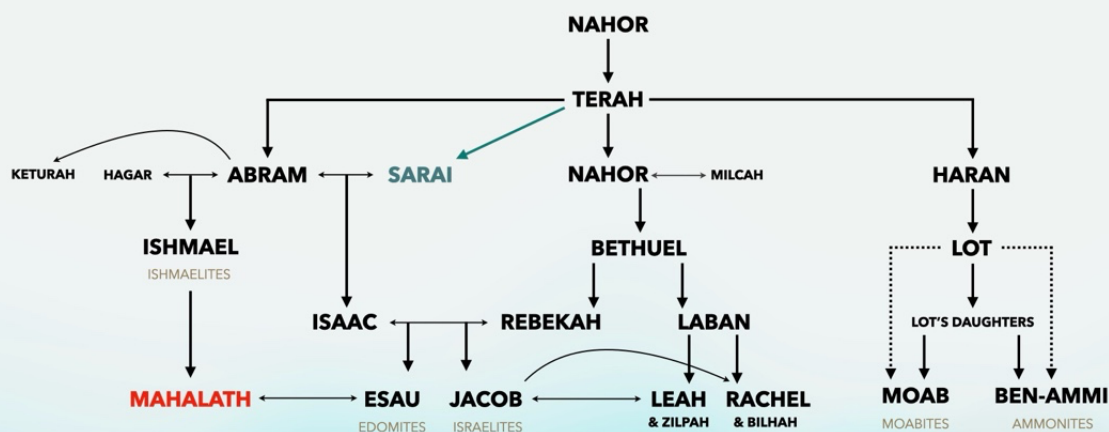
Genesis 28:9

So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had.

Now, I think it prudent to mention again here, that the Bible never approves of polygamy, even though it records it. Perhaps a helpful analogy is how a newspaper would report a murder, yet in no way is saying that it somehow an acceptable thing to do.

And Esau, seeing how Jacob is now favoured, even by his father, tries to emulate him. Knowing Jacob is off to choose a wife from his mother's nieces, Esau goes off to Ishmael's descendants and marries one of Isaac's nieces. This, then, is the family tree I said we'd come back to.

Abraham's extended family



And you can see here the relationships and how Esau was trying to mirror Jacob — not because he thought it was the right way to live, but because he saw Jacob's blessings. He didn't see anything wrong in what he had done in his prior marriage choices, he just wanted to play the part so that he might get the blessings. And sadly that's like so many in their response to the gospel — they do good works because they want God to bless them, but are still unwilling to depart from sin. They will sing "I surrender all" but in reality won't surrender anything at all.

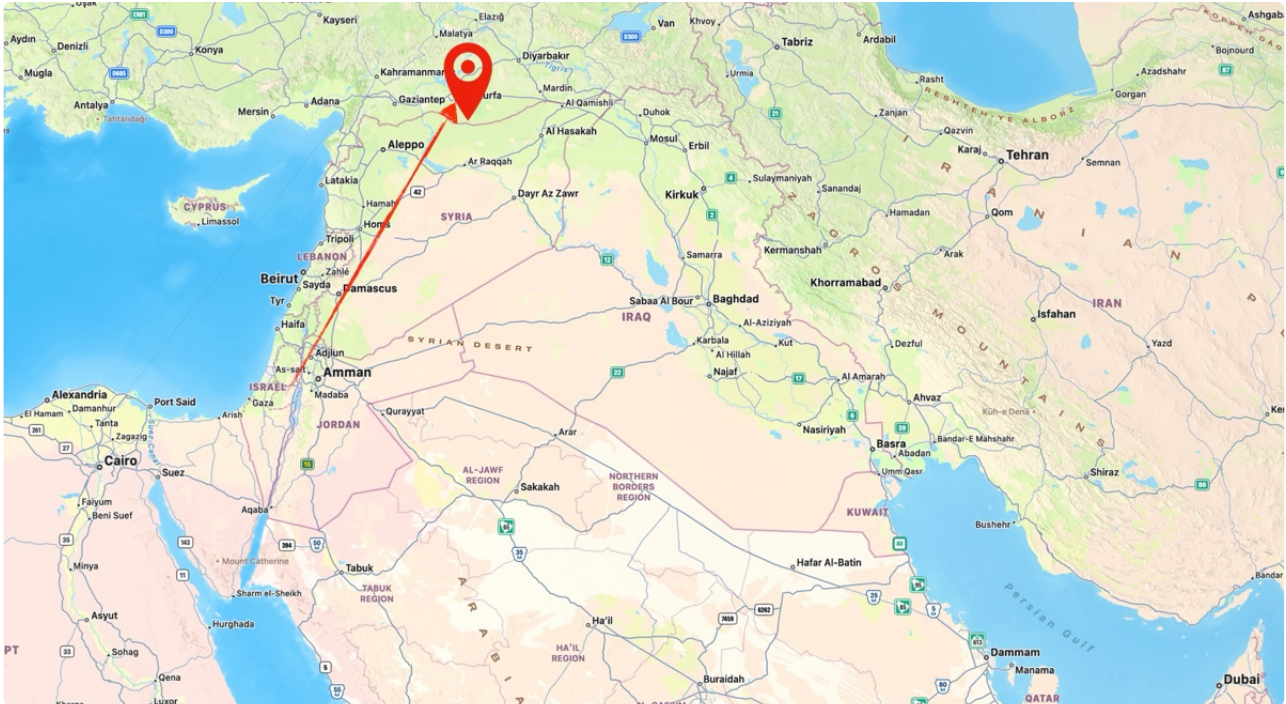
The challenge I must put to you then, is whether that is you. Are you merely pretending to be a Christian? Are you doing a few good things here and there because you like the idea of heaven, but are unwilling to actually repent of your sin, and truly put your faith in Jesus as your Saviour?

Esau is a man full of examples to avoid, and as we continue on in Genesis, we'll see him just a few times more until the full focus remains on Jacob, through whom would come the line to Christ. Switching to Jacob then, we read in verse 10:

Genesis 28:10

Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran.

So, knowing both Isaac's instruction, and that he is only safe while his father was alive (which might not be for long), he leaves the place where Isaac and Rebekah had settled, and departs for Padan Aram where Rebekah's family lived, re-tracing the steps that his grandfather, Abraham had previously taken in the direction of the Land of Canaan:



And so he heads toward Haran, where you may recall Abram (as he was called at the time) delayed (or procrastinated) until his own father had died. But en route there we read:

Genesis 28:11

So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep.

It's easy to forget that there wasn't streetlights or Google Maps, therefore you needed the daytime to see clearly and get your bearings (indeed, trying to travel in the dark wouldn't have been a good idea). And Jacob comes to rest at a place verse 19 will confirm is Bethel, where Abraham had build his second altar, around 12 miles north of Jerusalem, 1200 feet above sea level, and some 40-50 miles away from home. Of course, there was no Premier Inn either, and Jacob lays down to sleep, using a stone as a pillow. Doesn't sound super comfortable, but we can make a reasonable assumption that he wasn't used to a memory foam mattress, and probably used some clothing to make this a touch more comfortable that it first sounds.

Nonetheless, this can't have been a fun moment. He's left the family home, perhaps for the first time ever in this regard, his father is expected to die soon, his brother wants to kill him, and now he's sleeping with a pillow for a rock with only the stars for company, and he's less than 50 miles into a what is likely a 200 mile journey on foot. Yet at this low point in his life he'll reach one of the high points of his life in terms of his relationship with God. What reminder to us that the valleys are hard, but they are often times of blessing too.

Here we read:

Genesis 28:12

Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

An unusual dream for sure. But what did it mean? Was it that he'd had too much cheese the night before? No, no. We'll see that this was nothing less than a message from God to Jacob. And first it should draw our attention to the spiritual realm – that there is far more going on around us that we can possibly imagine. Not only is the devil walking around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, but the angelic realm is always active — even when we are unaware.

But what does this ladder symbolise? Well, we get some insight in John's gospel, where we read:

John 1:43-51

The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!" Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

The point that Jesus made to Nathaniel, was not only was He the Son of God, but He was the *only* way to the Father. That is, Jesus *Himself* is that ladder. Of course, Jesus put this plainly when He said "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

So what we have here in Genesis is God showing to Jacob that the way to God wasn't by works (for Jacob was ultimately on the run here for being a deceiver), it wasn't by riches (for at this moment it's just him and his staff), but rather it was only by the grace of God. And in light of that we read on:

Genesis 28:13

And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: "I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.

Was Jacob deserving of this? No. Rather, this was by God's grace. And in His grace, God re-confirms the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob, as He had previously done to Isaac too. Verse 14...

Genesis 28:14

Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Not only would Jacob and his descendants be blessed, but so would we — because the seed being spoken of here is none other than Jesus Christ, who would be born to his descendants. This is grace upon grace! And yet furthermore, we now read this incredible promise to Jacob:

Genesis 28:15

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 spoken to you."

As Jacob hits perhaps the lowest point of his life to date, God says to him "I've not finished with you yet, Jacob, and I won't leave you until I have finished what I've promised to do". What comfort this must have been to him. But what comfort this should bring to us too, for this reveals not only the comfort of Jacob, but the character of God.

The same God who told Joshua *"Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you."* and later also said *"No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them"*.

The same God who David spoke of to Solomon, saying *"Be strong and of good courage, and do it; do not fear nor be dismayed, for the LORD God—my God—will be with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you, until you have finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD."*

The same God who said to His disciples *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

The same God who the writer to the Hebrews noted said *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* So we may boldly say: *"The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"*

And the same God who Paul wrote of to the Philippians, saying that he was *"confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;"*

Let me ask all of you for a moment to look me in the eye. **God has not finished with you either.**

As the great hymn Amazing Grace says, "'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home." What precious words from the Lord to Jacob here. No wonder we read next:

Genesis 28:16

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it."

In other words, on the run for being a deceiver, Jacob wasn't expecting to God to show his grace in this place. And what do we read in Romans? That *"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

Genesis 28:17

And 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!"

Jacob is in awe. The word behind awesome is translated dreadful in the KJV. And more often than not it is translated fear, then afraid, then terrible. But it is also translated as reverence elsewhere in the KJV. And note, it is not the place, but God's presence that has made this impact. Indeed, the house of God is where His Spirit is. Not simply a location or building! And where we find His Spirit, there must be sanctification, separation, consecration. Whether our bodies, or the places we set aside for worship. They are not entertainment venues. And so we read:

Genesis 28:18

Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it.

Not as an idol, but as a memorial to what God had done. And this is the response of everyone who has truly encountered God's grace — they desire to tell others about it, they desire to worship God. Indeed, the heart of a true believer will look for a way to express love and thanksgiving to his Lord, as one commentator put it.

Genesis 28:19

And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously.

Having been far from God, he now recognises He is in this place he calls the house of God.

Genesis 28:20-21

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God.

What's going on here? Is Jacob bartering with God, saying if you do this, then I'll do that? I don't believe so, nor do many trustworthy Bible scholars, for the sense here doesn't seem to be one of doubt, but of confidence. Not *if* God will be with me, but *since* God will be with me — for we've already read God's great promise to Jacob that He would not leave him until He had done what He had spoken to him.

And so Jacob is saying, since you will be with me, and provide for my needs, you shall be my God. That is, Jacob was yielding his life to the Lord.

Genesis 28:22

And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

And so Jacob wasn't merely talking about his time, but of all that God gave him. And this is the right response to God's grace.

So what then, will we give to God? Let us start with what God has given to us. He has given us life. He has given us air to breathe, eyes to see, ears to hear, and food to taste and sustain. He has given us seasons, sunsets, family, children, friends and wealth beyond what we deserve. He has give us His Word, and He has given us His Son as our Saviour. He has given us His Holy Spirit, the fruit and gifts of His Spirit, and His church. Simply put, He has given us everything worth having.

In light of that, what *won't* you give?!

Let's think of it another way, too. For, perhaps grudgingly at times, but at least out of duty and responsibility, you give at least 20% of what you earn to the government straight out of your wages or salary. You then give 20% of what's left on most things that you purchase. And you may *even* find it in your heart to further give to schools or hospitals, which your taxes are *already* designed to fund.

Why then should it be in any way remarkable that you would give 10% of all you earn to the Lord? It should rather be remarkable if you *don't* do that. Indeed, we've been given more by God than our government will ever, or can ever give to us. So what do we give? We give all we can.

The problem is, what we think we can give is usually less than we can actually give. Perhaps to the extent that we give 10% of what's left. And it's easy to give that, right? But it's much harder to give until it really costs us — that is, until it costs us the ability to go out for dinners, or buy a new phone, or a new car, or a bigger house. In the end, giving — whether our time or our finances — reveals to us where our hearts really are at, and what our priorities really are.

There is much more that could be said on this matter, as it is so important to get right in each of our lives. But let me leave you with two examples, the first of which was one that Jesus made particular point of, as recorded in Mark's gospel. We read:

Mark 12:41-44

Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

What an example! May we truly consider whether we're giving just token tithes out of our abundance, or if we are giving our all. For we do sing the song, I surrender all. And it would make it tricky for the band to play if we had to change the line to "I surrender everything but my finances and my time". It wouldn't be so easy to sing. And we wouldn't be in line with what the Bible instructs.

The second example, is that of the children of Israel while they were in the wilderness, following God's instruction to build the tabernacle. We read in Exodus 36:

Exodus 36:2-7

Then Moses called Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, everyone whose heart was stirred, to come and do the work. And they received from Moses all the offering which the children of Israel had brought for the work of the service of making the sanctuary. So they continued bringing to him freewill offerings every morning. Then all the craftsmen who were doing all the work of the sanctuary came, each from the work he was doing, and they spoke to Moses, saying, "The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which the LORD commanded us to do." So Moses gave a commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, "Let neither man nor woman do any more work for the offering of the sanctuary." And the people were restrained from bringing, for the material they had was sufficient for all the work to be done—indeed too much.

I'm not trying to put any undue pressure on you, but rather I want to hold this up as an example to you, and to myself, to check where our hearts are at. Are we willing to give until it costs us something, whether giving to this church, or any work of God? On reflection, if we're honest, I think we talk ourselves out of our Biblical responsibility to give because "we can't afford to give any more". Yet when the cost of food, petrol, or mortgages jumps up as it has, we generally find a way, right? How do we do that? By cutting out the treats, the takeaways, the trips, and so on. Am I suggesting you live such a simple life you have no furniture, and walk 20 miles to work? No, of course I'm not. But I'm suggesting that we each have a peculiar way of determining what we can and can't afford — and often it comes down to what we give priority to in our lives.

In the end, what we give is a reflection of how much we understand we've been given by God. If we treat Jesus' sacrifice for us casually, we'll only give casually. If we have concluded that no-one has ever given any more, nor could give any more for us, then surely our giving won't be half-hearted!

Conclusion

In closing, don't merely be a church-goer, hoping to get some of the blessings God gives to Christians, without submitting to Him as your Lord and Saviour. But if you do know the Lord as your Saviour, then take amazing comfort from what we've read this morning that God has not finished with you — and indeed He will keep working in your life until you stand before Him in Heaven.

How will He do that? Through His Holy Spirit, and through the ordinary daily reading and application of the Bible. Indeed, it's crucial that you don't merely let God's Word be of interest to you, but that you apply it to your life. So with that in mind, I urge you to ask yourself, and answer honestly, these 3 questions:

- Are you more interested in being blessed by God, than obeying Him?
- Will you respond to God's grace with apathy, or worship?
- Will you give to God out of that which He has given you? (or will you rob from Him?)

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