

"I Am With You."

Genesis 28

Go ahead and be turning to Genesis 28 in your Bibles...

"Well, it is what it is." I started with a quote on Sunday, and here I am, using another quote. I'm gonna get stuck starting off with trite sayings, if I'm not careful. "It is what it is." Haha. When we say that about a given situation, is there much we can do about it? Nope. We say it when, pretty much, the only thing to do is MOVE FORWARD. Jacob would inherit the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant, just as God foretold, but not in the way God intended, and that only added to the dysfunction of the family and the difficulty of Jacob's path. Sure, Jacob protested A LITTLE, but only because he was worried about GETTING CAUGHT AND CURSED; he wasn't concerned with lying to his dad. In fact, he was a QUICK STUDY! For whatever reason, Isaac was on high alert regarding the passing of this blessing. He peppered Jacob with questions surrounding his identity, and with each passing lie, Jacob got better at passing himself off as Esau. "If take the curse if things go badly" Jacob's mom told him, and just as Pastor Dale showed us last week, she would be cursed. Jacob was separated from his family, Rebekah was separated from him, likely for the rest of her life. We'll see the enactment of that curse tonight.

What a mess! Everything had blown up! Sure, Jacob had gotten the blessing, but HE WOULD'VE GOTTEN ANYWAY! He could've gotten it without the deception because God had already decided that, out of the twins, Jacob would be preeminent. As soon as Esau left to bag his game for Isaac, Rebekah could've just come out of her hiding spot where she'd been eavesdropping, and confronted her husband...

"Seriously?! HIM?! You're going to bless him? You know what God showed me. You know Jacob is to be your heir. OH, and you DO remember how little Esau cared about his birthright too, don't you? He sold it, let alone for a bowl of SOUP! What makes you think he'll care any more about your blessing. C'mon. This isn't right, and you know it. Stop listening to your GUT, and listen to God."

I truly believe Rebekah could've prevailed upon Isaac. I want to believe that he would've listened to his wife and changed his mind. That didn't happen, though, did it? The blessing has passed to Jacob, but the family is torn apart. His brother wants to kill him, and his mom got scared, and said "You're living with your aunt and uncle in HARAN," not Bel Air (this isn't Fresh Prince). What a mess indeed. "It is what it is." However, tonight, we're going to see that "I Am that I Am" has the power to work in and through "It is what it is." So, picking up in verse one, we read...

Genesis 28:1-5

1 Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and directed him, You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women. 2 Arise, go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel your mother's father, and take as your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. 3 God Almighty bless

you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. 4 May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham! 5 Thus Isaac sent Jacob away. And he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban, the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.

Jacob doesn't just disappear after deceiving his father and stealing his brother's blessing. Oh, no. He's got to go to see dad first. That was definitely an "is what it is" kind of encounter. You could say that it was only awkward for Jacob to stand before his father after taking advantage of his blindness and lying to him repeatedly, BUT Isaac is also standing before the son he was SUPPOSED TO bless, but attempted NOT to! Have you ever seen someone apologize in scripture? Me neither! But you know they did! Was this an apology? In a way, I believe it was! "It is what it is," but now they're moving forward.

THIS IS A BEAUTIFUL SCENE to me because, I believe, Isaac is making sure his son knows that he wishes for him to be blessed. Jacob stole the blessing; Isaac mistakenly bestowed it. Had he allowed Jacob to just leave for Paddam-Aram, who knows if he'd have ever seen him again, and Jacob would've lived with the understanding that he had something his father never intended to give him. Isaac didn't let that happen and now openly and freely blesses Jacob as he should have in the first place. "I know you feel like you stole my blessing, but the truth is God Himself meant for you to have it, and I need to you to know that I want you to have it too." May we never allow pride or hurt, shame or fear keep us from saying the things that need to be said. May we never ASSUME that people know. It's telling your wife, "I love you. You're beautiful." It's telling your husband, "Thank you for all you do. I still admire you." It's telling our kids, "I love you, and I'm proud of you." In the midst of conflict, it's remembering to say, "I'm sorry" and "I forgive you." In this way we move on from "It is what it is" ourselves. As Isaac does so, he takes an additional step to look after his son, giving him a charge regarding marriage.

"You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women." We see this a lot throughout scripture. *"You don't associate with these people, you don't date them, and you sure don't marry them."* It's one of the chief points of contention that the militant lost have with the Bible. *"Your God is RACIST,"* they claim, and because they largely believe that God is our invention, we made Him that way, which means we're racist. However, those of us who have applied ourselves to meaningful study of Scripture know that the issue at hand is SPIRITUAL, not racial. Endogamy, or marrying within the clan, was important for the sake of maintaining distinction from other groups; it ensured loyalty to the family. However, the concern in this instance and throughout scripture is maintaining purity of faith. Paul most succinctly stated this when he said, **"Do not be unequally yoked with UNBELIEVERS" (2 Corinthians 6:14a)**. As one who had inherited the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant, Isaac knew those blessings were not to be endangered through intermarriage with pagans. As we'll see, this charge motivated a response from Esau as well, albeit a worldly one. Listen to the way the next section is worded...

Genesis 28:6-9

6 Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he directed him, You must not take a wife from the Canaanite

women, 7 and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan-aram. 8 So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please Isaac his father, 9 Esau went to Ishmael and took as his wife, besides the wives he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth.

Did you catch Esau's focus? **"Esau saw that Isaac blessed Jacob...sent him...blessed him...directed him...and that Jacob obeyed."** He's just watching Jacob. The thought of God hasn't entered his mind; his thinking's FLAT, horizontal. He sees that his brother is doing something that pleases his father, so TO KEEP UP, he COLLECTED another wife. Mom and dad couldn't stand Canaanites—Esau probably should've taken note of that out before marrying TWO of them—so now he's marry a good NON-Canaanite. Oh, but the competition wouldn't stop there. No, no, no! Esau sees that Jacob's been sent to get a wife from MOM'S brother, Laban, so what does he do? He decides to ONE-UP Jacob (so he thinks) by taking a wife from DAD'S brother, Ishmael. Again, Esau's primary motivation for this marriage wasn't love or companionship (he had two Canaanite wives who drove his parent nuts already); he just wanted to please his dad (28:8), and if he could OUTDO Jacob in the process, BONUS POINTS! However, all the UNCHOSEN brother has managed to do is take a wife from another UNCHOSEN brother's family.

This is what it looks like when we compare ourselves to each other. Sometimes it drives us to COMPETE with one another, (buying something or making a decision or just doing something that we wouldn't have necessarily done without prompting). Other times, this comparative mentality just leads to being PUFFED UP or DEFEATED in our spirits, depending upon the person with whom we compare ourselves. **"I've got THIS going on,"** or **"I'll never be as good"** or maybe even **"as spiritual as so-and-so."** THE THING IS, in BOTH cases, we're thinking precisely how the devil wants us to think. He doesn't just attempt to skew our perception of God. If we're holding to an inaccurate view of OURSELVES, we're right where he wants us! For the reason, Paul wrote...

Romans 12:3

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with SOBER JUDGMENT, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Chip Ingram is known for saying, as believers we're to be "SOBER IN SELF-ASSESSMENT," neither thinking more highly or lowly of ourselves than we ought, but SEEING OURSELVES AND ONE ANOTHER AS GOD DOES. We weren't made to compare ourselves to each other or imitate each other. In fact, the Bible teaches in 2 Corinthians that **"when [people, especially believers] measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding" (2 Corinthians 10:12)**. Like Esau, we can get stuck focusing on the HORIZONTAL instead of the VERTICAL, but we were made to look at and imitate GOD. Well, after this explanation of things, we see Jacob head out...

Genesis 28:10-13a

10 Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11 And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and

lay down in that place to sleep. 12 And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! 13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac.

This would be a LONG journey. Jacob's route from Beersheba to Haran along what's known as the "Central Ridge Road," that goes through Hebron, Bethel, and Shechem before joining the "Great Trunk Road," would've been a 550 mile trip, and would've likely taken over a month to traverse. The trip to the site where Jacob dreamed of the stairway to Heaven would've been closer to TWO days walk from Beersheba than one (60 miles). Is it any wonder?! He's trying to put some distance between him and Esau. So, a couple of nights into his journey, Jacob is exhausted and finds a spot to lay down. I hesitate to say "make camp" because that would imply the presence of supplies. With the sky for his tent, the ground for his bed, and a rock for his pillow, Jacob passed out. Given the soreness from his journey thus far, sleeping completely exposed, and thought of his brother pursuing him, it's a wonder he slept at all, but the reality is, he was getting ready to have the best night's sleep he'd ever had or ever would have!

I love the excitement in the way Moses recorded Jacob's dream. He essentially said, "LOOK! A ladder! LOOK! Angels! LOOK! The LORD!" If Moses used emojis to tell it, he would've use that shocked emoji.



Out of all the images I found of "Jacob's Ladder," I liked this one the best because it matched up best with scripture; it was the only one I could find that had the LORD STANDING at the top. It was a GLORIOUS VISION, but what did it all mean? The words of God that explain it...

Genesis 28:13-15

13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. 14 Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15

Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

The Abrahamic Covenant passes to Jacob. Israel is God's PHYSICAL PEOPLE and, therefore, receives PHYSICAL BLESSINGS, the first of which is the LAND. Jacob was on his way OUT of the land, on his way to sojourn with his uncle Laban and acquire a wife. In obedience to his father and the will of the LORD, Jacob would take a wife from his own family and forego inviting paganism into the family. The LORD reaffirmed his mission to LEAVE the land to take a wife by promising to BRING HIM BACK to it.

Another physical blessing promised to Jacob was OFFSPRING. The twelve tribes that would descend from Jacob's twelve sons are just part of the way in which God fulfilled His promise to give him descendants like the dust of the earth. The most glorious fulfillment of God's promise of offspring to Abraham through Isaac and Jacob would be the birth of THE SEED promised to Eve in the Garden, the One who would crush the head of the serpent, rescuing us from our sin. It is through Him, Jesus Christ, that all the families of the earth would be blessed as God promised the Patriarchs. As Paul wrote, it is through Christ that we've been blessed with every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3), and it's in Christ that God's promise that Abraham would become the father of a multitude of nations would ultimately be fulfilled because in Christ **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).**

Through the reiteration of His of the covenant that He made with Abraham and Isaac, God was making it clear to Jacob, "I am with you." That's the WHOLE MESSAGE of Jacob's dream with the ladder. This "ladder" or stairway symbolized a CONNECTION between Heaven and earth, between God and Jacob. Though Jacob had made an utter mess of things, God wasn't done with him. Specifically with regard to God's desire to save Israel, Paul wrote to the Roman believers that "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). God willed to work through Jacob IN SPITE OF HIS PAST MISTAKES, just as He does with us, and in doing so, His sovereignty, power, grace, and GLORY are displayed.

Standing on the balcony's edge of Heaven, God said "I am with you," a gesture He repeated as Stephen was laying down his life for Him. In the midst of hardship, in the midst of trial, in the midst of persecution, if we'll only hear Him, God says, "I am with you," and that has the power to change any circumstance.

The LORD continually reminded Jacob of His presence. **"I am with you."** In Genesis 31, when He told Jacob to return home, He promised, "I will be with you" (Genesis 31:3). A verse later Jacob recounts how his uncle Laban has only dealt treacherously with him, but he was okay because **"the God of [his] father [had] been with him."** God's presence would be FELT through His PROVISION and PROTECTION. **"[I] will keep you,"** the LORD said. Leading Jacob as if by the hand, God promised, **"[I] will bring you back to this land."** God hasn't stopped leading people. He hasn't left us alone to figure things out on our own. In whatever situation we find ourselves, if we're willing to recognize our need for Him, the LORD is available and willing to guide us. **"[I] will not leave you."** The LORD promises never to depart from those who are His (Deuteronomy 31:6-8; Joshua 1:5). Jesus said, **"I am with you always"**

(Matthew 28:20b). For this reason, I stop myself from praying, "LORD, be with so and so" because HE ALREADY IS! Instead, I ask that He would make His presence FELT, and if that requires things becoming difficult, it's GOOD. Experiencing His presence is worth it. Let's continue...

Genesis 28:16-22

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

"Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." Jacob's eyes had been opened to spiritual realities to which he had previously been oblivious. I don't care how spiritual you are, just like we can become tricked into speeding down the highway by the hurried pace of surrounding vehicles, the busyness of daily life can cause us to miss God. Instead of responding to Him as we know we should, we begin "feeling" our way through life, basing our decisions on others and IMMEDIATE issues. Sometimes it takes finding ourselves knee-deep in an awful situation before we look up and are reminded **"Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it."** Aren't you grateful, though, that the LORD is willing to go to whatever lengths to lay hold of us? The cross is the greatest example of the fact that God will use suffering to reach us, and He doesn't hold back.

Along with being astonished at his encounter with God, the Bible says **"He was afraid..."** This is typical throughout scripture. It seems that every time God revealed Himself to anyone, He always had to start off by telling them, "Fear not," and "Don't worry. You're not going to die." God's presence was so palpable that a holy fear had fallen on him. As a result of this impression, we're told...

Genesis 28:18-22

18 So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. 19 He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first. 20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, 21 so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, 22 and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you.

For the first time in Jacob's life, we see him respond to the LORD in FAITH. The first thing he did was set up an ebezer, a memorial stone to commemorate the encounter and its impact on his life. [WE WOULD DO WELL TO SET UP VISIBLE REMINDERS IN OUR LIVES AROUND OUR HOMES AND IN OUR PATHS OF TIMES AND WAYS IN WHICH GOD HAS COME THROUGH FOR US.]

Previously the place was known as Luz, but Jacob called it by a name that, like the memorial stone, commemorated his encounter with God. "That's where I met God, at His house," and this wouldn't be the last time God appeared to Jacob in this area. It would happen again after the burial of Rebekah's nurse at Allon-bacuth (Genesis 35:6-9). Abraham had also built an altar near that site when God first

spoke to him, and as the nation that would descend from them grew in its knowledge and relationship with God, the old name and significance of the place would eventually be completely erased.

In fear and awe over his encounter with God, Jacob vowed that the LORD would be

This vow wasn't in any way saying that *"If God fails me, then I'm out!"* People are given to being so fickle, but this isn't the heart of Jacob in this moment. Instead, he vows that **"if the LORD will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace,"** then **"the LORD shall be my God" ALL THE MORE.** It could also be said, "Since the LORD is with me and promises to do all these things, I WILL DEPEND ON HIM."

Finally, Jacob vowed to tithe to the LORD from all that He gives him. Of course, this wouldn't have been money dropped in a box somewhere or even goods given to a priest as an allowance for provision. This would've been SACRIFICES. Tithing acknowledged that everything a person had actually belonged to God. When we recognize that, we become less concerned with ACQUIRING things. We care for what we have, understanding that we are STEWARDS, not owners, and we freely give of what we've been given knowing that, just as the LORD has provided, He will continue to provide.

Many believe that they are too strapped to give. However, scripture is replete with examples of those who FAITHFULLY gave out of their need. Jesus watched a widow who had nothing and no real means of supporting herself give all she had to live on. Another widow, this one residing in Zarephath, was prepared to use the last of her flour and oil to bake a cake of bread for herself and her son to eat and die, but when the prophet Elijah asked, in the midst of a FAMINE no less, she gave it to him instead (1 Kings 17:8-16). The patriarch we're following is another example of those who give out of their lack. Jacob had nothing but a staff when he crossed the Jordan (Genesis 32:10), yet having encountered the Living God, he committed to give the LORD a tithe of whatever the LORD gave him. You caught that right? Jacob said, **"And of all that YOU GIVE ME I will give a full tenth to you,"** recognizing the true source of his provision. If you struggle to give to the LORD, you've yet to grasp that He's the source of all you have, not yourself.

WRAP UP: Jacob witnessed the mighty hand of God working in his life over and over again...

- God was with him as he was deceived by Laban and Leah (more punishment for his own deception)...
- Sustained by the LORD and completed the seven additional years for the wife he desired...
- Preserved by the LORD after constantly being swindled by Laban...
- Given SON AFTER SON by the LORD...
- Protected by God when Laban pursued him...
- Crossed the Jordan with only a staff and returned as TWO COMPANIES...
- Survived a WRESTLING MATCH WITH GOD!!!
- Reconciled with the brother who once sought to KILL him...
- Reunited with Joseph 15 years after he thought he had died, and getting to see Joseph's children!!!

These are PRECIOUS scenes PRAISING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS. We could talk about them endlessly. However, at the end of his days, out of all the scenes from his life, the one still on his heart was...

Genesis 48:3-4

3 And Jacob said to Joseph, God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, 4 and said to me, Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.

THIS was this scene moment would indelibly mark Jacob's life because it was the moment when he said, "**The LORD shall be my God,**" the moment he put his trust in the LORD, and his life was never the same. When Pharaoh asked Jacob the number of his days, Jacob told him, "Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life," but at the end of them all, he bore witness to his sons that the LORD had been with him through them all.

Jacob was a scoundrel. There's no way around it. Previously, he wasn't a spiritual person, but he came to find out that he was in the presence of the Lord, under His watchful eye, and as he said, "**[He] did not know it.**" Maybe your situation has caused you to lose sight of the Lord. Perhaps a sinful habit or worldly attitude has caused you to miss Him. You may be on autopilot, having relied upon the Lord in the past and thinking you still are, but without realizing it, you've begun relying on your own understanding. Quiet, intimate moments with the Lord in His Word and prayer have been replaced with routine. Up to this point in your life, you may have never even called on Him to save you from your sins. I don't know your situation, not completely, but the Lord does. He sees you and HE'S WITH YOU. He's available! You can call on Him right now and invite Him into your life. TRUST GOD'S WORD. If the Lord would make Himself known and available to a scoundrel like Jacob, in the very midst of his schemes and their consequences, He'll make Himself known and available to you. For this reason, many times the Bible says in various ways...

Isaiah 55:6-7

**6 Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near;
7 let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.**

Whether you know it or not, you urgently need Jesus in your life, in the very situation in which you find yourself. So do it! Let us not be oblivious to Him or so SELF-assured that we fail to seek Him TODAY. Yesterday's done, and we can't touch tomorrow. All we can do and all we need to do is recognize that He is with us and call on Him TODAY...

...and FATHER...