

Genesis 29.5-22

**25 July 2010**

Sermon Notes by Pastor Paul Goh

Beloved, in the last few months in the morning worship service, the sermons have been focusing on the needs in the congregation, namely, dressing modestly, the calling of the wife: that is, not to teach in an official way so as to usurp the authority which belongs to man but her calling is in the home for that is God's way of sanctifying the woman. And we also dealt with abiding in Christ and the calling of deacons to hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

Now, our focus will shift from our needs to God-ward. Recently, I came across a quote from an email I received and immediately I was impressed with it. It says,

“the fundamental problem with visible Christianity is neither a lack of good works, nor even poor doctrine, but a lack of the vision of the glory and absolute holiness of God resulting in the healthy fear of God”. And so, in the next few sermons, we hope to look at theophanies, where the Son of God revealed himself to his saints in the Old Testament. This, in order that we have a glimpse of the glory of God, to be in his presence and be transformed unto his likeness and holiness in the fear of God.

Today, we will study of life of Jacob. God has already declared, “Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated”. But, Jacob as a child of God often did not live like one. He was a supplanter, for he stole the birthright of his elder brother when he was hungry and wanted to eat some red bean soup, and stole his brother's blessing by pretending to be his brother. And he was driven from his home, the land of promise And at Luz, God met him by means of a dream. By this dream, God assures him that God will be with him, will keep him and God will bring him back to Canaan, the Promised Land. And in-spite of that, he was seen bargaining with God. All these show that he is till not fully surrendered unto the Lord. But Jehovah is not finished with him yet for God will continue to work grace so that Jacob will live a consecrated life to God.

Jacob's dream at Bethel. First, the chastised saint. Secondly, the divine revelation. And thirdly, the significance of this dream.

Jacob's father Isaac intended to confer the covenantal blessing on Esau, his first born and favourite son. This is despite God's clear revelation that Jacob was the son of promise. Jacob, with the help of his mother, Rebekah deceived the old and blind father in order to receive the blessing. There were two results of this deception. First, that Isaac finally conferred the firstborn blessing on Jacob, leaving Esau without the blessing. Secondly, reprobate Esau was very angry with his brother Jacob, and he expressed his intention to kill his brother after the death of his father, Isaac. And thus, Rebekah sensing the danger to Jacob's life, her favourite son, she asked her son to flee to her brother Laban in Padan-aram for a few days until Esau's anger cooled. Isaac, Jacob's father agreed and at the same time asked him to get a wife not from the Canaanites but from the relatives of Rebekah's family. In fact, this journey

of a few days lasted for twenty years! And Jacob was sent away into exile due to the chastisement of the Lord.

Jacob is chastised by the Lord. The lord uprooted him from the promised land and planted him in a strange country to be cheated, harassed and persecuted by Laban, his uncle. And Jacob left Canaan, the land of promise, and went into exile and be humbled to be purged form his sins: of deceiving Esau of his birthright and deceived his father, Isaac in receiving the blessing of the firstborn. And by his two acts, Jacob showed himself to be hated and despised by his brother Esau.

Therefore, Jacob is a clear illustration of the truth that the Lord chastised his saints for they are his sinful saints. There is in us a two-fold power at work. Firstly, there is the work of the power of grace and secondly, the power of our sinful nature. By this sinful nature we depart from Jehovah, dis-trust him nor acknowledge that he will save us. We will not humbly bow before him. Instead, we will trust in the arm of the flesh and walk in the pride of our heart. And when we are chastised, negatively, the Lord humbles all our pride, brings our work to nothing and leads us into deep misery. Positively, the Lord sustains and comforts his people at the same time. God does not send chastisement to destroy but to save and sanctify. The Lord's purpose in sending misery in chastisement is not only to teach us not to trust in self and to leave our idols but that we may seek him with our whole heart and to acknowledge him as our God and believe that he will fulfil his promises to us. And thus, we view the history of Jacob as he fled to Luz as God's chastening of Jacob. And he fled from his parent's home at Beersheba and on his way to Haran, he stopped at Luz and rested for the night. And he took the stones and laid it under his head as a pillow. He laid down to sleep and he dream a ladder that was set on the earth and the top of the ladder was toward heaven and the angels going up and down on it and Jehovah God was at the top of the ladder.

Why do we dream? We dream because certain images are pressed onto our minds from our subconscious life without the control of our will. Our dreams are not prophetic nor should we think superstitiously think that God is speaking to us, nor should we trust in them. Instead, we trust only in the Word of God. But the nature of the dream that Jacob had was greatly different from our usual dreams. The Holy Spirit mysteriously weaves upon Jacob's consciousness things that he wants to reveal to Jacob. He did this in a way that the dreamer knew and was convinced that the dream was indeed a special revelation. Sometimes, dreams are prophetic in the sense that they reveal the future, e.g. Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel's time. Sometimes God speaks to individuals, e.g. Jacob.

So, it is important to ask, what is the spiritual condition of the dreamer at this time. And to get an insight into Jacob's spiritual condition, we go to his own reaction to the dream in verse 16. When Jacob said, "surely the lord is in this place, and I knew it not". This does not mean that he did not know that God is everywhere present but that Jehovah was there, near him. Jehovah loved him but this truth was far from his mind. He had gone to sleep thoroughly lonely

and miserable, without pouring his heart to God. Thus, for Jacob, Jehovah was not there; and he felt God had forsaken him. He had every reason to be miserable. He indeed sought the blessing of God's covenant and that was good. Through the blessing was already his by God's promise, he sought it by the arm of the flesh. He trusted in his ingenuity and cleverness. He bought the birthright from Esau was famished and wanted a bowl of soup. And what fruit did he receive? When he deceived his father, he did not receive the covenantal blessing but the first-born blessing. In the end, Jacob was a fugitive, an exile from the land of promise. He must flee. Blessing is pronounced upon him but at the same instance snatched from his grasps for he had to leave Canaan. Canaan was at the heart of the blessing. He left God's blessing. It was miserable Jacob who went to sleep that night at Luz and this teaches us that misery is always at the end of our own work. And against this background, we must now consider and understand Jacob's dream. About his dream, there is something very important that I want to show you from the text. Let us read the text in verse 12 "And he dreamed, and **behold a ladder** set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it". The word "behold" means to see, look and the purpose is to draw attention to the object. This dream is the most important thing in the text. Jacob sees a ladder and it slopes upward like a broad stairway, reaching to heaven. And upon that ladder he sees angels going up and down from the top of the ladder. And he sees Jehovah at the top of the ladder.

And Jehovah speaks to Jacob directly in verse 13 to 15. "And, **behold, the LORD** stood above it, and said, I *am* the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; 14 And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 And, **behold, I am with thee**, and will keep thee in all *places* whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done *that* which I have spoken to thee of".

What is the significance of the dream? Firstly, God assures Jacob that Jehovah is near him. The ladder is a means of communication between God and Jacob. By means of the ladder, heaven and Jehovah is brought very near to Jacob, as seen by the angels coming from heaven to Jacob. The presence of the angels means that Jacob is in the presence of God. That ladder is Jesus Christ. And we know that this interpretation is correct because Jesus says to Nathaniel in John 1.51, "verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man". And so by means of the Messiah, Jacob is brought near to God. And God through Jesus Christ forgives Jacob for using deceitful means in order to receive the blessings of God that he wanted so desperately. And the basis of that forgiveness is the death of Jesus Christ and the precious blood that was shed. And thus, through the crucified Christ, there is the way, the only way to God, and there is no other way. And the angels show us what we ought to do that to ascend or go up to Jehovah in prayer and God will fulfil his promises to his people. Children, do you pray? Young people, do you

pray? Adults, do you pray? Pray, beloved, pour out all your heart to God. Pour out your burdens, afflictions and trials and He will answer you. Our prayerlessness means that we are like Jacob depending upon our arm of the flesh or our cleverness to solve our problems. Depend completely upon the Lord and pray.

Secondly, Jehovah assures Jacob that God will keep him. This is expressed in verse 15. And so, there is a four-fold assurance. The assurance of divine presence – I am with thee. The assurance of divine protection – I will keep thee. The assurance of divine preservation - I will bring thee again unto the land. The assurance of divine promise – I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. Thirdly, Jehovah says that he will fulfil his promises in Jacob. Jehovah speaks to Jacob directly in his dream. He announces himself as the God of his fathers, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac. And he assures Jacob that he will give the land to him and he will make Jacob a great nation and he will cause all the nations of the earth to be blessed in Jacob. The pronouncement of blessing was first given to Abraham in Genesis 12.3, that in Abraham shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Thus, Jehovah's promise to Abraham is fulfilled in Jacob, whose name was later changed to Israel. And from the loins of Jacob came the twelve tribes of Israel, the covenant people of God.

What effect did the dream have on Jacob?

He initially feared. When he awoke from his sleep, he realised that Jehovah was there and he was fearful. This fear was not of godly fear but of dread or terror for he said, "how dreadful is this place". Jacob reacted that way because he felt his sin, chiefly that he was thinking and acting as if God was not there, and now he finds himself the gate of heaven. And he dedicated that place and called it Bethel. He took the stone that was his pillow and put it upright and poured oil upon it. It was a memorial that he met God. And oil was used to consecrate that stone to God for showing him favour and oil as a holy ointment was used to consecrate the tabernacle and its vessels. The name Bethel is significant because it means the house of God. It was there that God met Jacob and he dreamed. The house of God is the place of God's presence. It is not brick and cement put together to have a beautiful building. The church of the living God is the assembly of Christ and his people. Wherever God is present with his people, that is the house of God. If we have the presence of God, we have everything. And if we don't have the presence of God, we have nothing. May the time of worship from Lord's day to Lord's day be our Bethel, the house of God where God is and where we meet God!

And finally, Jacob vows. He says, if the Lord blesses him and causes him to return and realises the promise to him, then he will acknowledge Jehovah as his God and he will make a tenth of all his possessions. By this vow, God has strengthened Jacob and saved his sinful child from despair he mercifully gave him strength to live for the Haran. But Jacob is not cured from his reliance upon his own strength and cleverness. If he had been cured, he would have humbled himself with weeping and prayers and would have confessed his sins before the Lord. And he would have confessed, "the ladder is with me", that is Christ. But he missed the point for he says, "Jehovah is in this place,

how dreadful it is". Besides Jacob bargains with God. He says, "if the lord is with me and will keep me and will give me bread and raiment so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then he shall be my God and this place shall be God's house and I will pay my tithes". At this stage, Jacob has not completely surrendered unto the Lord until he reaches Jabbok twenty years alter. But the conclusion is clear: That ladder is the symbol of Jacob's life and the life of the people of God. The Lord wants us to direct our faith at that ladder, that is, Jesus Christ and have complete confidence in God alone. And the Lord chastises his children until they reap that fruit of righteousness. Amen.