

I Am With You

Genesis 28:10-17 (NIV84)

¹⁰ Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. ¹¹ When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. ¹² He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. ¹⁴ Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. ¹⁵ I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." ¹⁶ When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." ¹⁷ He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

Last Sunday, we saw God test Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his one and only son Isaac. Abraham and Isaac both passed as the LORD provided trust for them based on his past kept promises as well as the future promise that God would make Isaac's descendants greater in number than the stars in the sky and would bless all nations on earth through one of Isaac's offspring.

Since that day on Mount Moriah, Isaac has grown up and gotten a family of his own. The only children that we know of that God gave Isaac and Rebekah was a set of twin boys: Jacob and Esau. Being a set of twins was not the only thing that made them unique,. God revealed to Rebekah while the children were still in her womb that the older would serve the younger – very counter-cultural for that day and age. When the time came for the children to be born, Esau came out first with Jacob clutching his heel. In fact, Jacob's name means "heel-grabber," which is a not so flattering way to say, "Deceiver," someone who trips you up. Jacob owned that name.

After they had grown up, Esau came in from hunting one day completely famished. He demanded to have some of the stew that Jacob was cooking. Instead of just giving it to him, Jacob charged Esau. And he charged him a hefty price: his birthright. Esau's birthright as the firstborn was to receive a double portion of the inheritance, leadership over the family when father died, and, in the case of Abraham's descendants, the blessing to carry on the covenant promise that God would make their family into a great nation and that all nations on earth would be blessed through their offspring. Esau accepted the terms and sold his birthright for a bowl of stew.

Later on, Jacob, helped by his mother, would pull an elaborate ruse on his father. Isaac was ready to give the covenant blessing to Esau, even though God said it would go to the younger of the brothers, to Jacob. Wearing Esau's clothes, Jacob came to a now blind Isaac and deceived him into giving him the covenant blessing. Once Esau found out what Jacob had done, he held a severe grudge. He was biding his time until Isaac would die and then he would kill Jacob.

Mom, knowing what Esau was planning, stepped in. She demanded that Isaac send Jacob away to her old homeland so that he could get a godly wife. Isaac, probably also realizing Esau's grudge, agreed and sent Jacob on his way to Paddan Aram. The journey all together was 500 miles. It would take several weeks to make the journey on foot. To top it off, Jacob was taking this trip alone.

There Jacob was. He had traveled a couple of days from the only home he knew, from all of his family, with probably very few supplies. No caravan. No servants. No friends. He was alone with his thoughts, and it was sinking in. He had tripped up his father and brother. He used any means necessary to get what he wanted, and now he was basically an outcast from his family. He knew that there was no way that he could just "smooth things over" with his brother. If he were to turn around, Esau would probably kill him before he made it back. How could anyone love him now? How could God love him after what he had done?

Jacob's suffering was a result of his own actions. He deceived people. He tripped them up. It was his fault. Yet, isn't that the case for many of us? Yes, there are certainly times when outside forces make our lives miserable, but how many more times do we bring it upon ourselves?

When it's night, everyone is asleep, and you are left alone with your thoughts, the situation plays through your mind again and again. You know what you've done. You know that you have hurt this person and deceived that person. You don't even know where

to begin to start righting your wrongs. In fact, can your wrongs even be righted? Who can I talk to in order to figure out what's going on and how I can fix it? Who can tell me that everything is going to be all right? I ask. I look for that right person to talk to who will comfort me so that maybe my conscience will stop bugging me and I can actually get some sleep. I look for the consolation and the answer, but instead there is silence. I suffer all alone. There is no voice to soothe me. Can anyone love me after what I have done? Can God even love me?

That's how Jacob felt. Would God ever even look at him again? He had done all these things to get these blessings, but now would God even bless him? Would God forsake him, turn his face from him, and hide from him?

As he is at that certain place that night, stone as a pillow, all alone with his thoughts, Jacob begins to dream. There was a stairway reaching from earth, going up to heaven. The angels of God, his messengers, were going up and down on the stairway. God is communicating with Jacob. He has not turned his face from Jacob completely. Instead, the LORD stood at the top of the stairway showing that he was staying connected with Jacob. And this is what the LORD had to say to him: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring." (verses 13-14)

Sound familiar? That's because these are the same promises that God had given to Abraham and to Isaac. This covenant was not based on Jacob deceiving and tripping people up in order to get what he wanted. No, these words were in line with the promises that God gave of his own free will. Neither Jacob's father nor his grandfather had earned these blessings from God. They had not cheated them out of God. God gave them because it was his good and gracious will so to do.

What's more is not only is God going to give Jacob the blessing that he had deceived people in order to get, but the LORD also said, "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." (verse 15) Just to you, Jacob, as you are out here all by yourself in the desert wondering if you will ever have a family again, wondering if you can ever come back home, wondering if you will ever be loved again, I am telling you that you will never be alone. Even if your situation is all because of your doing, because of your deception, I am with you. I will be with you. I will watch over you wherever you go. I will bring you back. I will do everything that I have promised to do for you because that is the kind of God that I am. I will provide for you through your suffering with my presence and my protection.

All of the promises that the LORD gave Jacob on this night rested entirely on himself to fulfill, not on Jacob. He doesn't promise these things to us if we behave, if we make smart life choices, if we don't deceive people or hurt them. God promises to be with us through all our suffering simply because it's his choice. "God has said [even to us], 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" (Hebrews 13:5)

When you are suffering the consequences of your actions, feeling absolutely the loneliest ever because you have alienated yourself from your family with what you have said and done, when you are left with the thoughts that you have done something so awful that God himself wouldn't even bother to look at you anymore, the LORD provides for us with his continual presence. Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you.

God promises to be with us always because he has removed the very thing that separates us from him. Through Abraham, through Isaac, through Jacob, the offspring has come who is a blessing to all people on earth. That offspring, Jesus Christ, takes our sins away. He has paid for the deceiving words that we have spoken as well as the alienating deeds that destroy relationships. Through Christ, we have a restored relationship with God, that stairway connecting heaven and earth as Jacob saw in his dream. Because he has done this, God makes his choice to never leave us, but to provide for us through our suffering by being with us always.

"When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.'" (verse 16) We may not always be aware of it ourselves like Jacob, but God is always with us. Because the offspring of Jacob came and took the punishment that our deceiving and alienating words and deeds deserved, God will indeed never leave us. When you are in that lonely place, feeling as if no one can love you, remember that the Lord is with you. He provides his presence for us even through our self-made suffering. Amen.