

SERIES: Unwavering Faith (Genesis Vol. 3)

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Message Title: The Place of Salvation Pt. 1

Release Date: Tuesday 4/07/20

Every so often in life, we have what I call an “Aha!” moment. It is a moment where things that otherwise did not make sense, or we did not understand, become clear. There is this “Aha!” moment.

This past week I was talking to my daughter, Bobbi. She was struggling with some new concepts in her trigonometry class. I was not much help. She was frustrated, and a couple of days later I asked her how things were going. She said, “Well, the whole class was confused, so the teacher went back through the material again, and all of a sudden, I just got it. All of a sudden, it just made sense.” That is an “Aha!” moment.

We all have those moments in life. I will have to admit I didn’t have many in math class, [Laughter] but in general we have those moments. Certainly that is true in our spiritual walk. There are times when we hear stuff and we kind of understand it. We can probably repeat the verbiage, but we just really do not get it. All of a sudden there is this “Aha!” moment where it all comes together and it makes sense. It tends to be a life-changing experience.

In our story today, Jacob has an “Aha!” moment, where he understands something that he had heard before, but he did not really understand. When he finally gets it, when the light goes on, it is life changing. Perhaps in understanding what Jacob understood, it could be an “Aha!” moment for us and could be life changing.

Turn with me to Genesis 28, where we pick up the story in Verse 10:

Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. (*NASB)

Let’s back up a little bit and remind ourselves of what is going on. Jacob is leaving his home in Beersheba and he is headed back to the home of his mother in Haran. Haran would be the city. Paddan-aram would be the region that is talked about earlier in the chapter. From Beersheba to Haran is about 500 miles, so it is a lengthy journey. In those days, it was a very dangerous journey. The place where we find him when this particular story takes place is about 60 to 70 miles from Beersheba, so it was a 2-3 day journey.

He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set...

(v. 11a)

We need to understand what is being said here because it really sets up the whole story. Whenever you are studying a Hebrew narrative like the book of Genesis, one of the things you always want to look for is the repetition. If there are certain words or phrases that are repeated,

especially if they are repeated in an unnatural sense and it is overdone, there is usually a reason for that. The writer is trying to tell you something.

In this case, the word “*place*” is unnaturally repeated over and over and over again. It is not that there was something terribly significant about that piece of geography. As a matter of fact, the writer goes out of his way to say that is not the case, when he tells us that the only reason Jacob stopped there was because the sun had set. In other words, he wasn’t on his journey and he stopped and said, “I think God is in this place.” Or it wasn’t that he stopped and said, “This is a beautiful place. I think I will camp here for the night.” It was nothing more dramatic than, “This is as far as I can get. The sun is down.”

The idea of a certain place is not so much the geography, but maybe more of a metaphor for that place in Jacob’s life and where he was when he was ready to hear God speak. Let’s think about this. Jacob, by and large, was an upright man. He was a man who cared about his family and cared about God and the promises of God.

He also was a man who didn’t yet really get it. Because of that, he still was motivated by fear and that led him to deceive and manipulate his father to get the blessing. He created such a mess at home that his brother literally wanted to kill him. So Jacob is fleeing for his life. He does not know if his brother is chasing him or not. He does not know if he is about to be killed or not. As a matter of fact, the writer tells us that Jacob is concerned about this. He is fearful. We will look at that in just a minute.

But beyond that, Jacob had grown up in a home that was very wealthy. God had poured out his blessing on Isaac; we are told that. So Jacob would have had pretty much everything he ever wanted. He would have had servants and probably all the food that he could desire. He had it all. Now, all of a sudden, he is all alone. There are no servants. There is no food. There is no entourage. He is traveling alone, and to travel alone in the ancient areas was very dangerous. One could probably say this was the low point of Jacob’s life up to this point. That is *the place* where he is at that prepares him to hear what God has to say.

As we look back in our lives, and we think about those “Aha!” moments spiritually, most of those were probably times when we were struggling—when we were at a low point. It is typically in that place in life when we finally are willing to hear God speak. Oftentimes those “Aha!” moments are not something new. It was not something new for Jacob. It is probably something we have heard over and over again, but we get to that place in our lives where we are finally willing to hear it.

I often have people say to me that they heard a certain truth and it was life changing. They will say something like, “I just have never heard that before.” I am thinking, *Yes you have. I have seen you sitting there, and I have said it twenty times before.* But we just reach a place where we finally hear it, and there is that light that goes on.

That is what I think the writer means when he says that “*place*.”

He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place. (v. 11)

We are asking ourselves why we need to know that he used a stone for a pillow. That is going to come up later in the story. I think the translation is a little bit misleading. It is not saying that he used the stone for a pillow. As a matter of fact, the Hebrew could be translated instead of under his head, it was “at his head.” In the ancient Near East if you slept in the wilderness, you would find a large stone and put that right next to your head, so if a wild animal came through in the night, it at least protected your head. Even more than that, if you feared someone was trying to kill you, it protected your head, which increased your chance for survival. Really, what the writer is telling us, is that Jacob was filled with fear, and he thought someone was trying to kill him. So he got this stone, and he put his head by it to provide some level of protection.

Verse 12:

He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” (v. 12-14)

Jacob has a dream. In the ancient world, before God’s Revelation was given, God sometimes spoke to people in a dream. We do need to understand that this was still extremely rare. But God speaks to Jacob in a dream, and it is a dream about a ladder that reaches from Heaven all the way down to his feet on Earth. There are angels ascending and descending on this ladder. There at the top of the ladder is God Himself and He speaks. He says, “I am the LORD”... capital L-O-R-D. That is always important to notice that name, which is the Hebrew *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*. It is the God who is intimate. It is the God who is personal. It is the God who makes covenants with His people.

In Genesis 1, we are introduced to *Elohim*, the Creator God, who is so big. You come out of Chapter 1 thinking that He is so big no one could ever know Him. But in Genesis 2, we are introduced to *Yahweh*, the God who is so intimate that He breathes the breath of life into the very nostrils of Adam. It is a very intimate, personal picture that tells us this God who is so big is also so personal and intimate.

God introduces Himself then to Jacob as the God of your grandfather Abraham and the God of your father Isaac. That is very personal. As a matter of fact, that is the first time that God ever introduces Himself as the God of Isaac. The God of Abraham...the God of Isaac—what is implied in this is that God will be the God of Jacob. It is personal; it is intimate. There is a connection between God and Abraham, God and Isaac and now God and Jacob. That is very unique. In the ancient Near East, the pagans believed in multiple gods and they had absolutely no concept of an intimate, personal God. That is what made the Hebrew people unique. There was one God and they could be intimate with that God. That is what God is saying here.

Then He restates the promise, saying to Jacob that He is going to give him land; He is going to give him prosperity. He is going to give him the Promised Seed. This was not new information. At the very beginning of Chapter 28, Isaac already went through all of this with the blessing, and

promised that Jacob would have all of this. But Jacob did not get it. He didn't understand it until he had this moment where God spoke to him. But God says more than that.

“Behold, I am with you [that is a promise of His presence] and will keep you wherever you go [that is a promise of guidance and protection], and will bring you back to this land [that is a promise of preservation. God is saying, ‘I will get you to the finish line. I will complete this thing.’]; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” (v. 15)

God comes to Jacob in a very personal, intimate way and He says, “I will be with you. You will have My presence. I will guide and protect you. I will complete this thing. I will fulfill My promise to you. I promise I will do that.” And Jacob believes.

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.” 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.” (v. 16-17)

Jacob realizes he is in the very presence of God. This is God's house. This is God's presence. This is the very gateway into Heaven itself. Jacob is learning what it took Isaac so long to learn—that as a Son of the Promise, God is concerned about him personally. God has made a promise to him that should radically, dramatically change his life.

One of the problems with Isaac, Jacob's father, is that it seemed like no matter how many times God told him, Isaac just didn't get it. He would hear the promise and it was just like, *Okay*. He would hear the promise, but then he would go on and live his life as if he was no different from anyone else, just scratching it out in the trenches and trying to do his best. He just did not understand that God had promised His very presence. The very resources of Heaven were poured out upon Isaac because he was a Son of the Promise. It wasn't until Isaac was wanting to bless Esau, and ended up blessing Jacob, that the light bulb finally went on, and he had an “Aha!” moment. He finally realized, *Wow, this is what this means!* He turned right around and he restates it to Jacob at the beginning of Chapter 28. But Jacob did not get it until this moment.

The question is still: So what? What difference does this make? It has to do with this ladder. The point is that the very power and the very presence of God are coming down this ladder to Jacob personally. What does that ladder mean? What is the point?

Let's go back and review a little bit. In Genesis 15, God made the initial promise to Abraham. In that promise, God said, “Abraham, we are entering into a covenant. If either you or I fail to keep the covenant, I will shed My blood in order to make it right.” This is a unilateral covenant, where God was making the promise, and Abraham was merely the recipient. Abraham believed that, and it was credited to his account as righteousness.

The sign of the covenant was circumcision, which was the removal of the flesh. This was a way of saying there is nothing we can do in our own power, in our own flesh, to fulfill this covenant. Therefore, the flesh is thrown away, and that is our way of saying it has to be totally God. God has to do it all. We can't do it.

Then it moves to this ladder, this connecting point between Heaven and Earth that Jacob dreams about. What is the ladder? Thankfully, Jesus describes it in John 1:51. Jesus is engaged in a

discussion with Nathanael, who would become one of his twelve apostles. It is believed that Nathanael was reading this story right before he met Jesus. Jesus said to him, “Nathanael, I am that ladder. I am the ladder upon which the angels of Heaven will ascend and descend. In other words, I will be that connection between a holy God and sinful man. I am the ladder.”

Paul said the same thing to Timothy. Paul told Timothy, “Remember that God desired for all people to be saved, but there is only one God. There is only one mediator, one ladder, between God and man and that is Christ Jesus; Christ the Messiah, Jesus.” (1 Timothy 2:4-5)

Jesus Himself said it when He said, “**I am the way** [*I am the ladder*], **the truth and the life. Nobody comes to the Father except through me.**” (John 14:6)

Let’s put it all together. God promised that because we cannot keep the covenant, He would shed His blood to atone for that. God had become flesh and was ultimately nailed upon that cross. He did what He promised. He shed His blood because *we* could not keep the covenant. Those who believe that, those who embrace that and say, “Yes, I believe You did that for me, because I could not keep the covenant”—for them He becomes their Savior. He forgives our sin; but more than that, He is what links us to a holy God. He is the ladder from sinful man to a holy God.

Because of that, the very presence and power of God comes from the Heavens and fills my life, where I become now a radically new person.

Nat: Bryan, in your message, you talk about those “Aha!” moments in life like Jacob had in today's story. What would one of those “Aha!” moments be for you?

Bryan: Yeah, I can think of several bigger ones. A big one for me, would be in my late twenties, I was really struggling with all the pain and suffering I had seen in our family growing up. My dad's pain and suffering, and trying to reconcile that with the idea that God is good, and He's kind, and He's loving, and the “Aha!” moment was realizing, I'm not going to get answers to my questions, but I just have to believe God tells the truth. And that's something that has served me well through life, but it was kind of an “Aha!” moment that I need to let it go. Surrender meant letting go the need for answers; just choosing to believe God tells the truth.

Nat: It seems like we can experience the same message, the same lesson over and over and over again. But so often we miss the real point, until we have that “Aha” moment, right?

Bryan: Yeah. Sometimes God just has to get us to a place where we hear it. So you think about Jesus talked about having ears to hear, which is what He's saying, if you think about being ready to listen. So even with your kids, sometimes it takes a while before they're willing to listen. I think sometimes to be stripped of my own self sufficiency creates a level of desperation, where I'm willing to hear it. There's kind of an “Aha!” moment because I'm now listening. And I think sometimes God just supernaturally opens our ears to hear it and it creates these “Aha!” moments.

Nat: In your sermon, you mentioned that Jesus actually identifies himself as the ladder of Jacob's dream. And what I've come to find quite amazing and quite inspiring and helpful, and when I read the Old Testament, is that Jesus is all over the Old Testament, isn't He?

Bryan: He is all over the Old Testament! As a matter of fact, in John Chapter Five, Jesus is talking to the Pharisees, and they revere Moses. Jesus actually says, you do understand they were writing about Me? So Jesus Himself says, that when Moses was writing, he was writing about Jesus, which is interesting. There's kind of a movement right now that the Old Testament doesn't matter and it should be diminished. And yet the whole of Scripture is about Jesus. It's a significant part of the story.

Nat: That's really helpful for our listeners. Thanks Bryan.