

SERIES: Unwavering Faith (Genesis Vol. 3)

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Message Title: The Place of Salvation Pt. 2

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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.” (NASB, Gen. 28:12-14)

Verse 15:

“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.”

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. 15-17)

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. 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? Well, 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)

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.

So often we are like Isaac; we are like Jacob. We say we believe that, but then we just keep cranking it out in life, as if we are just like everybody else. Sometimes we fail to realize that because of Jesus Christ, we have God’s presence, God’s power, and God’s blessings channeled from the Heavens into our lives personally. I am now a Son of the Promise, which gives me what I need to live radically different than those around me who don’t know Christ.

Oftentimes I hear people, especially when they are in difficult times, talk about how they just know they need religion—how they need God in their life and how they need to do better. But we need to understand, what we are really talking about here is not religion. It is not doing better. What we are talking about is the one and only way that we can have a relationship with God. It does not matter if you are Berean, Lutheran, Roman Catholic or Seventh-day Adventist. What matters is what you do with Jesus, and to believe that Jesus is the only means by which sinful man is connected with a holy God.

That is what Jacob finally understands. That is the ladder, and he understands that it is God’s power and God’s presence that now are going to be poured into his life personally, because he is a Son of the Promise. How does he respond?

So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. (v. 18)

Again, we are not talking about his pillow here. We are talking about his protection—what he had believed would be his protection. He is now saying, “I get it. God will be my protection. God will take care of me.” Therefore, he is taking what he was trusting in and, in a sense, he is dedicating it to God as a testimony. He believes.

He called the name of that place Bethel [which means house of God]; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me...” (v. 19-20a)

The word “*if*” is a little bit misleading. Really, in the Hebrew it says, “If God said, and He did.” We would use the word “*since*.” He is not questioning it. The end of the story makes it quite clear that he believes.

“If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father’s house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. This stone, which I have set up as a

pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.” (v. 20b-22)

Jacob responds by saying, “I believe.” He gets it. “God has promised He will be with me and He is going to protect me. He is going to take care of me and get me back into the land. He is going to see this promise completed.” And he said, “I believe.”

Think how that corresponds to what we have in Christ. God has promised through Christ that He will dwell within us. He has said that His very presence will never leave us or forsake us. God has promised His guidance and His protection. God has promised to finish what He has started: “He who has begun a good work will be faithful to complete it.” (Philippians 1:6) “I will not leave you until this whole thing is done. Mission accomplished.”

Jacob hears that; he understands it; and he believes it. So he responds. He responds by saying, “God, I will give you back a tithe, ten percent of everything that I have.” It would be several hundred years before the Law would be established with the concept of a tithe. This is not a legalistic thing for Jacob. It is just a reasonable expression of worship. Jacob is saying, “God, because I understand what You sacrificed for me and what You have done for me, then I want to sacrifice for You. I want to give back to You a portion of what You have given to me.”

Now at this time, Jacob had nothing. It was easy to promise ten percent of nothing. But he also believed that it was not going to be long until he was going to be the recipient of God's blessing and he would be wealthy. He would just keep giving it back to God. It is really an indication that he got it; he understood. It was an “Aha!” moment and because of that, he said, “God, I want to sacrifice for You. This is my worship. This is my sacrifice of worship.”

For some of you, that “Aha!” moment may be the moment where you finally understand, *This is what Jesus did for me and this is why He did it.* You understand and you get it. For you, this is that moment of salvation where, in the quietness of your heart, you just tell God, “I believe. I get it. I believe.”

But for many of us, we have already made that decision. We would say, “I understand that. I understand it; I have embraced it. I have asked Jesus to be my Savior.” So in light of that, we really need to ask the question: What has been the outflow of sacrifice as a response to what we say we understand, and what we say we believe?

When Jacob understood, the natural response—the reasonable response—was a sacrifice of worship. What have we sacrificed as a response to understanding the truth of our Salvation? In what ways have we sacrificially given of our time to build the kingdom? So often, we are trying to just make it convenient. We are trying to fit it into our schedule. We don't want it to interrupt our lives too much. It's supposed to be a sacrifice! It's supposed to cost us! It is supposed to be a sacrifice that says, “God, I understand. I understand what You did for me and I, in turn, want to sacrifice for You, because I love You. This is my statement of worship.” It should cost us something.

But, part of what we are saying is that when we get it, it changes our value system. It changes what we live for. It changes what matters to us. Therefore, we are going to sacrifice for that which we now value. In what ways are you sacrificing of your money as an expression of

worship to God? It is easy to say, “I understand and I have had that ‘Aha!’ moment.” Okay, then what is our response?

It is interesting how Paul says the same thing in Romans 12. He takes eleven chapters to talk about Salvation by grace through faith, this magnificent doctrine of God’s grace and His sacrifice for our salvation. Then in Chapter 12 he finally says, “Therefore, because you get it, because you understand it, then you are to present yourself as a living sacrifice—which is, according to the King James, “a reasonable service of worship.” That is a very good translation. That is exactly what it says. Paul says, “If you really get it, then to sacrifice is a reasonable response.” In other words, if you want to turn that upside down, anything less is unreasonable, given what you say you understand He did for you.

According to the latest statistics, the average born-again Christian gives less than 3% of their income to God. It seems to me there is a problem there. Somewhere there is a disconnect. We say we understand, we receive it and we embrace it, but when it comes to our sacrifice of worship, of giving back, there is a disconnect. We are still doing our own thing and living out our own value systems. Something is not connected there.

The same statistics would show that three out of every 100 Christians tithe. Only three out of every 100. Folks, something is wrong there. Somewhere we have made a disconnect between that “Aha!” moment of knowing this is what Christ sacrificed for us and what we are willing to sacrifice for Him. It flows out of a statement in our hearts that says, “I believe Him. He will protect me. He will provide for me. He will take care of me. He will complete this race in me. I believe that. I believe it, and so I sacrifice as an expression of my worship to say I believe.”

Some of you are thinking, *I don’t think I could. That would cost me.* Yes, it will. It is supposed to. That is the whole point of worship. It costs us something. You might have to drive a ten-year-old car instead of a new car. You might have to live in a smaller house instead of a big house. You might have to invest in the kingdom of God instead of the stock market. I understand that. But I also understand that is a reasonable response, if you really have understood what God has done for you.

For most of you, this is not new. You have probably heard it lots of times before. But at some point, there has to come an “Aha!” moment, where the light comes on and we say, “Wow! I really understand what God has done for me and what He has promised me. I believe that; and because I believe it, here is my sacrifice of worship in return. Here is my reasonable sacrifice of worship.” Maybe you find yourself in that place where God can speak and you will listen and respond accordingly.

Father, we are thankful that when we were destined for eternal judgment because we broke the Covenant, that you shed your own blood to atone for our inability to keep the Covenant and Lord, through faith we become children of the Promise. Lord, that that ladder from Heaven comes right to our feet and the power and the presence of the God of the Heavens is poured into our lives, that we might be radically changed. Lord, if we really understand what you sacrificed for us, may we be in that place where we're willing to sacrifice for you. Lord, it will cost us something and it is supposed to. But Lord, you've told us that is a reasonable service of worship. Lord, may it be so in Jesus' name.

Nat: That is a great challenge, Bryan. It is so easy to say we believe, isn't it? But what I've come to find out is living like we really believe is so much harder.

Bryan: It is a lot harder. As a matter of fact, I find it common in our church that people convince themselves, they're sold out for Jesus, and they're really living for the things that matter. And it's easy to say that, but what is the evidence of that? Does Jesus really have our money? Does he have our time; does he have our talents? You know, what is it costing me? I found that to be a really helpful question to wrestle with is, what does it cost me to follow Jesus?

Nat: Yeah. It seems like today a good many people, they haven't thought about sacrifice, and what is the cost and the true sacrifice for Christ? We don't really understand what Christ has done for us, do we?

Bryan: I think that is a problem. You know, Paul says in Romans that sacrificing is a reasonable response to the Gospel, as it's been presented in Romans. So to not sacrifice then would be unreasonable. So it's like there's a disconnect somewhere in what I'm understanding Jesus did for me, and what I'm willing to give in return. And you know Nat, now one of the things I find compelling is many Christians in other places in the world will give their lives. They're being systematically imprisoned, tortured, and put to death for the cause of Christ. And if they look me in the eye in Heaven and say, what did it cost you? - that's a really good question to wrestle with, because we have it pretty easy here in the West.

Nat: Right. But I also think that people, even people here in the West, people you and I know, they'd be willing to die for Christ, but I think the question really is, are they? Or maybe am I willing to live for Christ, no matter the cost?

Bryan: Yeah, I think that's a good question to wrestle with too; maybe dying is easier.

Nat: It could be. I don't know. Let's hope it doesn't come to that, right? So back to the message. How is God moving Jacob from fear to faith?

Bryan: Yeah, I think that's a really interesting study. I would answer it by saying, one step at a time. There's been many steps already and there's going to be many more. So, nobody becomes a great person of faith overnight. So it's one step at a time. So right now in this story, he's pretty vulnerable. He's out there by himself. He grew up in the midst of quite a bit of wealth and now he's out on his own. I think he's probably feeling that and God has his attention, and it's going to be one step at a time. He's going to grow his faith.

Nat: I would say every listener out there knows about faith, but I think it becomes such an ambiguous term. So what is faith in the most practical terms?

Bryan: Yeah. So one of the definitions I like, it's simply believing God tells the truth. That's not vague and it's not unclear. It's like you have to understand, what has God said and do I believe that? And so do I believe God tells the truth? Faith means, yes, I do.

Nat: Wow. That is very clear and also can be a great challenge. Wow, thanks Bryan.