

“A New Lease on Life”
Genesis 28:10-22
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Jacob was about 50 years old and living a dead-end life.

His twin brother had married when they were 40.

His brother had married a couple of local women – yes that’s right, he married two women – and they caused no end of grief to the in-laws.

But for all the difficulty his brother’s wives caused, at least his brother had taken some action – he had moved on in his life.

Jacob seemed to be in a rut - nothing ever changed.

All his life he had been the compliant child, basically doing what his mother told him to do.

That was fine for the first 20 years of his life, but he had been past 20 for over 30 years.

He was surely an adult now – it was time to make his own decisions and to make those decisions based on his own values and beliefs – if he only had any of his own.

But just going through the motions of life without any control or direction of his own had become such a habit that it was hard to break out of it.

Comfortable is what life was - so comfortable he was in a rut.

Someone said a rut is a grave with the ends knocked out – that’s what life increasing felt like – a grave, a dead end.

He lived on his father’s income.

Oh, he worked but his security was in his father's wealth.

He unthinkingly accepted his father’s religion.

Oh, he went through the motions of worship but while it was comfortable, it was largely pointless.

He lived in a narrow little comfortable world.

But that comfortable rut changed in **one** day.

Jacob's father was about to sign the inheritance over to Jacob's brother when his mother heard about it.

She **ordered** Jacob to join her in tricking his father into signing it over to him instead.

The plan, the trick, worked – Jacob got the inheritance.
But he got a lot more than he bargained for.

His brother was now out to kill him and Jacob was running for his life.

It was probably the second day after he so quickly left home that he approached a town by the name of Luz.

He didn't go into the town but he camped outside of it in a field.

As he sat by his little cook fire that night, staring into the flames, it all hit him like a ton of bricks.

He was the most miserable man in the world.

He was alone, he had nothing, and he had no future.

This was the first time in his life he had come face to face with how truly alone he was.

He had always been around people.

But the worst part about what he felt wasn't that he was lonely but that he was truly alone.

He couldn't go home – his brother was seeking to kill him, his parents were aging and near death – and anyway his mother dominated him and his father was more interested in his brother.

He couldn't go back – there was nobody there.

And he didn't know what was ahead of him.

He was going in the direction of his mother's family – but they lived in a very foreign country and anyway he'd never met them.

He didn't know if there was anybody there.

For the first time in his life he woke up to the fact that in spite of people all around him, there was a huge sense in which he was alone.

Not only was he alone, but he had nothing.

He thought he was securing his future by getting the inheritance but in the process, he had to run with little more than the clothes on his back.

He couldn't go back and he had no idea what the future held.

For the first time in his life he woke up to the fact that financial security was a fleeting mirage.

Not only was he alone, and penniless but he could see no future.

He didn't have any reason for living – he just lived.

He didn't have any purpose for working – he just worked.

He didn't have values he'd die for – he just hadn't died.

And he also realized he didn't even particularly like himself: he held no values and goals of his own.

In fact, he had been a scheming, deceitful, self-serving scoundrel.

He had lived his life in a moral vacuum.

If ever a man wondered what life was about, if ever a man saw life at that moment as a cul-de-sac, it must have been Jacob that night as he sat staring into the fire.

His narrow, little, now not-so-comfortable world looked very bleak.

As in the lives of people in the Bible, so in our day, it seems that we must come to the end of ourselves before we are ready to see life differently.

Something has to shake us out of our complacency, our rut, before we can see a future.

Something has to wake us to our true condition before we can see another possibility.

I know it's trite, but it's also true, that sometimes a person has to be flat on their back before they can look up?

Jacob was both literally on his back and I think figuratively as well, as he lay down to sleep that night.

I want you to read his story with me from Genesis 28.

In Nehemiah's day when the word of God was read, the people stood to honor God.

We are not required to do that as some new law – but it still today can express the same respect.

Stand with me please. READ 28:10-22

When Jacob lay down that night he was a pathetic man – alone, penniless, and without a future BUT **God met him!**

What did God do for Jacob that night?

God opened his eyes and his heart to two realities that, for all Jacob's earlier religious training, he had missed:

God showed him the intimacy and security of an unending relationship.

God showed him the promise and purpose of an unending future.

When Jacob finally fell asleep, he had a dream.

And in that dream, God showed Jacob a reality that before now Jacob had totally missed.

Jacob had lived life, up until now, as if God was someone you go to on occasion when you need him.

God, to the extent that he was real at all, was one he worshipped in special places and paid homage to on special occasions.

Maybe Jacob said a prayer as he lay down to sleep that night but he certainly didn't think of God as being there – not in this lonely place and time of life.

But what did God demonstrate to him?

In his dream he saw a stairway that went from where he was on earth right into heaven and God was standing at the top of that stairway.

Angels were on the stairway – some were going up and some were going down.

Instead of there being two separated places – one called "heaven", out there somewhere beyond reach where God lives, and one called "earth", right here where we live – those two places were actively linked.

There was a veritable highway of activity linking the two.

God was intimately involved in what was happening right then and there in Jacob's life.

He was not a remote being who might deign to stoop down and influence a significant event from time to time in the affairs of nations.

He was a God who was right there in the desert, that night, not only aware but very actively involved in the life of this desperate man.

And more impressive than what he saw in his dream were the words Jacob heard:

"I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham, and the God of Isaac. I will give YOU...!"

Jacob, I am not only your fathers' God – I am your God.
You are not one or two generations removed from me – I am with YOU.

God went on to say, "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and... I will not leave you..."

That was a turning point in Jacob's life.

Later in his life, God said to him to go back to this place because there is where God met him.(Genesis 35:1).

It is called the place where "God revealed himself to (Jacob)" (Genesis 35:7)

Jacob himself later refers to this time when "God answered me in my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." (Genesis 35:3)

Is God's promise to Jacob for Jacob alone?

Or is this God's promise to you as well?

Jesus said, (Matthew 28:20 "...I am with you always, to the very end of the age.")

Hebrews 13:5 "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." It took a God-inspired dream for Jacob to see reality – to see God as present and actively involved in Jacob's life.

And his dream was given for us to know the same truth.

When Jacob went to sleep he believed in a God out there somewhere, but when he woke up, when the dream was done, what did he believe then?

Would he revert back to his belief only in a God who is out there somewhere?

No. Jacob accepted the truth. Genesis 28:16 "Surely the Lord is in this place..."

"Jacob had thought himself alone but the vision (populated) the wilderness. He had felt himself defenseless but the vision musters armies of angels for his safety. He had been groveling on earth, with no thoughts beyond its fleeting goods but the vision lifts his eyes from the low level on which they had been gazing. He had been conscious of but little connection with heaven but the vision shows him a path from his very side right into its depths. He had probably thought that he was leaving the presence of his father's God when he left his father's tent but the vision burns into his astonished heart the consciousness of God as there, in the solitude and the night." (From Maclaren 208)

When you are in a car moving about the city doing your tasks, when you are in your kitchen or office doing your work, when you are walking along a city street, when you lie down at night to sleep, where is God?

That open stairway between you and heaven is as actively populated as it was for Jacob.

And God stands (notice, not sitting) as actively involved in your life as in Jacob's.

There are times I wish that everyone of us could have a dream or a vision as vivid as Jacob's -

something that would attach itself to our memories with such power that we would never doubt the presence of God.

But few people, even in the Bible, have such visions or dreams.

Jesus said to his disciples in John 20:29 "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

God has called on all of us to believe his word – He has said he is with us.

A person whose heart is opened to that reality is a changed person. You can't view individual circumstances or life as a whole the way you did before.

You now know the intimacy and security of the presence of God. "I will never leave you or forsake you."

II. But God not only showed him the intimacy and security of an unfailing relationship, he **also showed him the promise and purpose of an unfailing future.**

Before Jacob went to sleep that night, what was the future he saw for himself? Was it worth waking for?

Even if Jacob had stayed at home and his brother had gotten over his anger, what would Jacob have had?

Yes, he would have inherited the family wealth and business, he would have given his life to managing all of that – but to what end?

He would finish life, having worked hard, but for what?

Solomon said it well, you work hard and gain a lot and then you die leaving it to someone else.

He asks, "What's the value in that?"

Yes, even after sleeping on his rocky bed, Jacob might have gotten himself together and in the energy of youth set out to make his fortune – but for what purpose?

Advertising executive Jerry Mander captured that question when he said, "I don't want to wake up one day, when I'm old, realizing I have given my life to convincing people to eat Quaker Oats instead of Malt-O-Meal."

God showed Jacob the promise and purpose of an unfailing future. And that purpose was the kingdom of God.

God had determined to use the descendants of Jacob to settle in the promised land, to build the family from which the Messiah would come, to be the means through which all the peoples of the earth would be blessed.

Jacob would not be just a businessman, he would not be just a father, and he would not be just a good spiritual man – he would be a man with a significant unending future.

God was going to do a work through him that would have a worldwide and eternal impact.

God said, “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.” And “I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

Can you identify with that? Do you realize God has made the same promise to you?

Do you realize God’s plan is to use you as he did Jacob to bring about God’s future reign on this earth?

You say, “I’m no Jacob.” Good thing!

Jacob was a man with a questionable past and an uncertain future.

If his future father-in-law had really known him, he would never let him into his house and certainly wouldn’t have let him marry his daughter.

Jacob was no candidate for greatness.

He was not most likely to succeed.

It would certainly not have been guessed that he would be used by God for God’s eternal purposes.

Even after his selection, he was no Abraham, no David, no Spurgeon or Billy Graham.

But in spite of Jacob’s failures, in spite of his sin, and in spite of his limitations God invaded his life and used him.

The Apostle Paul said we are all unworthy of the significant work God has given us.

2 Corinthians 4:7 “But we have this treasure in jars of clay.”

But like Jacob **we** are chosen by God to be used for eternal purposes.

Many of us don't believe that.

We live day by day as if only a few are chosen by God to make a difference in the world.

Ah, we say, I'm not Jacob or David or Paul or Calvin or Luther or Graham.

I'm just an average person – doing the best I can.

Do you recognize these names - Hezron, Nahshon, Salmon, Jotham, Abiud, Zadok, Akim or Matthan?

Ordinary men? Yes. AND ancestors of the Messiah.

When we stand before God in the New Kingdom, how many other names will we hear for the first time?

Names of people who faithfully obeyed, in seemingly out of the way places and in insignificant ways, but they were used by Almighty God to bring about his kingdom.

There are no unimportant cogs in the machinery of God's purposes. There are no unimportant people in the army of God's will.

The NT promises and commands to **every** Christian are as specific and grand as was God's promise to Jacob.

Jesus said, "**you** shall be **my** witnesses".

Jesus said, by your love for one another and your relationship to Him, the world would believe who Jesus is.

God said **we** are his means of bringing to reality that day when people from every tongue and tribe and nation will stand before his throne worshipping him.

And that happens not just through the great and grand incidents we all know about like the dramatic crossing of the Red Sea, or the raising of Lazarus, or a million-people crusade by some famous evangelist.

It happens through the billions of small but obedient responses of God's people, all over the world, day in and day out.

So how did Jacob respond?

Early the next morning Jacob memorialized the place.
He wanted to mark the night down as a turning point in his life.

He believed.

His faith was weak, as evidenced later, his understanding of all this was undoubtedly limited but he believed.

It was only a beginning but it was a beginning.

That's all God asks – just start believing Him.

Jacob made a vow that morning, a commitment.

It is flawed.

It sounds almost like he made a deal with God.

But it is real.

To the extent he understood he believed.

With the limitations of his immaturity, he responded.

He responded with his words and his worth – his mouth and his money – he would worship and he would give.

I think the whole paragraph is best understood as Jacob's new expectation that God would indeed do what God had promised and Jacob would live in that expectation and when it occurred, Jacob would respond.

It is his commitment to God.

I identify with Jacob.

I was 18 years of age.

I had left home after graduating from High School – left home to earn a living, to put myself through college and get on with life.

I put everything I owned in half of the back seat of an old car with no reverse and headed off for the big city.

Within a month I was not only alone but also with no job, out of money, and wondering what the future held.

I knew there was no going back but I didn't know if I had any future.

Those were dark days.

With little gas left in my car, no money to purchase more, and no idea where else to go to look for work, I walked to the Como Park in St. Paul, Minnesota (much like City Park here in Denver) and I literally sat in the park wondering what would become of me.

In my near despair, God met me.

No dream, but just as clearly he communicated his presence and his purpose for me.

I will never forget those days.

His Words from the Scriptures came alive to me – He was no longer just my father’s God – He was my God.

His promises were not just for Abraham or Jacob or Peter or Paul, they were to me.

My purposes to earn some money, to get an education, to succeed in a career became secondary to his purposes for my life.

As we will see with Jacob, it took several years for that to become even clearer to me, several years for God to continue working on me (which he is still doing), but what began in that park changed by life.

It doesn’t matter if you were 18, as I was, or over 50, as Jacob was, God still comes to us to **show us the intimacy and security of an unending relationship.**

And to show us the promise and purpose of an unending future.

How have you responded?

How do you respond?