

Genesis 28:10-17

March 8, 2009 – 2nd SUNDAY IN LENT

“How Awesome Is This Place!”

✦ **Reaching to heaven (vv.10-12)**

✦ **Blessing all people (vv.13-17)**

In the name of Jesus, God’s Stairway to heaven, dear fellow travelers:

He was running for his life from his twin brother, Esau, “the Red.” Why? Because of his parents and his own sorry character. In utero the two boys kept bouncing around so hard inside their mother that Rebekah went to inquire of the LORD. *“Why is this happening to me?” The LORD said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”* Birthday came, and out first was the hairy red one. That was “Esau.” But then *his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.* (Genesis 25:22-26 NIV) From then on it seems everything went downhill for their family. Running from “Red,” lonely Jacob is about as pathetic as any individual in the Bible. Sleeping on a rock for his pillow, how did he wake up so excited? **“How Awesome Is This Place!”** It’s a miracle of God *“who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.”* (Romans 4:17) For us too, **“How Awesome Is This Place!”**...

✦ **Reaching to heaven (vv.10-12)**

Maybe it was only natural that Rebekah favored the younger Jacob since he liked to stay home. And Esau certainly grew into a “man’s man” who impressed their father Isaac hunting wild game and cooking it just right. Isaac’s aging blindness made him all the more appreciative of his older son’s exploits. Before his life slipped away, Isaac wanted to pass on something we rarely hear about these days.

But for this family it was much more than a birthright. You see, Isaac’s father, the grandfather of the twins, was Abraham, whom God had chosen to pass on the promise of the Savior. The sadness in Isaac’s family was really a microcosm of what happened to the family of God. Everyone wanted to play favorites. No one wanted to respect the heavenly Father. So when Rebekah heard that Esau was out hunting in order for Isaac to give him the blessing, she put her favorite son in his place. Esau’s clothes that smelled like the field along with sheepskin gloves were enough to mask Jacob’s voice and fool Isaac. By the time Esau returned, the blessing was given like a will executed by a judge with the major party missing. Now Jacob was on the run because Esau wanted to kill him.

If it has not happened to you yet, brace yourself. Maybe you’re too young, or you’re so set in your ways you don’t remember the souls you’ve hurt. Maybe the memories are so painful that you buried them long ago and have no desire to dig them up again. No doubt, Jacob wanted to forget his life as a “heel-grabber,” a “deceiver” of his brother, stealing something that God had promised to him anyway. Esau kept despising his birthright, but Rebekah and Jacob took matters into their own hands. She is never mentioned in Scripture again even though her servant *Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse* is commemorated. (Genesis 35:8) As in so many arguing families, Rebekah and Jacob won the battle but lost the war.

Have you been busy singing with the old crooner, “I Did It My Way”? Have you been trying to do it God’s way, but on your own timetable? How hard it is to wait for God’s good time. How impossible for us sinners to do the right thing the right way. In deep disappointment, remember Jacob, undeserving, conniving Jacob. And look at what an **Awesome** thing God did for him. Jacob *reached a certain place [and] 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. 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.*

You see? *“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.”* (Hebrews 1:1f NIV) God’s Son appeared to that lonely sinner in a most remarkable dream. *“The one Mediator between God and men”* (1 Timothy 2:5) says, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* (John 14:6) In John’s Gospel a disciple named Nathanael confessed, *“Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”* Jesus said, *“You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that....I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”* (John 1:49-51 NIV)

Do you see what God did for Jacob? Do you realize God has done the same for you and me? Like Jacob, we deserve to lose all God’s blessings, even life itself. *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5:8 NIV) That’s why we say with Jacob, **“How Awesome Is This Place!” – Reaching to heaven.** Here God keeps...

✠ Blessing all people (vv.13-17)

How can God be so merciful and kind to the “black sheep” of the family? Could this be the same God another Rabbi named Paul spoke about by inspiration of the Holy Spirit? Yes, we worship the same one true God who *“justifies the wicked”* and *“credits faith as righteousness.”* (Romans 4:5)

Listen, Jacob, in your drowsy slumbers. In your lousy life God is about to tell you something so **Awesome** you won’t want to sleep another minute. Behind your eyelids REM sleep keeps darting across your retina. Look up, Jacob! High atop that stairway to heaven speaks the Almighty: *“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. 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.”*

Everything he thought he had to grab like the heel of his brother, the God of his family was just giving Jacob as an inheritance. All his sorry efforts to deceive his blind old father, none of it was necessary and all of it was wrong. Human works fail even if we’re trying for the right results the wrong way. “Pastor, what shall I do?...” And then comes another sad challenge of life over which we really have no control. Isn’t it time to read our Bibles, say our prayers and trust our God? Do you think He is so far removed from real life? He came down here to be one of us and built Himself as the Stairway to connect undeserving sinners like us to His gracious promises of eternal real estate in heaven. **Awesome!**

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob *“were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance....They were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”* (Hebrews 11:13-16 NIV) *“We walk by faith, not by sight.”* (2 Corinthians 5:7 KJV)

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” 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.” As the hymn writer put it: *“Where we find thee and adore thee, There a heav’n on earth must be. To my heart, oh, enter thou; Let it be thy temple now!”* (CW 255:2) Come as God’s temple with your griefs and cares, your sins and failures. Lay them all on Jesus, *“the spotless Lamb of God. He bears them all and frees us from the accursed load.”* (CW 372:1) The LORD’s Christ did it for me, and not only for me, but for you. And not only for you and me, but for all the people out there so lost and alone, so very much in need of this **Awesome Place – Reaching to heaven and Blessing all people.** Let no trouble in our hearts or our homes ever keep us away. And may God’s love for Jacob always impress us with the **Awesome** wonder of God’s grace for us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.