

The Promise Prevails - Genesis 28:10-22

Introduction

Here we are in January, after a rather different Christmas than we had hoped for. Children would have been dreaming of the ideal present – perhaps you did too. Then again, we might have been dreaming for a white Christmas – some got one a day or two later.

What dreams do you have for 2021?

Jacob

There a number of dreams in the bible – some good, some bad. I've been thinking about Jacob and the dream he had when he saw the ladder to heaven recorded in Genesis 28:¹⁰⁻²².

His life had been far from perfect, having cheated on two occasions we know about.

The birthright was almost within his grasp and it was obviously God's will for him to grab it. Hadn't God promised his mother before his birth that he would rule over his elder twin brother? Indeed, hadn't his own mother encouraged him to snatch the birthright while he had the chance^a? She would help him and surely, she knew what was best.

Years later, he had another opportunity and deceived his ageing father who perhaps wouldn't even have known that he had deceived him^b. To Jacob this was clearly the moment God had given him, it was a gift; it was the crime God wanted him to commit!

Twice he has deceived his family and in Genesis 28:10-22 he is on the run, away from the land in which God has promised to bestow his blessing on his people ^c. You might like to read the passage. He really is not a strong candidate for spiritual leadership.

Yet it is at this moment that God clearly and graphically reiterates his promise to Jacob ^d. The point is that the promise does not evaporate when sin is apparent. It is God's gift which he gives according to his own sovereign choice. Jacob does not earn the promise: he inherits it from God as a gift.

Similarly for us, the John 3:16 promise that whoever believes in Jesus 'shall not perish but have eternal life' is not a promise we gain by our obedience or nullify by our failure; it is a gift that God mightily and lovingly gives.

The picture of a stairway reaching from earth to heaven ^e describes the way the normal barrier between heaven and earth has been breached to draw Jacob into this personal and intimate encounter with God.

Jesus gives us a further insight into this picture in John 1:51. He explains that he himself is the stairway when he responds to Nathaniel saying "I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven opened, and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man who is the stairway between heaven and earth." Jesus alone is the true and living way into God's presence.

Our Challenge

So much for Jacob, what about me? I can read the Scriptures selectively. I can bend the meaning to fit my

^a Genesis 25

^b Genesis 27

^c v 10

^d vs 13-15

^e v 12

ambitions, perhaps even deceive others as I do so. I can remember the useful verses and forget the disturbing ones. But where does this get me? Certainly, it doesn't lead me in paths of righteousness and nearer to God. And by the following week I will realise that it has not even given me a clean conscience.

I can be good at self-justification. I can choose the signs and decide they mean I am in the right. I can persuade myself that 'just this once' it will be for the best. I can believe that it's ok for me although it would not be right for anyone else to do this; after all, I am a special case.

A Prayerful Response

Lord, it's easy to criticise Jacob, but I know that when I point the finger there are three fingers pointing back at me. Deliver me from self-justification. Give me the courage

- to take on the challenge of full obedience,
- to believe that the end never justifies the means,
- to understand that the fruit of your Spirit in my life Lord is less seen in what I achieve than in how I achieve it.

So Lord, lead me not in paths of compromise for convenience's sake but in paths of righteousness for your name's sake.

Amen.