

Text: Genesis 28:10-22

Title: "The Surprising Place of God's Blessing"

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Place: NBBC

Introduction: Have you ever been the unsuspecting recipient of a surprise party? The one time I remember experiencing that was my 40th birthday. I was in seminary in South Carolina and had not gotten much sleep that week. The Friday night I was scheduled to preach at a nursing home ministry for a friend from church, and he was in on the plan for setting up this party. Unfortunately, I went to the wrong nursing home at first and nearly missed my opportunity to preach. After a very stressful night, I made my way home where everyone was waiting to wish me a surprise happy 40th birthday.

In the last chapter Jacob and Rachel were full of surprises far less positive than a birthday party. Here at the end of chapter 28, however, it is Jacob's turn for something unexpected. Verse 11 of the passage begins with a very special word that indicates that Jacob camped down in a place that he had chosen by random (*And he lighted upon*). He had not gone there for any specific purpose.

He falls asleep, and God surprises him with His blessing; so much so, that he exclaims in verse 16 very literally, "Surprisingly, the Lord is in this place and I did not know it!" I want us to use this emphasis of the passage as our organizing theme this morning as we learn together about "The Surprising Place of God's Blessing." I want us to see three things about such a place this morning.

I. The surprising place of God's blessing can be anywhere because God is everywhere (vv. 10-12, 18-19).

Illustration: When I went to the wrong nursing home on my 40th birthday, I had some of the organizers of the surprise

party kind of worried. Like I mentioned, they were in cahoots with my friend who ran that ministry, and he was instructed to make sure that I did not go back home before the nursing home service ended. When I did not show up at the correct nursing home, there was a lot of concern that I would come home early. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time and as a result the surprise blessing was in terrible jeopardy.

Application: God is never threatened by the wrong place at the wrong time when it comes to His presence or His desire to bless His people in surprising ways. *Place* is one of the interesting emphases of this passage [v. 11 (3), 16, 17, 19]. One of the surprising aspects of God's blessing mentioned in this passage is that it can come to us in any place.

Unquestionably, had Jacob been asked, he would have said that Beersheba was the place of God's blessing, and that the fact that he was being expelled from his father's estate there meant that God's blessing was unavailable to him, at least for the time being. He was being expelled, of course, because of his own corruption, deception, and lack of character. And yet, in spite of the fact that Jacob was reeling from the consequences of his own sin, God's blessing finds him in a random place on the way to Haran. Jacob comes to appreciate the omnipresence of God in a new, personal, and important way. He learns that God is with him wherever he goes (v. 15), and that this means that every Luz of life is really a Bethel (v. 19).

There is no difference between the secular and the sacred for the children of God. Every place contains a stairway from earth to heaven through which forces that we do not see are at work. We cannot say that 184 Mont Vernon Rd. is the house of God and the construction site we work at all week is not. God is with us wherever we go. His angels are constantly active in a spiritual warfare that wages all around us. He intends our entire lives to be blessed with a consciousness of His presence. The apostle Paul tells us this is true. He says "Whether there-

fore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

It should be impossible for the Christian to live as though God is not in the neighborhood, or at the party, or in the school, or at the town meeting, or in the work place. Every place is a place of his presence and surprising blessing. We need to make sure that we are not ashamed of nor ignoring the God Who is always there. Every place is His place.

II. The surprising place of God's blessing is the place God's promises speak to us (vv. 13-15).

Illustration: How does the world determine whether or not a business enterprise is experiencing success or blessing? Well, they might look at the balance sheet to see how far the assets outstrip the liabilities. They might look at the number of customers and the trend line for the sale of their product. They might look at the management team to assess their notoriety and level of fame. Wealth, popularity, gifted men and women, these are the signs of success that the world looks for.

Application: Where we God's blessing in the word of God, we see something much different from these things. We see God's promise. The place where God's word is heard and His promises are challenging hearts to believe is the place where God is blessing. The place where God's word is neglected and His promises are not known is the place where He is withholding His blessing.

Jacob had not much of anything at this moment in his life that the world would label a sign of blessing, yet God's blessing surprises him here because God's promise becomes known to him in a way that he had not understood it before. We need to read our Bibles this way; we need to find there the promises of God that surprise us about His goodness, His unfathomable

ble love, and His tender interest in our need for His blessing. Notice two surprising things about the promise of God here.

1. It is surprising that God calls Abraham, not Isaac, Jacob's father (v. 13a, cp. Rom. 4). Perhaps I am making more of this than I should, because none of the commentaries I read picked up on it, but it was striking to me that God mentions both Abraham and Isaac in this promise, but only calls Abraham the father of Jacob. He does not say "I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham and your father Isaac," nor "Abraham and Isaac your fathers," but "I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham your father, and Isaac."

Evidently, Abraham was Jacob's father in a sense different from the way in which Isaac was Jacob's father. Now before you say, "Pastor, you are making too much of this," turn with me to Romans 4 where Paul explains the theological significance of the fatherhood of Abraham (4:9-12). You see, Abraham is a father of all who believe in a way that Isaac was not. When God call's Abraham Jacob's father, He is referring to the fact that Jacob was a man of saving faith.

That we need faith rather than good works to experience God's blessing is a surprising thing for some. God's blessings are always blessings of grace, never blessings that we deserve or earn in some way. Notice that according to the promise here, Jacob's wellbeing depended entirely on what God was going to do and nothing upon what Jacob had done or would do (vv. 13-15). C. H. Mackintosh writes in his commentary on this passage: "Jacob was such a sinner, and so utterly divested of all claim, both by birth and by practice, that he had nothing whatever to rest upon save God's purpose of pure, free, and sovereign grace. Hence, in the revelation which the Lord makes to His chosen servant in the passage just quoted, it is a simple record or prediction of what He Himself would yet do. 'I am . . . I will give . . . I will keep . . . I will bring . . . I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee

of.' It was all Himself. There is no condition whatever – no if or but; for when grace acts there can be no such thing. Where there is an if, it cannot possibly be grace. . . . Jacob asleep on a pillow of stone was not in a position of responsibility, but of the deepest helplessness and need; and therefore he was in a position to receive a revelation of the fullest, richest, and most unconditional grace" (1:284-285).

2. It is surprising that Yahweh not only promises a descendant, but He becomes this descendant (v. 13b-14). You say, "Pastor I don't see where these verses tell us who this descendant is," and that is correct. But we know that the descendant of Jacob that Yahweh here promises as a blessing to Israel and all the world with them is Yahweh Himself for two reasons:

a. Jacob could see Yahweh in the dream in angelic form (31:11-13). We know from other passages of Scripture that when Yahweh is visible to the human eye, it is always the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God (John 1:18, "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him"). Appearances of Yahweh in visible form in the Old Testament are appearances of the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. Micah 5:2 tells us about these goings forth of the one who would some day become Jacob's and David's descendant, the Messiah Jesus, born in Bethlehem. The baby born in Bethlehem was the same one whose goings forth had been from everlasting, and this dream of Jacob is one of those goings forth.

b. Jesus tells Nathaniel that He would see exactly what Jacob saw in his dream (John 1:49-51). Here again we see Jacob's ladder with the angels ascending and descending to do the will of the Lord. But this time, it is not Yahweh standing beside Jacob showing him these things; it is rather Jesus standing by Nathaniel showing him these things. Christ lays claim to the identity of the Yahweh of Genesis 28 here in John 1.

Application: This is why the descendant of Jacob is the only source available for man's need for the blessing of Yahweh God. He became the descendant. He did so that He might die in our place as a sacrifice for our sins. Here is the ultimate gift of God's blessing; He gave Himself! He did it for you and for me. If you are not blessed in Christ this morning, you are lost in your sin of unbelief. "Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is none other name, under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

III. The surprising place of God's blessing is the place we learn to fear God more (vv. 17-22).

Note: Some commentators criticize Jacob for his fear in this passage, yet I believe that too much of Scripture tells us of the importance of a reverential fear of God to find fault with Jacob's fearful response here. We need to be delivered from the fear of man, but we must embrace the fear of God. We must do so in two ways.

1. We fear God more when we are conscious of our need for Holy Spirit consecration (28:18).

Application: The passage does not tell us why Jacob poured oil on the pillar. This is the first time in Genesis (see also 35:14) someone does this, and we are not told why. What we do know, however, is the fact that Gen. 28:18 is actually a part of a much larger work called the Pentateuch, written by Moses, comprising the first five books of the Old Testament. As a whole, the Pentateuch has a lot to say about why oil is poured out, and so this would have been no mystery to the first readers of Gen. 28:18. In the ceremony of Israel's religion, oil and the blood of the altar made the priests holy (Exod. 29:21). These were symbols of what makes every man holy in the eyes of God – the shed blood of Christ on the cross and its application by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. So we

can conclude that Jacob anoints the pillar with oil because he wants the Holy Spirit to consecrate it for God's use.

Note, however, that the erecting of pillars became illicit due to their association with the paganism of the Canaanite world (Exod. 23:24, Deut. 16:22). When Jacob erected his pillar, it was a spiritual blessing. For Moses to do the same would have been disastrous. What had changed? The nature of stone? No; what had changed was the way the pagans used these stones. One might have argued that pillars are amoral or morally neutral. Yet when the stone was associated with paganism, it became something God's people were to avoid. Today we have certain genres of music that are uniquely associated with paganism. People argue, "Well Pastor its only notes!" Even if this were true, the association with paganism alone ought to motivate us to avoid using those genres of music for our own entertainment and worship. Our lives need to be consecrated to God. We fear Him more when we realize this.

2. We fear God more when we respond to his blessings with love (28:20-22).

Illustration: Valentine's Day is coming, and this time of year we recognize the vow to be the ultimate expression of love. You can get a lady a Valentine's Day teddy bear, you can speak sweet nothings into her ear, you can hold her hand and give her an embrace, but all of these things fall a bit short of the love involved in vowing the marriage vow and remaining faithful to it.

Application: Jacob expresses his love for the Lord as he vows this vow. The Hebrew words for *and* and *then* happen to be the same word, so translators have to decide on where to stop translating *If -and-and-and* and the place of *then*. For reasons I will not go into here, I believe commentators are correct who put the *then* at the beginning of v. 22. Let's read the passage that way: "And Jacob vowed a vow saying, 'If Yahweh God is

with me and keeps me in this way which I am going, and gives to me bread to eat and clothes to wear, and I return in peace to my father's house, and Yahweh shall be to me for God, then this stone which I have placed upright shall be the house of God and all which you shall give to me a tenth shall I tithe to you."

Jacob promises to create a settlement called *God's house* in God's honor in response to God's faithful execution of His promise. He would use a tithe to help sustain the worship of Yahweh there. This is the appropriate response to God's blessing in our lives, to love God who blesses us, not ourselves, and not the world. And follow through on those covenantal commitments, those vows, that you have made to him (35:1-5). Church membership is one of these vows of love. May we be found faithful.

Conclusion: Have you been surprised by the gracious blessing of God recently? Jacob was surprised this way simply because he understood his need. May we awaken to our need too, and then find that need surprisingly and graciously met in the blessing of Christ— His presence, His promise, and our fear.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*