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WHEN JACOB BECAME ISRAEL

Last month's message was titled, "Stairway to Heaven," about the occasion in Genesis 28 when Jacob traveled toward Haran and as he lay down to sleep dreamed of a stairway that reached from the earth up to heaven, with angels of God going up and down the stairway. Some 2,000 years later God finally revealed the meaning of that dream. In the first chapter of John, Jesus says to His first disciples, *I tell you the truth, you will see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.*

Jesus declared to His followers from the beginning that He was different from anyone who ever walked the earth, that He came down from God to be the stairway between heaven and earth, the mediator between God and mankind, the Messiah, the Savior, the Way and the only Way for humans to get to God.

So as we read this story about Jacob, or any other story in the Old Testament, we need to keep in mind that through this historical account of the formation and experiences of the nation of Israel (which covers a period of about 1,600 years!) the invisible God was always involved, progressively revealing Himself to mankind. Paul explains: *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us...* (1 Cor. 10:11) And the resurrected Christ explained to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures* (Note: all the Scriptures of the Old Testament.) *concerning himself.* (Luke 24:27)

So hidden in every story in the Old Testament are all kinds of clues pointing forward to Jesus Christ. For example: Hidden in the story of Moses rescuing slaves from Egypt is a picture of Christ. Moses (a Savior,) is called by God speaking from a burning bush (the Holy Spirit), to rescue the Hebrews (you and me), who are in bondage (sin makes us slaves) to Pharaoh (Satan), in Egypt (the world). Moses delivers them (slaves can't rescue themselves), leads them through the Red Sea (baptism by water), they are accompanied by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (the baptism and accompaniment of the Holy Spirit), through the wilderness (time of temptation and testing), given water from a rock (Christ), given quail (the meat of the Word), and led to the Promised Land (the place of victory and peace in Christ). 1 Cor. 3 and Hebrews 3 and 4 explain some of these things.

Let's look further at the story of Jacob: As Jacob cheated and deceived his brother and his father, so he was cheated and deceived. *Whatever you plant, that you will harvest.* For 20 years he worked day and night for his Uncle Laban, and his uncle cheated him out of the wife for whom he had worked seven years, and out of the fruits of his labor. Jacob ran away from Laban with his two wives and the flocks and herds that he had earned, and God protected Jacob from the anger of Uncle Laban (Genesis 31). But then Jacob learned that his brother Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men! Yikes! The jig is up! After all these years, Jacob, conniving Jacob, is sure that Esau is going to do what he threatened to do years ago and kill him. What in the world can he do?

Jacob sent some generous gifts to Laban, hoping that would assuage his anger. He moved his wives and servants and flocks and herds to the other side of the river. Then he decided it might be good to pray. (Good plan.) But this wasn't a normal little prayer. It is described in Scripture as "wrestling." He wasn't just praying to God, he was wrestling all night with God! Listen to the description:

This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. (Who was "the man?" Read on.) *When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket. Then the man said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking."* (In Jacob!) *But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."* *"What is your name," the man asked. He replied, "Jacob."* (Cheater, deceiver.) *"Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won."*

“Why do you want to know my name?” the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there. Jacob named the place Peniel, which means Face of God, for he said, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared.” The sun was rising as Jacob left Peniel, and he was limping because of the injury to his hip. (Genesis 32: 24-33)

This is one of the great stories, one of the high points in all of the Old Testament. It tells the story of a man who was confronted with the consequences of his bad character and his sinful choices. In that moment of crisis, Jacob made a decision: “My life is rotten. I have always deceived people and been deceived by people, and now I am facing ruin and death. It’s not because of bad luck or fate, it’s because of the way I am and have always been. I can’t protect myself from the consequences of the character that is me, and I can’t change. I am going to cast myself before God, and God is going to have to do something about me and for me tonight, or I am going to die!”

Think about Jesus’ declaration in Matthew 11:12: *The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force, (or forceful men lay hold of it).* When people are half-hearted about following Christ, nothing much is going to happen in their lives. But when people become desperate and even violent with their own fallen nature and cry out, “God, you have to change me!” then God is filled with joy that He can work in and through that person to bear much fruit for His glory.

The “man” that Jacob wrestled with was surely the Angel of the Lord, which is a code name of the incarnate Christ. You don’t think that a man is going to pin the Creator to the mat, do you? Jacob was wrestling with Godand with his own fallen nature. And he was not going to take no for an answer. The “man” simply touched Jacob’s hip and put it out of joint. Our wrestling with God leaves us wounded, broken and weak..... and healed, whole and strong! It’s a conundrum, isn’t it?

God gave Jacob a new name to fit his new character: ISRAEL. This is important, it’s big! And it’s curious to me that Israel is defined or translated in so many different ways. Mounce’s Dictionary of the Bible defines it: “Israel: One who struggles or fights (sara) with God (El).” A footnote in the NLT defines Israel as, “God fights.” The NKJV translates it as: “Either ‘Prince of God,’ or ‘He Strives with God,’ or ‘May God Persevere.’” The NIV footnote translates it: “Israel: He struggles with God.” The Bible translates itself best, *Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.* (Genesis 32:38, NKJV) We have to shorten this verse, so I think the NIV says it best: “He Strives with God.”

From this point on, the man Jacob would be called Israel, and also the nation that would come forth from Jacob would be called Israel. I suggest that every time you read the name Israel in the Bible or in the newspaper or hear it on television you stop and reflect on this story. God is telling us something very important and very serious about life.

Paul speaks to us about this subject as follows: *Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring. (Rom. 9:6-7) For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. (Rom. 2:28-29)*

Brothers and sisters, if we are believers we have been grafted in and are now Jews in the Spirit and a part of Israel. But if we can’t recall a time when we had an encounter with God sort of like Jacob did, then we might think about telling God that we must have a wrestling match with a “man” that He will send to do battle on His behalf.

WORDS OF KNOWLEDGE

There are several places in the New Testament that list different kinds of spiritual gifts, identified as gifts from the Father (Romans 12:6 ff); from the Son (Ephesians 4:11); and from the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:8-10). 1 Corinthians lists nine gifts of the Spirit that are for all believers. One of these gifts is: **words of knowledge.**

A word of knowledge is a supernatural revelation of information by the Holy Spirit. Paul received many of his revelations through words of knowledge. *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches. (1 Cor. 1:12-13)* Our church, Canyon View Vineyard Church, believes in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, not only academically but in their practice today. There are a number of folks in our fellowship that seem to be especially gifted in this area, and at the end of our Sunday services they pass notes to Pastor Kirk with the impressions they have received. He shares all or part of this information with the congregation. These “words of knowledge” usually have to do with healing, and we regularly see people healed as they come forward for prayer.

Randy Clark has been used powerfully by God for over 30 years to minister and teach in the area of spiritual gifts. He has traveled internationally with Bill Johnson, Roland and Heidi Baker, and others. Following are some insights from his “Global Awakening Ministry Team Training Manual” specifically concerning “Words of Knowledge for Healing:”

The Timing of Words of Knowledge

You may receive a word of knowledge anywhere and at any time. You might get a word during a prayer meeting or cell group meeting, while you are walking past someone in church, in the supermarket, while you are washing dishes at home, or in a dream.

You may or may not know for whom the revelation has been given. Usually, the word of knowledge is given for someone present, or it can be for someone you know or someone you will see in the next day or so.

How to Speak or Tell Others

Remember that our walk as Christians from beginning to end is by faith, so there is always an element of risk involved in stepping out and sharing “words” that we believe we have heard. So it is wise to be humble in speaking out the word you have received. Don’t say, “Thus saith the Lord...” or “God told me...” You might say, “I just had an impression or saw a picture in my mind of a left elbow. Is that just my imagination, or is God telling me that someone has a problem with their left elbow?” If someone acknowledges that the word fits them, then the “word” has built up their faith and your faith and you can pray with assurance that God is going to heal them. If no one responds to your presentation, or they acknowledge that it fits them but they are not willing to receive prayer, lovingly encourage them but don’t pressure them.

If you believe you have received a word for healing in a large meeting (as happens on Sunday mornings in our fellowship), you should not speak out unless there is an appropriate moment or way indicated by the leader. (Different churches have different ways of doing this.) But keep your antennae up to see whether God puts someone across your path later on that has the condition revealed to you.

How Does God Give Words of Knowledge for Healing?

God gives revelations in a variety of ways. Some of the common ways He gives words of knowledge for healing are:

(1) Feelings - which are like sympathetic pains or sensations or impressions. You may have (a) a sharp pain in some part of your body. (b) a throbbing sensation (c) a strong emotion such as fear or panic

Seeing. You may get a mental picture, such as: (a) a body part – perhaps a heart, foot, eye, or head. (b) a crutch, eye-glasses, cast (c) a person limping or holding his arm (d) a water bottle, auto accident

(3) Reading. You may see in your mind: (a) a person with a word written across his front or back or over his head (b) a written word on a wall or floor (c) something like a newspaper headline or banner

(3) An Impression, Thinking of a Word. You may sense in your mind that someone has a particular condition or need.

(4) Speaking. While talking or praying or standing with someone, unpremeditated words may tumble out of your mouth relating to a physical condition you were not aware of.

(5) A Dream. You may have a vivid dream or vision in which: (a) you see someone with a health problem (b) you hear someone talking about a health problem

(6) Experience it. You may have a vivid vision while awake. It may be so strong that you feel you are a part of what is happening.

Some Practical Insights to Help You Grow in the Use of These God-given Words

A word of knowledge for healing may come quickly, flitting through your mind like a bird rather than like a stationary billboard. It may be rather vague, tempting you to screen it out and ignore it. Practice tuning in to these revelations and speaking them out. If you are humble and tentative, not arrogant or presumptuous, no one will be offended if you seem to have heard amiss.

Resist the thought that a word, picture, or impression you receive is not important or that it is just your imagination. What seems like a vague impression to you may be a shout to the other person. These types of communications are love-letters from our

heavenly Lover! They are sent to heal and bless, which is the very nature of our Savior.

However, don't say, "God just told me you have an earache." Instead, say, "Does your left ear ever bother you?" Or, "I have an impression of a problem in a left ear. Does this mean anything to you?"

Other examples: "Does a picture of a garden gate mean anything to you?" "I think I see a picture in my mind of horses in a field. Does that mean anything to you?"

Words of Knowledge for Healing as a Doorway to Evangelism

Many times when God gives words of knowledge for healing, the healing occurs instantly. (We have seen this frequently at the altar of our church following words of knowledge spoken out by the pastor.) This can be a powerful aid to evangelism. For a person who is not born again to experience immediate healing following a word God gave someone, or to see one of their loved ones healed, can be a striking evidence of the love and power of God.

If you are present at such a time, don't overlook the possibility that someone present may be encouraged by the healing to make a first commitment or a deeper commitment to Jesus.

MORAL ABSOLUTES

Barna Research reported recently that adults in our country, by a three to one margin, believe that truth is relative, while only six percent of teens said that truth is absolute.

About the same percentages say that "faith" is just what a person believes and is not connected to reality. They have been taught and believe that reality is impersonal, just matter or energy, and is shaped only by impersonal chance.

So when it comes to: permissiveness, pornography, homosexuality, abortion, divorce, lying, cheating on tests, shoplifting, etc, there are only opinions, and one person's opinion is as good as another's.

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GROUPS

Groups of animals have unique names or designations. A group of: Bees are called swarms. Ants are called colonies. Whales are called pods, and fish are schools. Cattle are herds, birds are flocks, lions are prides, crows are murders, tigers are ambushes, flamingoes are called flamboyants, owls are known as parliaments, and buzzards are called committees. (Really.)

THE SAFEST PLACE TO BE

For many years there has been a Christian cliché, "The safest place to be is in the center of the will of God." Ralph McManus says this is a terrible and untrue cliché, and I agree. Some of his thoughts:

My wife found this cliché in the diary of Corrie ten Boom. Corrie's sister, Betsie, was encouraging her with this hope. For Corrie and Betsie, the promise of safety in the center of God's will was fleshed out in concentration camps during the Nazi holocaust of the Jews, and while Corrie lived to tell the story, Betsie died in the midst of it.

Neither of them concluded that being in God's will would keep them from suffering and hardship and even death. They simply believed that to walk in the character of Christ is always the right choice, regardless of outcome or consequence. God created you so that your life would count, not so you could choose the path of least difficulty and least sacrifice.

Do you think that being in the center of God's will was the safest place for the 11 apostles? According to tradition, every one of them died as martyrs except the Apostle John, who was exiled to the prison island of Patmos (sort of like Alcatraz) where he wrote the book of Revelation. Actually the biblical word for *witness* is the word for *martyr*.

Somebody forgot to tell Paul how safe the center of God's will was. He wrote: *I have been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I have been in danger from rivers, bandits, the Jews, the Gentiles, in the city, in the country...I have labored and gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.* (1 Corinthians 11:23-27)

Being in a place of comfort and security would have been a clue to Paul that he was out of the will of God!

Finally, of course, we need to look to the life of Jesus. Would you say that He lived in the center of God's will? In fact, that He was the only One who did it perfectly?

Jesus' death wasn't to free us from suffering and dying, but to free us from the fear of suffering and dying.

THE TOUCH OF THE MASTER'S HAND

Twas battered and scarred, the poet wrote, and the auctioneer thought it hardly worthwhile.... to waste much time on the old violin, so he held it up with a smile.

What am I bid, good folk? He cried, who'll start the bidding for me? In the room far back a grey-haired man came forward and picked up the bow, and wiping the dust from the old violin and tightening the loosened strings,

He played a melody pure and sweet as the caroling angel sings.

The music ceased and the auctioneer, with a voice that was quiet and low, said, "Now what am I bid for the old violin?" And he held it up with the bow.

"A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two? Two thousand, and who'll make it three? "Three thousand once, three thousand twice, and going and gone," cried he.

And the people cheered, but some of them said, We do not understand. What changed its worth? And there came the reply, "Twas the touch of the master's hand."

And many a man with life out of tune who is battered and scarred by sin, is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd, much like the old violin.

"A mess of pottage, a glass of wine, and a game and he travels on. He's going once, he's going twice, he's going and almost gone." But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd never can quite understand. The worth of a soul or the change that's wrought by the touch of the Master's hand.

God Bless

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