

God Meets Us In Our Mess

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[0:00] Amen. Thank you, Nathan. All right, good morning, everyone.! When Abraham went to Egypt, there was a famine in the land.

Abraham didn't cause the famine. It happened. And obviously, it's all under the sovereignty, the providence of God, but outside our control, even when it's under God's control.

Sometimes the messes we find ourselves in come because of what others do to us, the mistakes, the sins other people commit. Someone hurts us, betrays us, disappoints us, just like when Abraham lied to Pharaoh, lied to Abimelech, and they face the consequences of Abraham's actions. But then there's other kinds of messes, too. There are messes where we have to admit that we had a part to play in it. It can come from a bad decision. You're having an argument, loud conversation with your parents, let's say.

It's tense, emotions are high, you feel yourself getting upset, and then out comes a few words, and you realize, I've made this worse, I've made a mess of things, everything's on fire.

[1:34] And who made this mess? Well, you did. Sometimes it's not just a split-second decision, but a whole series of choices made over months, over years, a pattern.

You head off in the wrong direction, and before you know it, you've gone farther than you imagined. And now you're thinking, how did I get here? What happened? Sometimes life is hard because things happen.

Sometimes life is hard because someone sinned against us. Sometimes it's because of our own foolish choices. And often it's a mixture of all three of these things. And whatever the cause, sometimes we find ourselves looking around, and we wonder, how did I end up here?

And that's the type of situation we find Jacob in, in Genesis 28. We've been going through Genesis, and last week we read how Jacob and Rebekah, they schemed to get the blessing from Isaac.

They schemed. And actually their plan worked. Their plan worked. Jacob got what he wanted. He got the blessing he was after. But now, his life is a mess.

[2:42] His brother wants to kill him. His twin brother, Esau, wants to kill him. Jacob is now fleeing from his home, leaving the land that God promised to give him. He got the blessing, but everything else is falling apart.

And here's the question as we read this chapter, Genesis 28. What does God do when we find ourselves in the messes of life, even the messes that we create for ourselves? This is what we see in our text today, that in the middle of Jacob's mess, God comes, God reaches down to meet him. God comes and finds him with grace. And that's also the good news for us. If we find ourselves in a low place today, even if it's our own doing, I want us to know, God meets us in our mess with grace. He is with you. He will never leave you or forsake you. He will do all that he has promised you when we put our faith in Jesus. So let's stand together as we read from Genesis 28.

I mentioned faith comes by hearing. We're going to play the audio recording, actually, one of them from Genesis 28. If you guys find it hard to read the Bible sometimes, actually, I find listening can be good.

[3:53] I was just on a run this week, listened to all of Hebrews. And yeah, it's just something good you can play in the background. So can you play that for us, please, Darren? I'm going to play that for us, please, Darren.

Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and directed him You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women Arise to the house of Bethuel your mother's father and take it your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and make you fruitful and multiply you that you may become a company of peoples the blessing of Abraham may he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you you

may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham Thus Isaac sent Jacob away and he went to Paddan to Laban the son of Bethuel the Aramean the brother of Rebekah Jacob's Esau's father Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan to take a wife and that as he blessed him he directed him and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan

So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please Isaac his father Esau went to Ishmael and took as his wife besides the wives he had Mahalab the daughter of Ishmael Abraham's son the sister of Nebeah and went toward Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran and he came to a certain place and stayed there that night because the son had set taking one of the stones of the place he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep and he dreamed and behold there was a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven the angels of God were ascending and descending and descended above it and behold the Lord stood above it and said Abraham I am the Lord and the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac I will give to you the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed and behold I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land for I will not leave you until I have done what I have done and I will not leave you and Jacob awoke from his sleep and said surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it and he was afraid and said how awesome is this place this is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven so early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it he called the name of that place Bethel but the name of the city was Lodipah saying then Jacob made a bow saying if God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go and will give me bread to wear clothing to wear so that I come again to my father's house in peace then the Lord shall be my God and this stone which I have set up for a pillar shall be God's house and of all that you give me

I will give a full team alright this is the word of the Lord the fully dramatized version yeah please take a seat and Lord we trust that your word is living and active it cuts to our hearts and we pray in faith that you do that today speak to us just as you spoke to Jacob we pray in Jesus name amen and so what we read what we listened to today this is a famous story Jacob's Ladder the Lord appeared to Jacob in a strange dream what does it all mean before we look at the dream I just want us to take a step back and see the situation that Jacob's in this whole family's a mess it's a mess Isaac said to Jacob in verse 1 he says you must not take a wife from the Canaanite woman arise go to Paddan Aram to the house of Bethuel your mother's father and take as your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother and so yes if you think about it Isaac is sending Jacob off to marry one of his cousins and you might have some questions about that that's not our focus today that was that's odd to us but that's common in their culture more important than that is why Jacob is why Isaac is sending Jacob off in the first place we read last week

[8:46] Jacob and Rebecca they worked together they schemed so that Jacob would get Isaac's blessing rather than Jacob's older brother Esau and now to want the blessing the blessing is actually a good thing it's great to be wanted to be included in this covenant that the Lord made with Abraham we see in verse 4 that's what the blessing includes may he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham it's good to want this blessing it's a good thing the problem is that you can pursue a good thing the wrong way they wanted to take the blessing that's good but they did it by lying scheming manipulating we read last week Isaac was old his eyesight was failing he thought he was about to die everyone thought he was about to die and he wanted to bless his sons one last time before he died he wanted to give this final blessing on his deathbed to only the older brother

Esau but then his wife Rebecca overheard this conversation and came up with a plan she told Jacob this hey pretend to be Esau I'll cook food you put on Esau's clothes you dress up like him your dad is old he's pretty much blind he's about to die we can trick dad before he passes away like isn't that just messed up that's what they did they're tricking their dying father but it works actually this plan actually works or so it seems Jacob gets the blessing but then Esau finds out and he's furious Esau says to himself hey my dad's nearly dead I'll wait for him to die so I don't cause him any more pain but after that I'm gonna go and kill my brother I'm gonna kill my younger twin brother that's the situation we're in and that's why Rebecca complained about Esau's wives so that Isaac

would go and send Jacob off to find a wife somewhere else away from his brother he's complaining about these wives but really it's part of her plan to continue manipulating continue controlling the situation and send Jacob off so that Jacob would be safe from his brother and so that's why Isaac does that in verse 1 he says to Jacob you must not take a wife from the Canaanite woman so look at this mess look at this whole mess Rebecca's plan works but she has to send away the son that she loves Jacob has the blessing but he's fleeing for his life because his brother wants him dead and it's a messy situation all because they chased after the right thing the wrong way right thing the wrong way and have we done that before too so often that's what sin is we take a good gift God has given us and twist it twist it with evil desires it's good to work hard to want to provide for your family but then don't we scheme maybe you go against your co-worker or neglect your family in your attempts to go and provide for them it's good to encourage someone to rebuke someone to spread the gospel even all those are good but we can twist those desires and go after a good thing the wrong way

Jacob and Rebecca did that and it caused a mess Esau on the other hand he's even worse Esau is even worse Esau is impulsive we've been seeing that he thinks before he acts he thinks with his stomach according to just his fleshly desires and years ago Esau had married two Canaanite women who made life bitter for his parents Isaac and Rebecca and only now in verse 8 years later Esau finally seems to realize oh my parents don't like them they don't like that years later he finally starts to realize that's the type of person Esau is but instead of repenting instead of realizing this mistake turning from it Esau adds to his mistake Esau's in a hole and he keeps digging he already had two wives we know that's not the plan for marriage in the Bible that's between one man one woman only Esau had two wives and so what does he do?

he decides to take a third wife that'll make it better and look who he marries in verse 9 Esau went to Ishmael and took as his wife beside the wives that he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael so Esau sees that Isaac sent Jacob away to marry someone from the family weird we know but that's what he does and so Esau thinks hey maybe I should do that too that's making Isaac happy Isaac blessed Jacob maybe if I do something that makes my dad happy he might change his mind maybe I don't know but so Esau goes and marries someone from his father's side of the family and he goes and marries Ishmael's daughter but here's the irony of that Ishmael who is Esau's uncle Ishmael was the son that Abraham sent away from the family do you remember that Ishmael was the one who he's not the child of promise that was

[14:14] Isaac Ishmael wasn't the son to inherit the covenant so Esau thinks he's getting closer to the blessing but by marrying Ishmael's daughter ironically he's moving even further away from that and do we also do the same sometimes caught in a mess instead of repenting realizing our sin casting upon God casting it upon Christ we double down on our mistakes and so this is the situation we find this family in Esau's in a rage Jacob's on the run Esau wants to kill him Jacob has God's blessing the blessing of the Lord's covenant to Abraham but he's also forced to flee from the covenant promises from the promised land that's what we see in verse 10 Jacob left Beersheba and went towards Haran that's the situation we're in and night falls Jacob is on the run he's in the wilderness in Haran night comes where does he sleep taking one of the stones of the place he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep

Jacob spent all his life trying to secure the blessing but now he's just alone in the dark lying on the ground with a stone by his head that's what happens he's at one of the lowest points in his life so far and what I want to see in bringing this up is that in Jacob's low point this is where Jacob is it's that this is the time this is the place where God meets Jacob in that low point this is where we see the grace of God reach down to find Jacob in Jacob's mess this is where God appears to Jacob in a dream God's grace came to Jacob in his time of trial in his low point not when he's safe at home not when he has his life all sorted out God can do this but that's not what he did to Jacob it's not when God when Jacob had done anything to earn God's favor God meets Jacob after he screwed it all up after his sin and scheming blew up in his face that's where

God comes and meets Jacob in chapter 28 and now maybe you're in a similar situation a similar place here today maybe you're dealing with consequences of some of your own bad decisions or suffering because someone else had done something to you maybe life took a turn that you didn't expect that wasn't in your control but whatever brought you to this low point I want us to see today that this is the God we worship this is the type of God we worship behold your God he is the Lord who is near to the broken hearted and saves those crushed in spirit he is with you not only when we

have it all figured out but also in the struggles and in the trials he gently and graciously meets you there and isn't it so often in those times when we do actually encounter God and we do meet God when life's good it's so easy to think that

I'm alright I can manage I don't need God I can do it myself but so often it's in our stress in our anxiety in our darkest moments when we're at the end of ourselves that's when God is so near and dear to us I wonder if some of us in this room have experienced that that God meets us in our mess and if you're going through a hard time today if you're going through a low point today don't let that drive you away from God don't turn away from God but let this draw near to him because God meets us in our mess but even if we don't even if we don't want to draw near to God we don't have that desire to notice this God took the initiative to find Jacob God takes initiative to come and find us so far in Genesis we have not seen

Jacob pray or seek God actually the only time that we've heard Jacob mention God is in the last chapter I think chapter 27 verse 20 that's the only time he mentions God really when he uses the name of the Lord as a lie to cheat his dying father he says trust me dad I'm Esau I came back really quickly because the Lord your God has granted me success that's the only time we've seen Jacob mention the Lord when God appeared to Jacob here Jacob wasn't praying Jacob wasn't worshipping he wasn't going to church he was running away from his brother and actually he was asleep this dude was sleeping Jacob was snoring Jacob wasn't looking for God God came to find Jacob we see that in the dream also when we look at the dream in verse 12 he dreamed Jacob dreamed while he was sleeping and behold there was a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to the heaven and behold the angels of God were ascending and descending on it now some other translations if you look at it in the place of a ladder some others will say stairway staircase that's probably more accurate or as accurate if it helps you to visualize a staircase instead of a ladder if you want to visualize this weird dream you can go and do that the point is that we see something in this dream there is something connecting earth and heaven there's a way made between earth and heaven and notice this it says there was a ladder set up the language here is passive there was a ladder set up there the staircase is there in the dream already

[20:13] Jacob didn't build it Jacob couldn't construct it he didn't do anything to make this ladder appear someone else put the stairway there and this might remind us of another story in Genesis do you remember the tower of Babel the tower of Babel the people at Babel they said let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens and let us make a name for ourselves they wanted to build a tower that would reach the heavens build the way to heaven make a name for themselves secure their future and isn't that what Jacob has been doing isn't that what Jacob has been doing his whole life trying to cheat or manipulate Esau to trade his birthright for a bowl of soup and last chapter to lie to secure the blessing by his own effort scheming Jacob has been trying to do this and now heaven opened up to Jacob he sees

God's angels ascending and descending between heaven and earth God and his messengers are all around him even though Jacob's all alone in the wilderness he sees God's angels are surrounding him what did Jacob do for heaven to open up to him like that answer is absolutely nothing Jacob did nothing he's lying on the ground fast asleep Jacob didn't initiate this encounter he didn't ask God to do this God went to him it's all grace freely given unearned undeserved all by God's initiative and also God promises Jacob what he doesn't deserve after everything Jacob did it's remarkable here to me that God doesn't scold Jacob here at least not in this instance God will correct Jacob later but Jacob actually messed everything up he cheated his dying dad and God doesn't go to him and say first thing off what were you thinking what did you do you screwed it up instead

God meets Jacob's sin with promises he meets Jacob's sin with promises not just one promise a promise after promise after promise look starting from verse 13 Jacob is fleeing in the wilderness away from home but God promises him land I'll give you this land Jacob ran from his family but God promises him offspring a family of his own Jacob came from a broken family his family is in ruins but God promises him a family that will bless all the nations from a broken family to become a family that will bless all the nations Jacob's all alone but God promises him behold I am with you Jacob fears for his life but God promises I will keep you wherever you go Jacob is leaving the promised land but God says I will bring you back

I will bring you back Jacob's future seems uncertain but God promises I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you do you see that Jacob has spent his whole life trying to secure

the blessing through his own efforts and yes he got the blessing Jacob will have this blessing he didn't have to scheme to make God's promises come true and as with Jacob that's also our hope in our darkness in our mess

God promises us also I am with you I will keep you I will never leave you or forsake you I know many of us have felt that in our past even now in our lowest points that we are comforted in our hearts because in our darkness he says to us I am with you God is with us Emmanuel because what Jacob saw that night was only a glimpse of something far greater it was a shadow of something to come God appeared to Jacob in a dream but years later many years later God the eternal son of God he took on flesh and came to dwell among us that's how God appeared to us and the son of God his name is Jesus and Jesus himself refers to Jacob's dream turn with me to John chapter 1 verse 51 John chapter 1 verse 51

[25 : 29] Jesus is talking to a guy Nathaniel who had just confessed who had just realized Rabbi Jesus you are the son of God and Jesus replies to that you will see greater things than these truly truly I say to you you will see heaven opened up and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man that sounds familiar doesn't it angels ascending and descending God doesn't mention Jesus doesn't mention Jesus doesn't mention a ladder or staircase!

He says that the angels will ascend and descend on the son of man on himself Jesus here in John 1 is saying he's the fulfillment of Jacob's dream in Jesus heaven has come down to earth he has made a way between heaven and earth God himself has come to dwell among us that's who Jesus is and why did he come to bring us to God just as Jacob can climb up his way to God neither can we we can't earn our way into God's presence by good works by praying more by reading the Bible more by going to church more but that is the good news of the gospel we can't strive we don't need to strive and scheme our way to God we can't do it so God came down to us Jesus he stepped down into our mess into our broken sinful world it's all by his initiative it's by his work that we're saved his grace Jesus suffered and died on the cross for our sins rose from the dead to bring us to God hasn't promised us the same things exact things he promised Jacob he hasn't promised us the same land the same circumstances as Jacob but the Bible does say that all the promises of God find their yes in Christ all the promises of God are fulfilled in Jesus and we have these promises we have these sure steadfast promises that he will never leave us or forsake us that everybody who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose that God will pour out the riches of his grace and kindness toward us for all eternity we have all the promises of God because of Jesus not by anything we have done but only by what he has done we receive it God meets us in our mess with grace through the person of

Jesus Christ and now everything we've seen so far is God's initiative God came to Jacob God gave him these promises Jacob did nothing to earn them how does Jacob respond to such grace let's see that Jacob wakes up let's see what he does and if we keep reading Jacob responds all and worship he responds with genuine awe and worship from encountering the living God however he still has a long way to go in learning to trust God he's still on a long journey in his faith look at verse 16 then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it Jacob went to sleep thinking he's all alone and he was but he wakes up and realizes that God was there all along God was in this place God was here verse 17 says and he was afraid Jacob was afraid and said how awesome is this place this is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven Jacob is in awe and of course he is he's encountered the living God you have to be amazed at that and so what does he do Jacob the next morning he takes the stone that was by his head sets it up as a pillar pours oil on it long story short he sets it up as a memorial as a remembrance that God has met him in this place you can remember that place before this this place was called Luz there's nothing special about this place actually previously until this place but Jacob recognizes that this space is special now it's special because God has met him there not because there's anything special in this place but just because God has met him there he recognizes that and calls the place

[30 : 23] Bethel which means house of God Jacob responds with reverence and awe and similarly here there's nothing special about this room there's nothing special about this place but it's special because we encounter God as we worship together and look what happens next in verse 20 Jacob makes a vow listen to what he says and this is interesting because Jacob he has all reverence worship and now listen to what he says he's making this vow then Jacob made a vow saying if God

will be with me and will keep me in the way I go and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear so that I come again to my father's house in peace then the Lord shall be my God and the stone which I have set up for pillars shall be God's house and of all that you give me I'll give you a full tenth to you do you hear that this is what God said to Jacob I am with you I will keep you

I will God will keep me if I come back safely God says I will do it I will do it and Jacob says if you will that sounds a bit strange doesn't it God has just promised all these things to be with Jacob protect him unconditionally and Jacob responds if God will be with me now I just want to clarify some scholars say this is the normal way you might make a vow God if you do this or that then I respond with the vow I will fulfill these obligations and that Jacob could be expressing genuine faith in making this vow but I think when we compare God's unconditional promises here with Jacob's conditional response and also when we look at the rest of Jacob's life and how he's always grabbing at the heel it's clear to me that Jacob still has a lot about trusting

God Jacob has encountered God God met Jacob in a dream but this is only the beginning this is one step in Jacob learning to trust him and I think this is important for us to think about as well if we look at Jacob's life and think about our experience of encountering God first there's a difference between knowing about God to personally putting our faith in him and also growing in our faith think about our lives maybe just like me you've grown up hearing about God your whole life your parents are Christian you grew up in church you know all the Bible stories you know what Christians believe and actually Jacob may have well he overlapped with Abraham's life 15 years he might have heard from Abraham himself!

I'm not sure all the stories about how God what God did to Abraham how God called and protected him fulfilled his promises he had that first hand the second hand account but here's my question to us here here's my question to you is is God merely the God that your parents believe in is he just the God that you heard about at Christian school at church or is he!

the God who you yourself trust and have your faith in because after even though we've heard all these stories it doesn't mean we have personally come to know God encounter him or put our faith in him and even just like Jacob after we've encountered God don't we still also have doubts sometimes maybe you have an experience at a Christian camp where you've been also sometimes worry and bargain with

[34:50] God like Jacob we still have that heel grasping tendency that God if you help me get through this problem then I'll start taking my faith seriously then I'll trust in you God if you give me this job then I will give a full tenth of what you've given me all that you've given me God if you fix this situation then I will trust in you only then Jacob encountered God's grace and heard his promises but he's only beginning to learn what it means to fully trust in the Lord his faith will be refined through 20 more years Jacob will be working for his uncle cheated by his uncle the deceiver will become the deceived look at that he'll experience conflict within his family as his two wives two concubines say there's conflict there's tension within the family and Jacob will have to wrestle with God he'll have to wrestle with God and learn that he can't do it by his strength he can't win that fight and he can only ask

God for the blessing God walks with Jacob despite his imperfect faith God is teaching Jacob that his future doesn't depend on how clever he is how well he can manipulate control a situation how firmly he can grasp the blessing his future rests in the hands of God who promised to be with him and that's what God is teaching us as well it may take time to learn this lesson it may take pain and suffering God wants us to know today he is with us and we can trust him maybe you're worried about your career what does it mean to trust God there it means doing so you can have time to spend with God you don't need to exaggerate your achievements compromise your integrity because your life is in God's hands maybe you're facing a low point today you're coming here with a heavy heart someone has hurt you or you're facing an uncertain future you don't know how things will turn out and you don't know what you can do to change the situation what does mean to trust God there doesn't mean pretending that everything is fine but it does mean bringing your fears to God casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you and still doing what you can faithfully wisely prayerfully with wisdom trusting that even when you can't see the way forward God has not abandoned you he is with you that's the hope we cling to and that's the promise I want us to leave us with today Hebrews 13:5 says I've repeated it many times God's promise to us I will never leave you nor forsake you the God who met Jacob in the wilderness is the same faithful God whom we worship today and he hasn't promised us a life that is without suffering or that everything will

always work out the way we want it but in Jesus Christ he says all my promises find their yes in him he will never leave us or forsake us and some of us have been reading through Hebrews together you might have seen

Nathan's messages in our group I want us to leave us I thought this was a fitting way to end with yesterday's reading from Hebrews 4 verses 14 to 16 goes like this since then we have a great high priest for do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need Jacob was at one of the lowest!

points in his life at that time Jacob alone in the wilderness running away and God met him there with grace and we have something greater than Jacob's dream we have Jesus Christ our great high priest who made a way for us to heavens who understands our weakness he knows what it is to suffer he bridged the gap between us and God Jacob was weak and undeserving yet God met him he didn't have to climb his way to God boldly come to God's throne of grace and so whatever mess we're facing today you can run to him you don't have to get your life together first you don't have to earn his favor you can't but because of Jesus we can come to the throne of grace and when we do what do we find not condemnation but mercy grace help in our time of need!

[39:48] God meets us in our mess with grace through Jesus let's pray God we we just give you thanks when we read this that you are a God who is near to the broken hearted that what is man that you are mindful of us son of man that you care for us that you made Jesus for a little while you sent him to earth lower than angels and we have we have such a high priest who knows us cares for us and God I know here that there are people who are struggling in time of need and

Lord I pray that today you you reach out to them you encounter us you meet us in our mess in our brokenness and give us grace mercy help in our time of need thank you that you are such a God who loves us and cares for us help us not to emulate Esau or Jacob in their sin but to emulate Jacob in our faith Lord slowly refine us even when we fail even when we still grasp at the heel we still scheme thank you that you are gentle with us you reach out to us help us draw near to you we want to pray in Jesus name amen let's all stand and respond in song may