

“The Good News of a Savior Who Unites Heaven and Earth”

Pr Jim Sprengle – Lent Midweek 5 – April 2, 2025

- I. **Genesis 28:10-22** – previously read
- II. **In the beginning God created humans in perfect connection to Him.**
 - a. As we started our Lenten series, we began with the creation story and the fall of man as sin entered the world, and Adam and Eve were forced out of the paradise they enjoyed...
 - i. Since then, all of us have missed this great blessing of fellowship with God... which causes a restlessness in us that something isn't right.
 - 1. In fact, the theologian Augustine once described this feeling of discontent in his *Confessions*, that “our hearts are restless.”
 - ii. God designed us to have a place for Him within us, but sin destroyed all that, and the connection was lost.
 - b. Humans always look for what makes us feel better – in a way, we are trying to get back what we lost.
 - i. I read a book called, “Why God Won't Go Away,” as the authors studied the brain and religious experience... and found that we have a biological place for God in our brains.¹
 - 1. In other words, all people in history worshiped gods and believed in the supernatural because God created us with a place for Him – but we get it all wrong through sin.
 - ii. This place for God in our brains often turns out to be people seeking something greater than themselves – but not the one true God...
 - 1. They meditate, seek spiritual connections through mysticism, and basically try to ascend to heaven by their own work.
 - 2. The trouble is that all that effort leads to nothing but more emptiness.
 - c. Every effort we make to reach God, to get to God on our own, or do any good works that we think will count toward a connection with Him are futile... hopeless... or as Augustine says, “our hearts are restless.”
- III. **In our Genesis reading today, Jacob's heart is restless.**
 - a. Jacob is the usurper, the one who stole both his brother Esau's birthright and his blessing as the firstborn son.
 - i. Jacob and his mother Rebekah deviously tricked Isaac into blessing Jacob rather than Esau... and the only thing that would make Esau feel better about it was planning his revenge to kill his brother.
 - ii. So, Jacob was sent off to Rebekah's brother to live there and let Esau cool down for a while... but that meant leaving everything behind to start a new life with a different family... and a different land.
 - iii. Jacob was seeking blessings on his own terms, and his life was far from peaceful because of it... he was in exile with a restless heart.

- b. The name Jacob is the basis for James, so I'm familiar with what my name means... which is "deceiver" or "usurper" — and Jacob was using deception and selfishness to calm his restless heart.
- c. So, Jacob is headed to his uncle's place to let things calm down at home when he lies down to get some sleep on a rock pillow.
 - i. It says, "...he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, 'I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. 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. 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 promised you.'" (v 12-15)
- d. Jacob faced the consequences of seeking blessings on his own terms... which turned out to be a broken family and a brother whose only dream left was to kill the brother who stole everything from him.
 - i. Yet, without any effort on Jacob's part at all, God found him and freely blessed him.
 - ii. Everything Jacob tried to get through manipulation and deceit was now being given to him by grace!
 - iii. Certainly, Jacob deserved nothing but misery for what he did, but God was working on Jacob's restless heart... and God's promise to bring him home again and bless him forever allowed him to rest easy.
- e. Don't fall for the idea that we can make our own pleasure and paradise... it's not possible.
 - i. However, what is possible are the things of God... as He opens heaven to come to us.
 - ii. We cannot build a stairway to heaven... but God can... He builds one from heaven to us.

IV. **The picture of heaven opened for Jacob is also a picture for us.**

- a. The same promise that God made to Jacob, was the one he made to his dad Isaac... and his grandfather Abraham — your descendants will scatter the earth like dust.
 - i. Yet, the most important part of the promise was that through these descendants would come an Offspring to bless the whole earth.
- b. Jesus, the Offspring God promised, reminds us of Jacob's vision in our Gospel today.
 - i. Jesus said to Nathanael and the others, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (John 1:51)

- ii. Jesus wants these guys to realize that the Messiah, the Offspring promised by God, has come from heaven to earth.
- c. Jesus is the true stairway to heaven.
 - i. As He broke through the boundaries of sin and evil that keep us from connecting to God – He literally broke through to come to earth as a little baby born in a manger.
 - ii. Through Him there is a lifeline to the Father and ultimately to the Promised Land – or eternal life.
- d. No matter what anyone tells you, we cannot find this on our own or climb our own stairway to heaven – it just doesn't work that way.
 - i. God's way is the only way, and it's through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- e. The stairway wasn't built without a cost though.
 - i. The price for sin is death, and Jesus put Himself in the line of fire to open up the path to eternal life.
 - ii. In fact, He would die, forsaken by the Father in our place... and no one would come to His rescue or offer Him grace.
 - iii. As He went through that terrible judgment for us... He opened a way for us to have forgiveness, life, and salvation.
- f. In fact, Jesus didn't just make a way for us, He is the Way. (John 14:6)
 - i. He is the Way... the stairway to heaven... and all who believe in Him freely come without any barrier.
 - 1. That's the reason believers don't have to worry about searching our whole lives for the way to heaven.
 - ii. Christianity is the only religion that brings God down to earth to be with us in the flesh, so we don't have to climb a spiritual stairway of works to get to Him.
 - 1. He chose to come to us in our sin, setting aside our best effort... so that we don't trust in ourselves, but our hearts can be at rest in Him.
- g. I have good news for you today... we rest in the peace of Christ now.
 - i. We have no confidence in ourselves and our own work, but by grace we are given confidence in a Savior who fixes everything.
 - ii. As we may be tempted by a restless heart to go our own way, remember the only Way – Jesus.
- h. The stairway to heaven was brought down to us, the doors are wide open, and Jesus Himself says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11:28-29)
- i. Indeed, for all the restless hearts, our Savior gives rest for the soul. Amen.²

¹ Newberg, Andrew, D'Aquili, Eugene, Rause, Vince (2002), *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief*, Random House Publishing

² Sermon based on Concordia Pulpit Resources sermon series, *Good News from the Beginning: The Gospel in Genesis*, Copyright © 2025 Concordia Publishing House 3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis