

<sup>10</sup> Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. <sup>11</sup> When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. <sup>12</sup> He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. <sup>13</sup> There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. <sup>14</sup> Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. <sup>15</sup> I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

<sup>16</sup> When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." <sup>17</sup> He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." (Genesis 28:10-17)

## **I Am with You**

You maybe have a seen movie or show where immediately in the first scene everything is a disaster. You see someone is in quite the predicament and you try to get your mind to catch up to what is going on here! Then everything freezes. The narrator chimes in, "Oh, hey, that's me. Things aren't going too well. Right about now you might be wondering to yourself, 'How did things get to this point?' Well, let me tell you. It all starts when..." There's a record scratch in the background, the scenes rewind over time, and you find yourself at an earlier period.

When we meet Jacob in Genesis 28, things don't look like they are going to well for him. The sun is setting as he reaches a certain place. Nowhere else to stay, he decides to stop. As we see him contemplating life's decisions, he reaches for a stone and lies down for the night. This lonely traveler far from home, maybe tossing and turning a little bit, tries to get some sleep. One might wonder, how did he even get to this point? Record screech, rewind.

There's Esau, his twin brother, who is less than pleased with his younger brother. When he looks back Esau realizes what his brother had done. He gave up his portion of the inheritance to Jacob for a bowl of soup and some bread. What kind of person takes advantage of his brother like Jacob did to Esau?

Jump ahead a little bit. Isaac, their dad, is getting older. He's ready to give the blessing that had been passed down to him from his father, Abraham. This is God's promise that descendants would be great, prosperous, and of the eventual Savior. When Rebekah, mom, finds out Isaac is ready to give the blessing to Esau, she tells her favorite son Jacob. Together they devise a plan to trick Isaac. It works. Jacob

receives the blessing! Of course when Esau finds out, he's beside himself. Jacob has now cheated him out of his inheritance and the blessing. Begging dad, he pleads with Isaac, "Haven't you reserved any blessing for me?" Isaac answers Esau, "**I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So what can I possibly do for you, my son?**" (Genesis 27:37). For Esau, this was the last straw. A grudge burns within him against his brother. Esau makes a plan: once Isaac dies, he's going to kill his brother. When Rebekah hears about this she's afraid for Jacob. There's only one thing Jacob can do. Run. Run far away to uncle Laban's house and get out of Esau's reach. It's hidden under the pretense of finding a wife, but she and Jacob both know: he's not safe as long as he stays with the family.

So, now we are all caught up. As Jacob goes to sleep he maybe was wondering to himself, "How did I ever get to this point?" He knew. Different scenarios maybe played through his mind of "If only...I should have...I could have..." Doesn't change a thing; he had done this to himself. God had told Rebekah the promise when the twins were still in the womb, "The older will serve the younger." Jacob would have received the promised blessing all along! But Jacob just had to take it into his own hands. And now look at him. His brother literally wants to murder him. His home is no longer his home. Essentially, he's cut off from the family. He's on the run. It's not hard to imagine him struggling with feelings of loneliness, failure, disappointment, and anxiety over what to do next. Is Jacob also thinking, "Have I cut myself off from God's promise too? Will that blessing still be mine? Have I cut myself off from God? Will he also leave and abandon me?" He could blame mom, Esau, Isaac, his situation. In the end, his suffering is no one's fault except his own.

How did I get to this place? You take your pillow, put it under your head, lie down to sleep, and your mind goes into hyper-drive. You reanalyze your life. You talk through previous conversations. You compare and contrast your decisions with "should-of's" and "could-of's". You contemplate your current place in life. How did I get here? You probably aren't on the run from a sibling's real murderous threats chasing you and cutting you off from your home. But at times you can feel the tension at home. Sometimes it feels like you are living in a stranger's place. Other times you feel like you are living in a stranger's body struggling to understand why you did what you did. It was a lost temper, speaking without thinking, or saying what you would hurt. You can see those sharp words cut off your relationship with those you love so they don't want to be around you. Actions done in secret cover you with shame and embarrassment so you feel alone even when other people surround you. It's not too difficult for our minds to jump to the conclusion that maybe it's the same with God.

Finally, Jacob falls asleep and he has a dream. He sees, look, a ladder resting on the earth, with its top reaching to the heaven. His mind-eye focuses, look, angels of God

going up and going down this ladder. And then, look, there's the Lord himself over it all who speaks to Jacob: **"I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. <sup>14</sup> Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. <sup>15</sup> I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you"** (vv.13-15).

Where Jacob's actions bring him suffering, God brings grace and mercy. The Lord has not cut Jacob off from him. No, he connects himself to Jacob. Yes, Jacob's actions have consequences and he must suffer them. At the same time, God's promises do not change. God assures Jacob: "The blessing is still yours. Your descendants will have this land. They will grow and prosper. The Savior will come from your line." Yes, Jacob will be leaving. But God will bring Jacob back to this very same piece of ground where he currently sleeps. His brother is not going to kill him. Jacob has God's protection. Jacob may feel very alone, but God assures him, "I will never leave you. I am with you."

And that's what Jacob had forgotten. That's why he is in this particular situation. Instead of trusting God's promises, he thought he needed to do things himself. He lies to himself that his deceitful, sinful actions wouldn't be a big deal. He fails to believe and to understand what it means that God is with him.

Have you forgotten this too? I'm not saying that you had a lapse in your Bible knowledge or forgotten that God is present everywhere. Have you forgotten that God is with you right now while you are reading this and when you are not? Have you forgotten God is with you because you have found yourself too focused on the fear of the future and where this world is heading? Have you forgotten God is with you because concerns of this world, this life, have your mind too preoccupied? Have you forgotten so that you see the cross Jesus calls you to carry, but the struggle that comes with it seems like it is too much? So instead of carrying that cross and doing what I know God wants me to do, I do what my "self" wants simply because it's easier, it makes life momentarily more comfortable, more bearable, little more enjoyable. How many times do we drop that cross and succumb to those self-righteous thoughts that "At least I didn't do" when the conscience pricks? Other times we find ourselves spiraling in despair because our sins stare us in our faces, the consequences weigh us down, and the cross is heavy. But so often we forget that we do not need to carry this cross all alone. God is with us. And so we suffer, because we forget and instead of resisting sin, we jump into it. Sin that separates me from God. Sin that keeps me from being in God's presence. Sin that God hates. And, it's my fault.

The devil isn't wrong: God shouldn't love me. You think about how quick we are to cut someone off and leave behind when they have hurt us, not loved us as they should, taken advantage of our love. God has every right to abandon me. You aren't telling God anything he didn't already know. **"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"** (Romans 5:8). God knows what he should do to you. He knows what he is obligated to do. But instead of doing it to you, he does it to his own son. So, the Son of God descends to take on flesh and blood. He is Immanuel which means God with us. He sees the cross that he must carry with the weight of my sins and yours, the sins of the world. He sees the suffering he must endure. He knows the crushing weight of God's wrath that will come crashing down. How tempting it was to hear a friend, Peter, rebuke him telling him, "No, you don't have to that Jesus. You shouldn't be talking that way." Instead, again, as he always did, he resists sin and Satan, "Get behind me! I have work to do." And he goes to pick up His cross for my sake and yours. When I have so often turned my back on God, God instead turns his back on his Son. When I have given enough reason and evidence to leave me behind, God leaves Jesus instead. The punishment is placed on him so that we might have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. With his innocent blood pouring off the cross you are declared not guilty, justified, and saved from God's wrath. We have been reconciled with God. The broken relationship is mended. All is well between God and man, God and you. Jesus suffers and endures the punishment of hell alone so that you might never be alone. God's promise hasn't changed. Jesus lives. Jesus assures his people before he returns to His Father in heaven with the same promise God gave to Jacob, "I am with you always to the very end of the age." And if God is for us, who can be against us?

So go to Christ's cross with your sins; Jesus has already paid for them all. Be assured you are forgiven. Leave those sins behind you and turn to that new life that is yours because Jesus lives. Pick up your cross and follow him. Thanks be to God he does not leave us to carry them alone. He continues to make his face shine on you. He has no plans of ever leaving you. He's actively working for your good to bring you to him. So the almighty God continues to descend to us in Word and physical sacraments here in his house. Surely the Lord is in this place! Here we hear Jesus' voice and the promise of sins forgiven. Here God gives us the strengthening of faith to pick up that cross and follow him. Here brothers and sisters in Christ assure one another God's promise: I am with you. Amen.