

God's Gracious Care Revealed by a Ladder

Genesis 28:10-15

Halifax: 24 April 2016, 10:30 AM

Introduction

Today in our Genesis sermon series, we have come to a new section that begins with Genesis 28:10.

- In the Jewish lectionary, this is where the seventh division begins.
 - It is here that we have God giving Jacob the place of the headship of the family... of the family that is to bring forth the promised Messiah.
 - Isaac now retires, as it were, and Jacob becomes the leading patriarch.

But what has been going on with Jacob as we meet him at this time in his life?

- What have we seen about him?
 - We have seen him to be something of a deceitful, self-interested scoundrel, but we have also seen him as one who is striving for God's blessing.
 - It would seem that he has a seed of faith that is not yet fully grown.
- He wants greatness in God's kingdom,
 - which is a very good thing for him to desire...
 - but it is not good because he thinks greatness amounts to a position that puts you on top of others; a position that you must jockey for.
 - He is like Jesus' disciples were before Jesus was crucified when they kept quarreling with each other about who would be the greatest in the kingdom.
 - Until Jesus was crucified and raised again, they did not understand that the greatest in God's kingdom is the one who lays down his life for others.
 - Jesus laid down His life on the cross to secure forgiveness for us, and once we have come to Him, He works in us to transform us into those who lay down our lives for others—though our progress can be very slow.

So at the present time, Jacob was a hodgepodge of partially formed faith, confusion, hope mingled with uncertainty, guilt, and fear...quite a mix!

- He is leaving his home because he has been such scoundrel that his brother Esau wants to kill him—and he is also going to find a suitable wife for himself...
 - but what has driven him to go at this time is his fear of Esau.
- He has a vague hope in the promises of God given to Abraham and Isaac...
 - Isaac, in sending him to find a wife in Haran, has just reiterated these promises to Jacob, but God Himself has not yet, as far as we have been told, spoken directly to Jacob...
 - And you can be sure that as he gets out on his own, he is insecure and uncertain, and tinged with at least a little guilt about his behaviour that has stirred up his brother's hostility.
 - Remember as well that he was more of a homebody, but now he is on a great journey, all alone, to a foreign land with the uneasiness of guilt and a propensity to rely on himself rather than God.

Are we not often a similar sort of a hodgepodge?

- Not that the particular circumstances are the same...
 - But is it not the case that that we carry on in our lives with some guilt from sins that we have not really owned up to yet, and with some fear about the future and some uncertain faith about whether God is really with us or not?
 - You know good and well that it is often that way with you!

But what we have revealed to us in Genesis 28:10-15 is a wonderful vision that shows us how God is at work in His elect people!

- It is a vision that shows us things that we cannot see with our five senses, but things that are absolutely true!
- It is a vision that shows us that God is intensely engaged in our lives if we are among His elect people, whether we realise it or not!
 - This vision about the ladder is recorded for us to help us realise that God is with us if we are in Christ!
 - The more you grasp this reality, the happier you will be and the more godly you will be!

So let's read these words, and then examine them for our encouragement!

- The passage is Genesis 28:10-15.
- Please give me your careful attention as I read it to you, because this is God's holy word, written for our encouragement and admonition.
- Genesis 28, beginning with verse 10.

Genesis 28:10-15: Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. ¹² Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder *was* set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: "I *am* the LORD God of Abraham

your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. ¹⁴ Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. ¹⁵ 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 spoken to you."

May the Lord bless both the reading and the exposition of His word to our souls.

- There is a lot of encouragement for us here...
- There is a lot of encouragement in this ladder that Jacob sees in this vision...
 - Some have pointed out that it is probably more like a great staircase than what we think of as a ladder—and that is fine—but really irrelevant..
- And I want to begin, first of all, by calling you to

I. Look at this ladder and be encouraged with what is shown to us here!

- A. It shows us that the God of heaven is busy looking after us if we are His elect people!
1. Jacob represents all of God's chosen people—all of the elect who, like him, are appointed to obtain salvation.
 - It is unclear whether Jacob himself is in possession of true saving faith yet.
 - Some think that he obtains it here, some think he already possessed it, and others think his true conversion comes later...
 - But it really doesn't matter.
 - We know that he is chosen by God for salvation and we know that in this passage he receives revelation that the Lord is looking after him.
 - At whatever point you are along the way, if you are destined for salvation, God is looking after you now...
 - All of our times are in His hands; they are written in His book.
 - He is working in our lives long before we are brought to full saving faith.
 2. We cannot see all of His activity, but this vision shows us that there is a whole lot of activity about us.
 - That is what visions are often for—to show us things that we cannot see with our regular senses.
 - We saw that recently in Revelation chapter 1, where we saw how Jesus was presented among seven lampstands that represent the seven churches.
 - This showed us that He was with His churches, caring for them, watching over them, speaking His word into their lives through the ministers He had appointed for them.
- So with this ladder we see that that God is at work in our lives...
- B. And just what is going on with this ladder?
1. Well you can see from verse 12 that the ladder is set up next to Jacob and that the angels of God are going up and down on it!
 - a. They are going between Jacob and God.
 - This shows how they minister to us as God's people—in ways that we cannot see—and how they were ministering to Jacob in particular when he thought he was all alone.
 - b. We are often afraid and lonely and insecure—as well as a bit guilty—
 - but God is working incessantly and intensely in our lives.
 - He is with us and He is fully engaged in all of our affairs.
 - He is not aloof or detached, but intimately involved.
 - c. As you can see, the LORD Himself is at the top of the ladder, directing all of this activity that is going on for us!
 - He is the one who dispatches His angels, directing them concerning us, charging them to look after us according to His will.
 - And like Jacob, most of the time we are unaware of His presence.

2. This means that you are not alone—the way you often think you are.
 - The Lord is near, He is with you.
 - a. Jacob was completely mistaken when he thought that he had to jockey for a position in God’s kingdom...
 - All the while that he was doing this, God was busy working in a way that was invisible to Jacob to bring about His divine purposes concerning Jacob.
 - He was busy guiding Jacob into blessing, even through Jacob’s ridiculous antics and folly.
 - b. It’s not about you and what you do, it’s about God and what He does!
 - It is for you to trust Him, to follow Him, to put yourself in His hands, and to watch Him work...
 - Certainly, you are to work—but your work is the work of following Him, not the work jockeying for His blessing,
 - not the work of excuse making and blaming others...
 - not the work trying to prove your worth or your worthiness...
 - but the work of serving the LORD with child-like trust.
 - As long as you keep striving as if it all depends on you, you are in a very insecure position!
 - What hope do you have in securing God’s blessing by your own efforts?
 - And even more—what hope do you have if (unlike Jacob) you are looking for blessing that has nothing to do with God!

TRANS> But what a great encouragement it is to see this ladder that shows us that the LORD Himself is busy bringing His blessing to us even when we are weak and confused.

II. But we are given even more encouragement about this ladder by our Lord Jesus Christ!

- Please turn to John 1 and let me show you how Jesus speaks about this ladder.
 - In John 1:51, we have additional revelation about this wonderful ladder!
- A. In verse 51, Jesus tells Nathanael that He (Jesus) is the ladder between us and heaven!
 1. He calls Himself the Son of Man, and He says, **“Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”**
 - Nathanael could not fully understand how Jesus could be the ladder at this time, but he would understand it in the future...
 - None of the other disciples could understand it either...but after Jesus was crucified and raised again,
 - it would be a matter utmost rejoicing to think of Jesus as the ladder that connects sinners to heaven!

2. If we look at the full conversation between Jesus and Nathanael, it helps to understand the purpose of this ladder even more.
 - a. It appears that Nathanael had just worked some things out with God when he was under a fig tree (a place where Jews often had their devotions)...
 - because as soon as Jesus sees Nathanael coming to meet him, He says, as recorded in verse 47, **“Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!”**
 - This is the language of Psalm 32 where David confesses the sin that he had been hiding from God...
 - In the first two verses, he says:
 - **Psalm 32:1-2: Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2 Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.**
 - You know how it can be hard to admit your sin and how you can go on excusing yourself and justifying yourself...
 - And as long as you do, there is deceit in you...
 - But once you break down and confess your sin to God, there is no deceit in your spirit.
 - The idea here of being a man without deceit means that he has finally confessed his sin to God!
 - David speaks about how miserable he was while he was hiding his sin...
 - You know how we do that...we don't really face up to it...
 - We blame other people,
 - We make excuses,
 - We try to justify ourselves,
 - We compare ourselves with other we think are worse than we are...
 - It is a miserable business and it leaves you in your sin...
 - As David goes on to say in verse 3 & 4: **When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. 4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer.**
 - He was so miserable...
 - It was not until he stopped being deceitful that he was set free.
 - As he testifies in verse 5, **I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” And You forgave the iniquity of my sin.**
 - It is only when there is no deceit in you because you have confessed your sins to God that you are truly blessed.
- b. And you see how Nathanael immediately says, **“How do You know me?”** after Jesus points him out in this extraordinary way...
 - He knows that he has just confessed his sin to God—very likely he was meditating with joy on Psalm 32, feeling the freedom from deceit.

- He had been under John's preaching and John had been preaching a message of repentance, and perhaps Nathanael had finally faced his sin as everyone must do if we are to find God's forgiveness...
- And then Jesus makes it completely certain that this is what He is talking about when He answers very specifically how He knows that Nathanael is without deceit when He says, at the end of verse 48:
 - **“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”**
 - He shows that He knew that Nathanael had just unburdened himself of his sins by putting away his deceit...
 - And you see how Nathanael immediately says: **“Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (v. 49)**
 - And it is then that Jesus says, in verse 50-51: **“Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these... Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”**
- c. This is a clear reference to Jacob's vision in Genesis 28!
 - This ladder that connects sinners to the living God with angels going up and down on it is Jesus Himself!

TRANS> But as I told you before, Nathanael could not yet fully understand how Jesus could be the ladder.

- It was something that for him was yet to be seen...
 - That is why Jesus says, **“Hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man...”**
 - It was something that Nathanael would see in the future...
- B. But my brothers and sisters, we are in a position to see clearly how Jesus is the ladder that connects sinners to God!
 1. We now know how it is that Jesus is the Mediator between God and His sinful people.
 - The ladder is Jesus crucified!
 - We were entirely cut off from God by our sin.
 - But Jesus made the connection between us and heaven by dying on the cross for our sins!
 - By His stripes we are healed.
 - All we like sheep have gone astray, but the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.
 - The ladder that connects us to heaven is Jesus crucified, bearing our sins!
 - That is what opens heaven to us so that we can be saved and have God looking after us to bless us!
 2. Jacob's ladder is quite a scandalous thing until we see this!

- a. It is scandalous that the LORD of heaven should show mercy to a scoundrel like Jacob.
 - He was this deceitful, self-interested, scheming scoundrel!
 - How was it right for there to be this channel of blessing between heaven and a man like Jacob?
 - How could the Lord of glory be linked to the likes of him?
- b. And my dear friends, how could He be linked to the likes of you?
 - 1) It is scandalous!
 - The world has every reason to look at us, boasting in our salvation, and to say—*them—who do they think they are to have exclusive rights to God's blessing?*
 - A lot of people look at us and they wonder how we could claim to be God's people.
 - It is a good question—and the truth is, they don't even know the half of our problems.
 - But we must tell them that it is all because God has set up a ladder between earth and heaven.
 - That His mercy comes to us, not because we are good, but because Jesus died on the cross to take away the guilt of our sins.
 - We must tell them that they are welcome too if they will but acknowledge their need of Him and come to Him.
 - They too are deceitful self-interested scoundrels, just like us.
 - But that is the kind of people that heaven connects with through the ladder of Jesus on the cross.
 - That is the kind of people Jesus came to redeem—not the righteous, but sinners.
 - That is the reason He went to the cross.
 - But how can you know if the ladder is set up for you?
 - 2) You can know that the ladder is connecting you to heaven when you confess your sins and come to Jesus...
 - The truth is, the connection was made even before that in order to bring you to the point where you would confess your sins.
 - When the ladder is set up for you, it shines the light of God on you so that you begin to see your sins—and in such a way that you cannot keep running away.
 - And you begin to see the ladder—to see Jesus crucified and to see how much you need Him...
 - And then you come to Him for mercy, and when you do, you know that the ladder is for you.
 - Then you cannot leave the ladder—you dare not leave it—you do not want to leave it—because it is your only connection to God's mercy.

- 3) Sometimes the ladder is set up for the worst people and we wonder why better people weren't chosen.
 - It seems scandalous, but it is in this way that we see clearly that it is not about our merit—if it were, none of us would be saved!
 - Sometimes it comes to people when they are very young (people like Samuel or David or Timothy) and sometimes it comes to us when we are old...
 - But in every case, the grace that comes from heaven overtakes you and it conquers you and it keeps on pursuing you all the days of your life.

C. We need to be greatly encouraged when we see this link to heaven revealed.

1. It should encourage us to see how God joins Himself to unworthy sinners and shows mercy to them.
 - It should encourage us to come to Him.
 - It should encourage us to pray that He will have mercy on others also—especially on our children.
2. What a secure connection we have in Jesus the ladder!
 - God will not turn away His Son!
 - He will not reject His offering for our sins.
 - If you have come to Him, not in deceit trying to pretend that you don't need such a Saviour, but no longer able to live with that deceit...
 - then you can have full assurance that God's grace from heaven is yours forever!
3. We have the full blessing of heaven through Him.
 - You are not alone!
 - Heaven is very busy working intimately and intensively in your life.
 - The ladder is not something you climb up, but it is a ladder by which heaven and heaven's grace come down to you.
 - It is that which blesses you and keeps you and brings grace to you even when you cannot discern it.
 - The vision of the ladder makes all this visible to us.

TRANS> But God is not in the business of giving visions and signs to us without also explaining them with His word.

- And that is what He does here...

III. Along with this vision, God also declared His promises to give us even more encouragement.

- Remember that God's word of promise is absolutely reliable.
 - You can fully depend upon every word that proceeds from His mouth.
 - He stakes His reputation on being true to His covenant.

A. So what does He say here to Jacob (and to us) after giving Jacob this vision?

1. First, He identifies Himself as the God of his father Abraham and of Isaac.

- This shows that He does not change.
 - He does not have a new set of promises or a new plan for each generation.
 - He has one plan of mercy and of grace that He is working out in each generation, one step at time.
 - Known unto God are all of His works from the foundation of the world.
 - The promise made to Abraham and Isaac is the same promise that belongs to Jacob.
 - Bible religion goes all the back to the promise made to Adam.
2. God promises to give Jacob the land on which he lies...
- It is the same land that He promised to Abraham and Isaac and their descendants, and now it is promised to Jacob and his descendants...
 - And this land is given to them with one great purpose...
 - That they might serve Him as their God and might be His people—the people who receive mercy from heaven—the people who live at the foot of the ladder where God’s mercy comes.
 - And it is all that they might bring forth the Son from heaven who is the ladder for them and for all the families of the earth.
 - You see that in verse 14 where God says, **“in you and in your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed.”**
 - The seed is the ladder—whom we have seen to be the Son of God who was also crucified...
 - It is through Him alone that the blessings of heaven come to men.
 - And the glorious news here is that when He comes, it will not only be for Jacob and his family, but for all the families of the earth...
 - They will have access to heaven’s blessings through the ladder.
3. And then in verse 15, the LORD applies the promise personally to Jacob...
- He says, **“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 spoken to you.”**
 - The care of heaven is not just for the whole church, but also for each individual within the church—it is for Jacob right now in his travels.
 - And it is not just for this night when he might have been uneasy, but the care of God revealed through this ladder is going to continue for him until he is brought back safely—until all is fulfilled!
 - The vision will go away, but the reality that it revealed will continue with Jacob to the end!

TRANS> We will look at how Jacob responds to all of this next week, Lord willing.

- Suffice it for now to say that he is awestruck and filled with gratitude!
- God Almighty has shown him that He is with him forever, and that He is going to bless him and keep him forever!

- B. But do not miss that this blessing—these sure mercies—are for you too.
1. If you are elect, if God has chosen you for salvation, He is already working in you and for you whether you know it or not.
 - His grace will bring you in.
 - But there is only one way you can know that.
 2. If you want to be sure of this everlasting connection with heaven's grace...
 - If you want to know for certain that this blessing is yours...
 - a. Then you must come to the foot of ladder.
 - You don't have to climb it—no—rather come putting away all pretenses that you are fit for God's blessing...
 - Be like Nathanael—put away your deceit and come confessing your sins.
 - Do as David did and stop refusing to admit what you are before God and come to Jesus crucified for mercy.
 - b. We have seen where this ladder is—we have seen what it is...
 - It is Jesus who was crucified...
 - That is the ladder that God set up to bring mercy to all the families of the earth.
 - God did not set up this ladder in a mere vision...but in real history!
 - Jesus was openly crucified and He is the ladder by which mercy comes.
 - God promises that anyone who comes to this ladder will not be turned away...
 - His mercy and grace will come to you from heaven through Jesus Christ.
 - Don't come to climb up this ladder, but cast yourself at His feet, and heaven's mercies will come down to you forever.
 - He has never rejected anyone who comes.
 - But as long as you hang on to and keep silent about your sins and pretend that you are worthy, you will never be able to find this ladder.

Conclusion: So there you are, like Jacob, going along in life, a hodgepodge of faith, hope, fear, guilt and uncertainty, just like Jacob,

- but if you are among the elect of God, then all the while the LORD is busy working in you to bring His salvation to you—
 - His grace just keeps on overtaking you.

But I warn you, as long as you make excuses about your sin and refuse to come to Jesus as the only ladder by which God's blessing and grace can come to you,

- You have no grounds for assuming that you are among the elect.
- **Pr 28:13: He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy—**Just ask David.