

Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Reading Together
The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus

January 23 – Genesis 25: 19 – 34, 27: 1 - 41

It is interesting that just as Abraham and Sarah had difficulty in conceiving a child, so too did Abraham's son, Isaac, and his wife Rebekah. They didn't have to wait quite so long, but they were in their 60's before Rebekah became pregnant with twin boys, Esau and Jacob. As we read in the account, even though they were twins, Esau was the firstborn of the two. In that culture, by rights, Esau should have been the one to take the leadership of the family after Isaac died. That was the way things normally worked in their world. By rights, Esau would receive the birthright, meaning that all that belonged to Isaac would become Esau's to manage, and Jacob would live under Esau's rule and authority. By rights, Esau would receive the blessing, which would mean that the promise God had made to Abraham, that all nations of the world would be blessed through his offspring, should have passed through Isaac to Esau. But God had other plans. God was about to turn things upside down. Look again at Genesis 25: 23. God tells Rebekah that the normal order will be reversed—the older will serve the younger. As you read the rest of the account you can see how this happens. First, Jacob takes Esau's birthright by bribing him with some stew, and then in chapter 27, Jacob takes Esau's blessing by tricking his aging father, Isaac. Why did God do this? If God wanted Jacob to have the birthright and the blessing then why didn't God just arrange for Jacob to be the firstborn? We really can't answer questions like that, just like we can't answer questions like why God allows some to hear the Gospel and respond to it, but not allow others. Paul uses Jacob and Esau to illustrate this very important point.

Romans 9:8-16 *In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. ⁹ For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son." ¹⁰ Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. ¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-- in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls-- she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." ¹⁴ What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I*

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have compassion." ¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

Stop and think about this. Isn't it a wonderful thing that all of this relies on God's mercy and not our effort?

As you continue reading the account of Jacob's life, it is easy to see that there was nothing about him that should have made God choose him over Esau. Jacob at one time in his life was a cheat, a swindler, and totally self-absorbed. But yet, for his own reasons God chose Jacob to be the one who should inherit all the promises God had made to Abraham, and, ultimately, Jesus would come by way of Jacob's family line rather than Esau's. God has mercy and compassion on whom he wants to, rather than questioning why we have been shown grace, we should just be amazed by it!

January 24 – Genesis 28: 10 - 15

Jacob was a mama's boy. His brother Esau loved the outdoors and would go hunting and probably would have thought nothing of sleeping out under the stars. Jacob liked to hang around the kitchen and be with his mother. He wasn't too fond of the great outdoors, or being away from his mother for that matter, but when he stole his brother's blessing, he had no choice but to venture out into the wild because Esau wanted to kill him. So, Jacob goes on the run. You know life isn't going well when you have to use a stone as a pillow!

I think Jacob was probably feeling pretty hopeless at that point in time. He had no clue what was going to happen next or how he was ever going to get his life on track. But as Jacob slept that night, with a stone for a pillow, God came to him in a dream and brought him to his knees, because in the midst of Jacob's hopelessness God gave Jacob a vision of heaven, or maybe more precisely a vision of a stairway leading to heaven. The intersection of Jacob's hopelessness with heaven's hope and heaven's glory brought Jacob to his knees and it brought him to the very gate of heaven. It brought him to the place where God could begin to get his life moving in the right direction. This vision made Jacob stop

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looking down and focused his attention on the one place where help could truly come from.

Psalm 121:1-2 I lift up my eyes to the hills-- where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

But let's stop and think about this vision that Jacob had for just a minute. How does this vision relate to Jesus, "The Golden Thread?" In John chapter 1 Jesus introduces himself to one of his future disciples, Nathaniel, and this is part of the conversation Jesus has with Nathaniel:

John 1:49-51 Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." ⁵⁰ Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." ⁵¹ He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Look at what Jesus says about himself in a description that very much parallels the vision that Jacob had the night in the wilderness. Instead of a staircase, what does Jesus say the angels are ascending and descending on? It's the Son of Man. What Jesus is saying is that he is the staircase between heaven and earth.

When Adam and Eve sinned it created a gulf between man and God, a gulf between heaven and earth. Jesus is the stairway that bridges the gulf. Jesus is the mediator who bridges the gap between God and us.

Hebrews 9:14-15 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! ¹⁵ For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance-- now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

Jesus is the connection between heaven and earth. Jesus makes it possible for the help of heaven to come to us in our times of deepest need. When we come to the intersection of hopelessness and heaven, Jesus is there. In the midst of our hopelessness there stands one able to give us hope. In the midst of our hopelessness, rather than looking down at the ground, we need to lift our eyes to the heavens to Jesus.

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January 25 – Genesis 28: 16 - 22

As Jacob awakes from his sleep he is stunned by the vision (dream) that God had given to him. Jacob knows that he not only enjoys a special place with God, but that he is in a special place, as well. Look at the words Jacob uses to describe this place in verse 17. He calls it the house of God (that is what Bethel means) and the gate to heaven. Just as we saw the stairway to heaven that Jacob saw in this vision gave us a very powerful picture of Jesus, so also do these two expressions that Jacob uses to describe the place where he has slept.

Jacob called this place the gate to heaven and in John 10: 7 Jesus said something very similar about himself.

John 10:7 Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep."

During the time when Jesus lived, the gate to the sheepfold was nothing more than an opening in the wall. At night the shepherd would become the gate by laying down in the opening. This was how the shepherd protected his sheep. Nothing could get into the fold without the shepherd allowing it to get in, and no sheep could leave the fold without the shepherd allowing it to leave. Jesus is the gate to heaven. No one can enter heaven without Jesus.

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus is the only gate by which we can enter into God's presence, but as the gate, Jesus also keeps us there. Jesus stands between us and those who seek to remove us from the presence of God. He is not just our savior, he is also our powerful defender and king, defeating our enemies (Satan, sin and death) and keeping us safe and secure forever.

John 10:27-30 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it

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is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

January 26 – Revelation 21: 3 – 7

In yesterday's reading, from Genesis 28: 16 – 22, we saw that when Jacob awoke from his dream that he proclaimed the place where he was standing the "Gate to Heaven," and the "House of God." He used these terms to describe this spot, because this was a place where he had experienced the presence of God in a very real and powerful way. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned, we have wanted to get back to the Garden, back to the place where God dwelt with men. Whether we realize it or not, each of us has a deep desire to experience the presence of God in our lives.

This passage that we read today, from Revelation, comes at the very end of the Bible, at the end of the story. It is speaking about a time when Satan has been defeated, and the power of sin and death have been destroyed. It is a time that we look forward to in great anticipation. A time when there will be no more sorrow, no more tears, no more sickness, no more death. It is a time when the house of God literally fills everything. Look at verse 3 again. "The dwelling of God will be with men and he will live with them." That will be a special time and we look forward to that day, but because of Jesus we can also experience the presence of God each day in our lives here on earth, just as Jacob did that night while he slept.

Jesus came and brought the very presence of God right into our world. Jesus said in John 14:9 that, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." When Jesus came to earth God, through his Son, was literally making his dwelling with men.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

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And even though Jesus has now ascended into heaven, where he is seated at the right hand of God, we still can experience the presence of God everyday of our lives because of Jesus' work on the cross.

Hebrews 10:19-23 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

January 27 – Genesis 29: 1 – 28

Rebekah sent Jacob to his Uncle Laban, so that he would be safe from Esau, and also so that Jacob could find a wife from among his own people, rather than from the wicked Canaanites. When Jacob arrived at Laban's, he saw Rachel and immediately fell in love with her. She was so beautiful that Jacob was willing to give up seven years of his life to make her his wife. But as you read the account, you see that Laban tricked Jacob, and instead of Rachel he ended up being married to Leah. But Jacob's love for Rachel was so great that he was willing to work another seven years, so he could marry her as well. Can you imagine loving someone so much that you would be willing to give up fourteen years of your life just have her for your wife? Jacob's willingness to give up his life, so he could make Rachel his wife, is in a small way a vivid picture of the love that Jesus has for us.

John 13:1 *It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.*

These words from John's Gospel serve as the introduction to the story of Jesus becoming like a servant and stooping down low to wash the feet of his disciples. But that was just the beginning of showing us the full extent of his love. Jesus' love for us was so great that he didn't just give up fourteen years of his life for us, he gave up everything so that we could belong to him.

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Philippians 2:5-8 *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!*

January 28 – Genesis 29: 31 – 35

We were introduced to Leah in yesterday's reading, and it would be easy to think that she is not a very important player in the story of Jacob or the story of the Bible for that matter. But as we will see, nothing could be further from the truth. As you stop and think about Leah's life, you can't help but see that she was despised and rejected by seemingly everyone. Her father Laban didn't want her, and Jacob certainly didn't want her. But as you read the Bible you can't help but notice that God is constantly at work turning things upside down. Humbling the proud and raising up the downtrodden.

Proverbs 3:34 *He (God) mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble.*

Taking those who are seemingly weak and making them strong.

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 *God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him.*

Taking the foolish and shaming the wise.

1 Corinthians 1:27 *But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.*

Isn't that exactly what God did with Jesus? Like Leah, Jesus was rejected and despised by men. Writing 800 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah wrote this about Jesus:

Isaiah 53:2-4 *He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. ³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he took*

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up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

But that is not the end of Jesus' story is it? Jesus was despised by men, he was crushed for our sins, but after three days in the tomb Jesus rose again as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Hebrews 2:9 *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*

The Gospel is all about God turning things upside down, and going against the way of the world.

1 Corinthians 1:18 *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

1 Corinthians 1:25 *For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.*

Even though Leah was basically dumped on Jacob just to get her married, and even though Leah didn't seem to have much going for her, and even though Jacob certainly did not love her, God had big plans for her. She is very much a part of the Gospel story. As you see in this passage Leah would become the mother of Judah, the tribe of Israel from which King David would come, and the tribe from which Jesus, the Lion of Judah, would come.

January 29 – Genesis 32: 22 – 32

As we read this account of Jacob, I want to make sure we understand that, in this case, Jacob is not a picture of Jesus. In fact, Jacob is much more a picture of us than he is of Jesus. Who is it that Jacob is wrestling with? It is not just another man, it is God, or maybe better stated a theophany (an Old Testament appearance of God). Some, maybe many, argue that this theophany is Jesus making an earthly appearance before his birth, but we cannot be sure of that. What we know for sure is that this was not just an ordinary man that Jacob wrestled with. This "man" had the power to touch Jacob's hip and throw it out of socket. He had the power to bless Jacob and change Jacob's name to Israel. But the clearest evidence of all is that, when the

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wrestling match had ended, Jacob himself exclaimed that, "I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

Nonetheless, we can draw some interesting comparisons between Jesus and Jacob. Jacob was alone at night, facing his fears of what tomorrow would bring. The night before Jesus was crucified, he too was alone in the Garden of Gethsemane facing his fears of what tomorrow would bring.

Luke 22:41-44 *He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ⁴² "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." ⁴³ An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. ⁴⁴ And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*

Just as Jacob was wounded in his struggle with God, Jesus was wounded as God's wrath poured out on him.

1 Peter 2:24 *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

After the struggle, God changed Jacob's name to Israel. The name Israel meant that Jacob had struggled with God and with man and had overcome. In a very real way, Jesus on the cross struggled with God and with man, because he took our sins, and as a result, God's wrath was poured out on him. Jesus also won, and because he won Satan, sin and death are forever defeated.

There is also one last connection between the two stories. As a result of Jacob's struggle his name was changed to Israel and he became the father of the Israelite people in fulfillment of the promise God had made to his forefather Abraham. Because of Jesus' triumph on the cross, Paul tells us that he too has been given a new name—King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Philippians 2:9 *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

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And in a sense, Jesus has also become the father of a new people. He is not called father in the Bible because God is our Father, but Jesus is referred to as our elder brother, and in Jesus' day, the elder brother had responsibility over the whole family just as a father would.

Hebrews 2:10-13 *In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. ¹¹ Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. ¹² He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." ¹³ And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me."*