

Genesis 28:10-16

Jacob left Beer-sheba and went towards Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder* set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood beside him* 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; and 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 all the families of the earth shall be blessed* in you and in your offspring. Know that 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.' Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!'

John 18:33-38

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, 'I find no case against him.'

“Hidden Truths on the Rungs of a Ladder”

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What is truth? Well, that's a great question. It's a question that I think Jacob grappled with. Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Rebecca, Jacob who had a twin named Esau. Esau was favorite to his dad as he grew up, because he was a man of the soil, and he hunted and went out into the wilderness. Esau was rugged. Jacob was favored more by his mom, Rebecca. He was more mellow. He was a tentbody... you know, homebody.... Those siblings fought, and up through their adolescence they didn't get along very well, and then, in their young adulthood, some deception took place in the family. Jacob said, "I have to leave. I have to leave Beersheba. I have to go in search of my own, I have to liberate myself, I need freedom, I need my own identity, I've got to get out of this family, and hopefully, even to find a spouse. Find a woman that I can marry." So he left Beersheba, and he went to Haran.

Now, most of us don't think much of getting in our cars or whatever vehicle you have, and driving down the road for a day's trip, or maybe even a two-day trip. Most of us

don't think much about that. We get in our car this morning, we take off, go down I-25 to the south, we go out and around the airport, get on I-70, shoot straight across the state of Kansas, come to Kansas City, Missouri. It's about 600 miles, the same distance from Beersheba to Haran. 600 miles, and Jacob is striking out; this tentbody is going to walk 600 miles without a compass. He's going to be out there on the rocky roads in his sandals, and the first night that he's gone, he goes that first full day, and the night comes, the sun sets, and he's exhausted. He lays down on the side of the road, and he finds a big rock. He rests his head on that rock, and he sleeps like a baby. (By the way, I do think that people who say they sleep like a baby usually don't have one. At least that was my experience.) So he slept like a rock. Well, no he slept on a rock, on a rock, let's get it right. He slept on a rock, and he had this incredible dream. He dreamed all night long about a ladder. A ladder that stretched from earth to Heaven, from Jacob to God. It was a connection. The symbolism of the ladder was a connection between a human being and a God who had created this human being. And the angels ran up and down the ladder all night, probably trying to remind them of their connection to one another.

And all of a sudden, amidst the dream, God speaks to Jacob, and God says - and this is to establish God - God says, "Jacob, I am the God of your grandparents, Abraham and Sarah, and I am the God of your parents, Isaac and Rebecca, and I've come to tell you, and to give you a promise, a promise of truth, and that is that I am with you, and I will keep you wherever you go. That's my promise to you. I will keep you, wherever you go."

You know, these ladders, they have a way of reminding us, sometimes, that we only have partial truth. We think we've got the truth sometimes, and we do the best we can with it. We take all our experiences about life, we take a life's experience, we tell ourselves a story about that experience, we build on it, we make a story out of it. And then we draw conclusions - it must be true. And then we have feelings about it. Maybe you've had a friend who has moved away, and you wanted to keep in contact with them, but you've written and they don't write back. You've e-mailed, and you don't hear anything. You make a telephone call and leave a voice mail and they don't answer it. Pretty soon, that's your experience. So now you start to tell yourself a story about that. My story is, there's something wrong here. Did I say something? Have I done something wrong? Do they not like me any more? We used to be the best of friends..... That's your story. And then you start to draw conclusions: Well, they're just too busy to make a response. We get into all these feelings that we have. And pretty soon, we get a telephone call. And now we have a new experience. The telephone call says to us, "Our son has been very ill, very ill. We've been in and out of the hospital over the last two or three months, we've been in and out of doctors' offices. When he was feeling all right, we had to home school him, because he couldn't even go to school We haven't made contact with anybody." Now we have a new experience. We tell ourselves another kind of a story, a story of truth, because we have new information. We draw more conclusions now, we understand. Our feelings are different, our feelings are of compassion and caring, because now we know the truth.

Cheryl and I were back East some few years ago in New England, and we went into one of those shops where they have all the woolens and the maple syrups, and we were having a great time just looking around, and I saw this purple suitcase, and I said, "I have

never seen a purple suitcase like that. The store owner said, "That's the only one we have, and I've never seen one either." I said to Cheryl, "You know, we don't travel a lot, but when we do," - I know, there are all kinds of stories about our travels - "but when we do, I can picture that purple suitcase going around the carousel, and I'll spot it and I'll grab it because nobody else has a purple suitcase like we do. I've never seen one like that, and it's be so easy..." She said, "Get it." So we bought it. A year later we took a trip. Now, sometimes we pack together. But she said, "David, you love that suitcase." I said, "I do. No one else has one." She said, "Pack on your own." Sometimes we pack together, she said "Pack on your own." So I put my stuff in it, took it, got off the plane, went and looked, and there was our suitcase, going around the carousel. Nobody had a purple suitcase like ours. And I took it, and we drove thirty miles to our motel, and we started, which is our custom, to unpack our clothes the minute we get there. Got to hang a few things up, not a lot, but some. And I opened the suitcase, and I looked at it, and I said, "Cheryl, I thought we were packing separately." She said, "We did." I said, "No, no no." Now, see, I've got an experience. And I'm good at talk, this is my story. And I said, "Well, why did you pack your blouses in my suitcase?" She said, "I didn't pack any blouses." And now, I tell myself the story, "She forgot." Because we sometimes pack together, and I drew conclusions. She forgot, and she packed her blouses in my suitcase. Nobody else has a purple suitcase like that." And I had feelings, and they weren't real generous at the time. And I started to take her blouses out and I reached down and realized - it's not our suitcase. Somebody else had a purple suitcase, and they've got ours, and we've got theirs. That's a new story. That is a story of truth. Now we know the truth. And I went back down, and said "I'm sorry, I apologize." I said, "I really am sorry. I just thought..." and I started to tell myself... It's a new story now. It's a new conclusion.

We all have these instances in our lives, you see, where we tell ourselves these stories, and then finally the truth comes to us, and the rungs of the ladder ring out at us and say, "Now you know the truth." Zachariah, the Old Testament prophet, prophesied 500 years before the birth of Jesus. He was a minor prophet, minor only because of the length of his book, not because of his message. He said two things to the people in the land of Judah. He said, there are two things I want you to remember. Number one, do not plot misfortune on your family, on your friends, on your church, do not plot misfortune. He said, it is prohibited for you to do that. The second thing he said was, you need to seek the truth and speak the truth. Seek the truth and speak the truth. And he said, you are obligated to do that. Good old Zachariah, talking to all of us. But speaking the truth sometimes is very difficult. It's really hard to do sometimes.

Shirley was a plumber. She worked with a group of plumbers. She was the only woman plumber. She'd been there three months. She had to leave at 3:00 every day. They worked till 4. When she hired on she said, "Don't tell anybody why I'm leaving." She said, "I'm sorry, but..." Her supervisor knew why, but he was pledged to secrecy. "Don't tell them, please." Finally the workforce got so disrupted, they'd go out and come back early because she had to leave, and they didn't understand it, and she said, "I'm too embarrassed to talk about it." Finally, they called a meeting. Shirley said, "We've got to tell the truth. It's hard, but I've got to tell them." So they called the meeting, and Shirley said, "You know, it's really been difficult for me, these three months, and I appreciate

your tolerating me, but I know you're upset because I leave earlier than you do, and I'm not able to tell you, and today I'll tell you. The truth is, I go to school. I go to Front Range Community College, and I have to be there at 3:30 for my class, and I have to leave here at 3:00, so I clean up in the truck and I go to class." One of the plumbers looked at her and said, "I don't understand that. Why, Shirley, could you not tell us? We would celebrate your going to school. It's wonderful for you to go to school. We've all been to school. Look at the patch on our arms - master plumber. We've all been to school. Why couldn't you have said that?" She said, "Because I was so embarrassed." And they said, "Why would you be embarrassed to tell us you went to school?" She said, "Because I take reading. Do you know how hard it is to be the only woman in this company of plumbers, and then also to be the only one that can't read? Don't you notice, when we go out on our jobs, how you read the instructions and I do the work?" They said, "Yeah, we noticed." The truth. Those plumbers had gone up and down that ladder so many times, trying to figure out why she left early, and now they had the truth, and the truth set everybody free, difficult as it was for her to speak it.

Jesus said, "I am the truth. I have come to speak the truth." We're going to sing a hymn in a moment, and the hymn says, "Open my eyes, that I might see the truth. Open my ears, that I might hear voices of truth. Open my mouth, that I might dare speak the truth." There's old Jacob's ladder, reminding us that sometimes we don't always have the truth. We do what we can do, but when the truth hits us sometimes, we have to go down and tell ourselves a different story and draw some different conclusions. At the end of that old spiritual we sang about that ladder, it said, each verse ends with "Soldiers of the Cross." Soldiers of the cross. If there was anybody that went up and down that ladder, it was those soldiers. We talked about them three weeks ago. They pounded nails into a man hanging on a cross, and their experience was that he was going to be a king, he was going to rule the world, he was going to be the enemy, he was going to over take us. And they told themselves that story, and they drew their conclusions, and they took action with their feelings and they pounded nails. Then in the midst of that, they heard somebody from a cross utter some words, some words of forgiveness, words of love and caring and "take care of my family." They looked out and saw people kneeling down, and crying, and they saw people worshipping, in agony, and then all of a sudden they found out they had a different story. It was a different experience for them at that moment, and they went up the ladder with the truth, and one of the soldiers said, "Surely this must be the Son of God." The same God, the very same God that said to Jacob, "I will not leave you. I will keep you. I will keep you wherever you go, wherever you go." And I think that's the truth. Amen.