

## The Journey Home

Sunday, November 7, 2021 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

Genesis 28:15 “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.”

- Introduction: The people of faith on a journey to the great city.

The second passage of Scripture for today is from the famous chapter of heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11. Starting with Abel in the early chapters of Genesis, the chapter touches on one great saint of the past after another. Abraham, Sarah, Enoch, Moses, Rahab and others. The writer of the book mentioned that he did not have the time to write of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel. Would that he did have the time. He wrote of their accomplishments, their heroism and how the "world was not worthy of them." It gives us much to consider. In the middle of the passage, we find the very definition of faith, verse 6. It reads "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." It also shows us the goal, for all these people, held up to us as examples, was to seek a city made by God, and that is the same goal of every follower of Christ, including us in this present day. All our journeys are journeys home, and I believe that we can learn about our journey by considering what we know about the journeys of any of these people, and today we'll note an episode in the life of Abraham's grandson, Isaac.

- Set the stage

To set the stage, so to speak, we go back to Genesis 27 and 28. Jacob, our hero for today, has acted in a manner that was anything but heroic. Jacob was the slightly younger twin brother of Esau, and he conspired with his mother, Rebekah to deceive his father Isaac, who had developed eye problems and couldn't see well. Old and nearing the end of his days on earth, Isaac was preparing to bless his two sons, an

honor that they took very seriously. The blessings were prophetic and spoke forth destiny for the person receiving the blessing and his offspring for many generations beyond. It was of paramount importance and Jacob knew that Esau would get the better blessing and he wanted it for himself. Now Esau had red hair and hairy arms, and was an outdoorsman, a fine hunter. Jacob, knowing this, disguised himself and took his father food from the hunt and pretended to be Esau in order to gain the blessing intended for Esau. It worked, and when the real Esau came later, Isaac realized that he had been deceived but could not remedy the situation because once the blessing was offered, it could not be retracted. Esau would have to settle for the lesser blessing reserved for the second son.

Later, after Isaac's death, Rebekah learned of Esau's intentions to avenge his theft of blessing by murdering Jacob, and she helped him escape, not realizing that Jacob would be gone for years and that she would not see him again. Jacob was now on the run and would later marry sisters Rachel and Leah and spend years working for his father in law, Laban, who proved to be just as devious and deceptive to Jacob as Jacob was to his father and brother. On the run from his brother, and yet to meet his two wives and in laws, Jacob, apparently alone on a mountain north of what is now Jerusalem, sleeps with a rock for a pillow. During the night he has a dream in which he learns that he is at a portal to heaven, with angels descending to earth on errands for God and returning to heaven having completed their assignments. The Lord speaks to Jacob from heaven, identifying Himself as the God of his fathers (including the one he deceived) and assuring Jacob with these words: "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." Jacob awakens from this dream deeply moved and marks the place with stones as a monument to the event. He will return to it years later. For now, let's look at the Lord's promise to "keep" Jacob.

- Meaning of “keep”

The word translated "to keep" means to create a hedge about someone or something, to guard, protect, attend, preserve, watch. It is found over 400 times in the Old Testament. Psalm 121, a song of ascents (to sing one the way to worship in the Temple) includes these words: "The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore" (verses 7-8). Here translated as "preserve", it is the same word for "keep" in Jacob's dream. The God who kept and preserved Jacob keeps and preserved others as well. The great priestly benediction of Aaron found in Numbers 6:24-26 directs that promise to us. You're familiar with it, it goes like this: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace."

- How God kept Jacob

The Lord did not keep Jacob in the sense that He did not allow trouble to bother him. In fact, Jacob was bothered by trouble for many years after this event. God kept him by giving him wisdom, answering his prayers, and making him deal with his faults. Years later, as he returned to face his family, and his brother Esau, Jacob would spend the night wrestling with an angel (the Lord Jesus?). He would leave the encounter permanently wounded but changed. At the crucial moment when the Man (it is "man" in the text) is about to leave Jacob held on desperately, begging for a blessing. The Man asks him his name. It meant so much more than an inquiry of information. The name "Jacob" actually means "deceiver" and Jacob was going to have to face his Lord and own who he was, a liar, a cheat, a thief and a deceiver. It was only after he faced himself in the presence of his Savior that received a new name and a new life: he was called Israel. God kept him in order to make him who he was meant to be.

- How God keeps us

The Lord promises to keep us the same way. He leads us through life, answers prayers, gives wisdom and makes us face ourselves in the presence of our Master in order to become who we were meant to be. It does not mean "to live a charmed life." Even a brief review of Hebrews 11 reveals that the heroes of the faith often faced grave troubles, but to be kept by the Lord means to receive the promises He has for us, including Philippians 2:12-13, which reads: "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." What He promised to Jacob, years ago with heaven opened up above him, He promises to us as well during the days of our journey home.

- Application: Be generous with your life because you can be confident in God.

One application of this is to be generous with your life because you can be confident in the Lord who keeps His promises. Give of your time and life to others, encourage and invest in them. You are the recipients of great promises, you have ample reason to be kind and patient.

- Conclusion

The great heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 journey to the same city this we journey. Jacob, the hero who was a deceiver, traveled his days to that same city as us. Our lives are a journey home made by many, and we can support each other and help each other on the way. Look at your lives in that fashion.