

GENERAL SUBJECT: BETHEL—THE HOUSE OF GOD

Message One

The Dream of Bethel

Monday

Eph. 2:21-22 – Footnotes 22², 22⁴

“Lord, we love you. How amazing is this place! It is the house of God and the gates of heaven. Lord, we come here tonight, we pray that you take off the veils. Lord, give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Lord, we pray that we may see this dream, that the dream of Jacob may be our dream. Lord, we pray that this vision would govern us. God and man, man and God, a mutual dwelling place.”

It is a joy to be here with you. This weekend, we will be covering from Genesis 28 to 35. The topic is: Bethel—the house of God. If you have an opportunity this weekend, I encourage you to cover this portion of the word from Genesis 28 to chapter 35.

In this first message we will be touching specifically the dream of Bethel. This was Jacob’s dream. Genesis 28:10-22 is the story of Jacob’s dream; but really it was God’s dream. God’s dream became Jacob’s dream. We hope that it also becomes our dream because we are all Jacobs. We all can identify with Jacob. What happened in Genesis 28? God opened His heart, and He showed Jacob what was in His heart. If God could open His heart to you, and you could touch the pulse of His heart, you would enter into Jacob’s dream. In Genesis 28 God opened His heart. There is a good pleasure in God.

The desire of God’s heart, His good pleasure, is to obtain a mutual dwelling place with man. This is *Bethel*, which means *The house of God*. That which causes God’s heart to beat—His good pleasure that makes Him happy, is to obtain a mutual dwelling with man where God dwells in man, and man dwells in Him. Due to the fact that we love Him because He loved us first, then we want to enter into this good pleasure so that God’s good pleasure may become our good pleasure. In fact, to enter into these messages we should pray this way: “Lord, may Your good pleasure become my good pleasure. Lord, I want to desire the same thing that You desire, to choose the same thing that You choose, to long for what You long for.” So this longing, this good pleasure, is to have a dwelling place with man. Along with this good pleasure is the central thought of divine revelation in the scriptures which is that in order to obtain this dwelling place, God has to wrought Himself into man and wrought man within God Himself. This has been completely missed over the centuries. They have overlooked it; they have forgotten it; they have neglected it; it is something that they have truly overlooked. But if you go to the end of the Bible, there it is; in Revelation 21 and 22 you see the New Jerusalem. There, God dwells in man and man dwells in God. So, this is God’s good pleasure, the central thought of the Bible. In order for God to obtain His good pleasure, he must wrought Himself into man. This is carried out as a union in life, a mingling of nature, and an incorporation of persons. For this to happen, God was willing to go through a process. He was incarnated, He had a marvellous human living, He entered into an all-inclusive death, had a transcendental resurrection, and became the Spirit to be poured out into man, in order to gain a group of people that would enter into Him.

Tuesday

Matt. 16:18 – Footnote 18⁴

In the Bible we can see three works: (1) the work of creation, (2) the work of redemption, and (3) the work of building. In Genesis 1 and 2, there is the work of creation. There in six days God produced the material. This was creation and recreation, but it only lasted 6 days. But because man fell, Christ carried out a work of redemption. This took 33½ years. In this way God could recover and restore these materials that He had formed but that had fallen. But in Matthew 16:18, the Lord said, “I will build My church.” So, the work of creation, and the work of redemption, have a goal; the goal is the building. This building work has been going on for 2,000 years, and this is now the process by which those created materials which were restored, need to be built up together. What do you think is the most important work? The building work. In fact this is the central work of God. God has to make His home in our heart. God has to be wrought and worked into you and me. This is the central work of God because this is what carries out His plan and His good pleasure. If you see this, this will revolutionize your life and your church life. Paul saw it and that’s why he prayed in Ephesians 3 that Christ may make His home in us. This is God making His dwelling in us.

After Ephesians 3, there is Ephesians 4 where there is a man who is wrought into God, because there it says the Body, the Spirit, the Son, and the Father (Eph. 4:4-6). So there is a Body, but there is also the Spirit, the Father, and the Lord. So there man is wrought into God. To whom was this revealed? We can affectionately call Jacob a bandit. He was a usurper. He was one who lied. He was one who cheated. In this story we see that he was running away because his brother was going to kill him. Why was his brother going to kill him? I do not know if any of you has a brother who wants to kill you, but he was fleeing because he had taken away his blessing. How did he take away the blessing? He put on some goat skins because he had no hair, he was hairless. But for the father to give him the blessing, which was the plot of the mother who was behind all this, he introduced himself to his father, he made his voice hoarse, and he had to make himself smell like the field, because he had never been in the field. Then he took away his brother’s blessing by deceiving his dad who was only interested in the food and who was blind. Before that, he had already cheated his brother Esau from his birthright. This is the person to whom God showed His heart. The most unexpected of all people. It truly is a surprise that God opened His heart, this is the first time that God in the whole Bible opens His heart to show what His good pleasure is. Maybe you would say, “And why Jacob?” Because he was someone chosen by God, period. By divine decree, God loved Jacob (Rom 9:13), so God chose him. It was not because of any merit of Jacob. And God also chose you, period! This is a divine decree. We have been chosen before the foundation of the world to be holy, without blemish before Him in love (Eph. 1:4). So your destiny is already fixed. Your destination is secure. You and I have been chosen!

Wednesday

Matt. 18:20 – Footnote 20²

Gen. 28:17 – Footnote 17¹

What was this encounter about? Consider that Jacob had no home. He was running away, he was a homeless person. God was also homeless. As the Lord said, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of heaven have roosts, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Matt. 8:20). This was the encounter of two homeless people. Two people did not have a roof over their head. Jacob had no home, and God did not have a home either. God still does not have a house. You have a house, but God has no house. If we can see this, we will touch the desire of God’s heart. Because God’s good pleasure is to have a dwelling place in you, in me, in all of us, in a corporate way. So God showed Jacob, one who had no home, God’s desire to have a house. Jacob saw it. This passage in Genesis 28 truly requires the entire Bible for us to understand it.

What happened there? While Jacob was fleeing, night came. He had to sleep and grabbed a stone as a pillow. I would worry a lot, if while I am staying here in hospitality I found that they put a big stone there as a pillow. So, every detail of this story is significant. He takes a stone and makes it his pillow. Then he has a dream, and in this dream there is Jehovah, the heavens are open, and the main thing of this dream was that he saw a ladder. But the ladder did not descend from the heavens, but the ladder was supported on the earth. The ladder was already resting on the earth, connecting them to the heavens and the angels did not descend and ascend, but instead they would ascend and descend. So Jacob wakes up and with a reverent fear, with a holy fear, he says, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven” (Gen. 28:17). He saw it. In that small dream, he saw that this is the house of God, this is Bethel!

Then Jacob took the stone, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on it. I do not know if when you are fleeing your home, you say to yourself, “Well, on the trip, I’m going to take some oil with me.” I don’t know where he got the oil from? But the oil was there. The oil is needed! We all need the oil! He poured the oil on the stone that had been set up as the pillar and said, “Bethel, the house of God.” We need the whole Bible to understand this. It truly is something marvellous. Only God could have written the Bible.

Thursday

John 1:14 – Footnote 14³

This weekend, we are going to enter into this dream a little bit. This was the first time in the whole Bible that God opened His heart's desire to have a dwelling place. But you can follow this thought, and this good pleasure throughout the entire Bible. Hundreds of years later, after the people of God had been enslaved and began their exodus, they passed through the Red Sea, passed through the wilderness, and came to the mountain. God told Moses, the one who had already been prepared by God for 80 years, to go up the mountain. And what did God do there? He opened His heart again. And what did He say? "I want you to build Me a dwelling place; build Me a Tabernacle so that I may dwell with My people." This is recorded in Exodus 25 to 40. There all the blueprint is given, and then they built it. Then when they set it up, God, the Shekinah glory, descended on the tabernacle. Later the tabernacle was expanded to become the temple. Then the temple was lost and then recovered again.

This is all in the Old Testament, but when we go to the New Testament, John 1:14 tells us, "And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us...." There is God dwelling in man. Then He passes through death and resurrection, and His body was expanded to become the mystical body of Christ, which is the Church. Finally it becomes the New Jerusalem. What is this? It is the mutual dwelling of God! From Genesis to Revelation God has always had this desire to have a dwelling place. So, tonight we hope that the Lord would awaken our spirit! We hope that our spirits be touched, be awakened, so that we could truly see this dream; so that Jacob's dream, which really is God's dream, may become our dream. In other words, we hope that this dream would become our vision so that it governs us, so that this dream would really be what directs us and governs us.

God can only have His dwelling place with one kind of person or persons, in a corporate way. These are what? Persons who are transformed. That is why He cannot build with clay, he needs stones. From clay we need to become stones. This is the process of transformation. The regeneration of our spirit occurred in an instant. The transfiguration of our body will also be in an instant. But the transformation of our soul takes a long process. So then, from clay we become precious stones, living stones. This means that there will be some dealings, some breaking, the discipline of the Spirit for us to go through. But what is the goal? The goal is not for you to become a museum piece. The goal is not individual. The goal is not something personal, not some kind of individual spirituality. That stone needs to be set up as a column as part of the house. So the transformation has as a goal that we would be buildable. That is the purpose of the transformation. Transformation is with a view to building, so that the clay would become a stone, and that stone would become a pillar in the house of God. Little by little, if this starts awakening within us, then we begin to have a concern for God's heart desire. Little by little, we begin to be governed by the central thought of God concerning man. There begins to be, little by little, a genuine growth in life, and finally we can become buildable with others to be the dwelling place of God. So, a prayer should be bubbling within us that we open ourselves to the Lord saying, "Lord, work Yourself into me for Your house. Lord, transform me for Your house."

Now, let's go through the outline. This is truly the burden, but we have been slowly touching some of the points in the outline.

Friday

Psalms 132:13-14 – Footnotes 13¹, 14¹

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Message One

The Dream of Bethel

- I. We need to be enlightened by and fully saturated with the thought that in this universe God is doing only one thing—building His eternal habitation—Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:21-22; Rev. 21:2-3.**

In the beginning we have to be enlightened, but this is only the beginning; in the end we have to be saturated. Perhaps we are not fully saturated, and we may not be satisfied with the measure of saturation, which means that within us there are certain thoughts that have to be removed. There are certain thoughts within us that have to be given up, discarded, in order that the thought that is presented here may fully saturate us. God is doing only one thing; He is building His eternal habitation. Why is it important that this saturates our way of thinking? Because our thoughts direct our being. Hymn 841 says in verse 6, “Build me up with others, / Till in us Thou see / Thy complete expression / Glorifying Thee.” God is building His House. He knows what He wants. He knows what He likes. When we begin to enter into that building, within us there is a very precious inner feeling that God is satisfied because it is His house that makes God happy.

Psalms 132:13-14 says, “For Jehovah has chosen Zion, / He has desired it for His habitation. This is My resting place forever; / Here will I dwell, for I have desired it.” God’s dwelling place is where He is expressed, where He is happy, where He is satisfied, where He finds His rest. When we enter together with Him to build His dwelling place, also within us there is a sense of rest. There is a sense of satisfaction. There is a sense of joy in being one with God in carrying out His good pleasure.

Saturday

John 1:51 – Footnote 51²

II. The account of Jacob’s dream at Bethel is the most crucial word in the revelation of God, including the whole Bible in its scope and requiring the rest of the Bible to explain it—Gen. 28:10-22; Matt. 16:18; 1 Tim. 3:15:

We have already presented this development: there is the tabernacle, then the temple, then the recovered temple. This is the Old Testament. This is the typology, but in the reality of the New Testament, there is the incarnation of Christ, then the Church produced in resurrection. Then the Body of Christ is built up. Then the manifestation of the New Jerusalem in the Kingdom. Finally the manifestation of the New Jerusalem for eternity. So we must exercise ourselves, so that it is a dream become our dream. In the sense that this would be our reality, and that we begin to pray for this, and we begin to live this. And then that becomes what directs us, and controls and starts to govern our living.

- A. Genesis 28:10-22 is the first place in Scripture where God reveals that His intention is to build Himself together with man and to have a dwelling place, a Bethel, on earth.
- B. Jacob’s dream is a revelation of Christ, for the center of this dream is Christ as the ladder—v. 12; John 1:51:

The center of all genuine revelation is Christ. In Revelation 1:1, it tells us that this is “The revelation of Jesus Christ....” The entire book of Revelation is the revelation of Jesus Christ. So in this dream, the center of the revelation is the ladder. Christ is the ladder as it is shown to us in John 1:51. The Lord explains this in John 1:51 saying, “... You shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” So Christ is the ladder and the ladder is what produces the building.

- 1. The purpose of the dream at Bethel is always that we see Christ as the ladder; this ladder issues in Bethel, the house of God on earth.

Ephesians 2:21-22 are key verses here. I would like to read them: “In whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.” So God’s dwelling place is in the spirit. And we are being built up together as the dwelling place of God in spirit. So, Bethel with the ladder is in your mingled spirit. In our spirit is the ladder; and this ladder is Christ the Son of Man, who is divinely human and humanly divine. In this ladder, there is much traffic. I think tonight, there is much traffic in our spirit. God is showing us His house, and within our spirit is emerging a cooperation for God’s house. So, on this ladder there is much traffic which connects the heavens with the earth and unites the heavens to the earth. Jacob said, “This is the house of God, the gate of heaven!” Everyone wants to go to heaven but God wants to come to the earth! How do we enter into heaven? Through our spirit! It is by entering into our spirit that we have contact with Christ who is in our spirit! There is much traffic there. In this Christ who is now in our spirit there can be this two-way traffic, so that the heavens and the earth can be united, so that God would work Himself into us and we would be worked into God. In this way the corporate dwelling place of God can be produced. “But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). We are joined together with the Lord as one spirit.