

GENERAL SUBJECT: BETHEL—THE HOUSE OF GOD

Message Three

The God of Bethel

Scripture Reading: Gen. 33:17-20; 35:1, 6-7, 9-12

Monday

Gen. 35:6-7 – Footnotes 7¹, 7²

We have seen the dream of Bethel, then the reality of Bethel, and now we come to the God of Bethel. We can only know the God of Bethel by being at Bethel. In the progression, we have seen that God has a good pleasure, and that His good pleasure is to have His dwelling place in man. That is a mutual dwelling place; that is, God dwells in man and man dwells in Him. Together with this good pleasure, there is a central thought in the Scriptures, and that is that in order to obtain that mutual dwelling place, God has to work Himself into man. God works Himself into man, and also works man into Himself. We can say that this is a metabolic process. This is a process of transformation for the building. What is the goal? It is God's house. We have already given the basic definition of the house of God or the building of God which is: The corporate expression of God through His transformed people.

Now we will see the great need we have to make a great step forward. Only the Lord can shepherd us to take this step. In this message we will try to see the need that we have to take this big step, which is truly a step that will take us onwards. Perhaps this is may be one of the greatest advances in our Christian life. There may not be another step as great, or as critical as this one. In the Scripture reading, we saw that Jacob made two altars in two different places, and he gave them two different names. What was the name of the second altar? El-bethel. That is, the God of the house of God. This has a tremendous revelation for us to experience. So far, God and Jacob have had a personal relationship. Certainly our personal and individual experience with God is necessary; it is absolutely necessary and indispensable. But there comes a time when based on certain experiences, certain dealings, a certain light, then we enter into a corporate experience of the Triune God. In other words, we come to know the Triune God as the God of a corporate entity. And here God becomes different to us. He never changes; He is immutable. In His essence, He is unchangeable, He is immutable; but in our experience, He is a different God. It is a completely different God. So, as we progress in our experience of life, based on the light we receive, based on the stage of life we are at, as we are going on, God truly becomes a different God to us.

Many know the God of Abraham, who is the God of justification. Many know the God of Isaac, who is the God of grace, but just knowing the God of justification and the God of grace does not fulfill God's purpose. This only takes care of man's fall. That only takes care of our need, but it does not take care of God's need. That is why we have to come to know the God of Jacob, and this is the God of transformation. This is the God of His government or His governmental administration; this is the God who transforms us to accomplish His purpose. So, why do we receive grace? Why do we receive justification? It is with a goal; it is with an objective. We receive justification and grace with a view to being transformed for Bethel. To be built up together with others, as the house of God, which is the Body of Christ.

Tuesday

John 14:2 – Footnotes 2¹, 2², 2³

So, at this point we have gone through Genesis 28, Genesis 32, and now we are coming to Genesis 35. Jacob is advancing, and Bethel is not only built upon the basis of our individual experience, but upon the basis of both our individual experience and our corporate experience of God. So, in our personal experience, we love the Lord, we have a relationship with Him; He takes care of us, and He supplies us. But there is another dimension, there is another stage where we can come to know the God of Bethel as the all-sufficient God. This is another dimension of God. This is the God that is supplied to us in the Body and for the Body. It is no longer something individual, it is an immeasurable supply. God can now remove His limitation because we are in the Body and we are for the Body. We will see this in today's message.

To begin I would like you to see some verses in John 14 to see the relationship between the Triune God and His house. In John 14 we are told in verse 2, "In My Father's house are many abodes." What is the Father's house? It is Bethel. Bethel is the house of the Father. This does not refer to heaven. This has nothing to do with heaven. You have to understand this phrase, "the Father's house..." is based on the context that is presented in the book of John. Where is this phrase "the Father's house" presented to us again in the book of John? In chapter 2 of John, verse 16 we are told, "Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise." Then He spoke of His physical body in verse 19: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up, but He spoke of the temple of His body." If we understand the context, we will understand that "the Father's house" refers to the temple, and the temple was the dwelling place of God. So we cannot take the phrase *the Father's house* out of its context. The context given to us in John 2, which is also the same context as in John 14, is that "the Father's house" is the temple, the dwelling place of God. We must relate this to the fact that Jesus Himself was the expression and the embodiment of God as the tabernacle. In John 1:14, "the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us ..." What is the tabernacle? The tabernacle is the dwelling place of God with man. So this temple was Jesus in His physical body. But by going through death and resurrection, this body was enlarged. Now this dwelling place, the dwelling place of the Father, is the Body of Christ in resurrection. So, the Father's house is Bethel. It is the Body of Christ. Bethel is the Body of Christ.

Wednesday

John 14:3, 6 – Footnotes 3¹, 3², 6¹

Then the Lord says in 14:2, “...for I go to prepare a place for you.” He did not go to heaven, as a skilled carpenter, to prepare some condominiums for us. Where was He going? Some think of “I go” as though He has already spent 2,000 years there, as a skilled carpenter, so He must be preparing mansions for us; what tremendous mansions these would be! If you think like that, you are taking these verses out of context. We have to go to John 13 to understand where He was going. In John 13:1 we are told, “Jesus knowing that His hour had come for Him to depart out of this world unto the Father ...” Where was He going? He was going to the Father. He was not going to a place, but to a Person. Verse 3 confirms it, John 13:3 says, “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going to God.” When He says, “I go”, what does He refer to? He refers to going through death to go to the Father.

Then Jesus says in 14:3, “I will come again.” This does not refer to His second coming publicly. This refers to His coming in resurrection. In John 20:22, He came and breathed into the disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” That was His coming in resurrection. These verses are telling us that He went through death and resurrection to introduce us into the Father. Verse 3 continues, “So that where I am, you also may be.” Where is He? He is in the Father. So, He went through that process of death and resurrection to introduce us into the Father. The process is death and resurrection, but what is the goal? The goal is that where He is, we also may be. Where is He? He is in the Father. So the Lord is telling us, “I am in the Father and now you are in Me, and being in Me, you are in the Father with Me, so now you are enabled to be in the Father’s house.” By being in the Son, we are in the Father, and by being in the Father, we are in the Father’s house. That is to say that by being in the Father, we are positioned to be in the Father’s house.

Then the Lord said in John 14:6 “I am the way, and the reality, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.” He did not say, “No one comes to heaven except through Me.” He said, “No one comes to the Father.” That is, no one enters into the Father except through the Son. Then in verses 9 and 10 it says “I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.” So the Lord is telling us, I am in the Father, and “you will be in Me, and you will be where I am. Therefore, as I am in the Father you also will be in the Father.” And since we are in the Father together, then we are in the Father’s house. Hallelujah! You cannot be in the Father’s house, without being in the Father. And you cannot be in the Father, if you are not in the Son. Where are you? We are in the Son, in the Father, in the Father’s house. Hallelujah!

Thursday

John 14:16-17, 20 – Footnotes 16¹, 17¹

Then, later in verses 16 and 17 it says, “and He will give you another Comforter ... the Spirit of reality ... shall be in you.” Verse 20, “In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” What is this? This is the incorporation. These are persons who mutually dwell in each other. This is a matter of knowing, in our experience, that the Son is in the Father. We are in the Son, the Son is in us; therefore, we are mingled with the Triune God. This is the mutual dwelling of God and man. In other words, the Father’s house, in the context of John 14, is completely related to our experience of the Triune God. And our experience of the Triune God is completely related to Bethel, the Father’s house. So our experience of the Triune God, the union, the mingling, and the incorporation, gives us the position to enter into the Father’s house. That is to say, we cannot enter into the Father’s house without being in the Triune God. And it is by being mingled with the Triune God, that we then enter into the Father’s house. And it is by being in the Father’s house, that is, by being in the reality of the Body of Christ, where we come to know the all-sufficient God. Now God can flow to us without measure. Because now all that flow goes to the house. It does not stop with you, but it flows to the whole Body of Christ. So let us pray that The Spirit of reality will guide us into the reality of Bethel, and so that in Bethel we can truly know the reality of El-Bethel.

It is truly wonderful to see how Jacob took certain steps—this was a decisive step—and we are also following the same steps. We have been chosen, we have the birthright, and we have the blessing. We also have Laban, because for every Jacob there is a Laban. Hallelujah for the dealings, for the breakings, and finally for the transformation. In this process we enter into Bethel as the reality, and we come to know the God of the Body of Christ. And in this way we can know and experience the immeasurable supply of God for His house.

Friday

Phil 3:8-10 – Footnotes 10¹, 10², 10³, 10⁴

I. Being built up with fellow partakers of the divine life is the highest virtue of one who pursues after Christ according to God's eternal economy—Phil. 3:7-12.

I do not know if you remember that in the second outline, we talked about being built up. We were told that this was the highest and supreme requirement, even the most costly requirement. But here we are being told that being built up is a virtue; in fact, it is the highest virtue. To be built up with others is the highest virtue. Love is not the highest virtue. Love is required, and if there is love, according to Ephesians 4:16, the Body builds itself up in love. This means that if there is love and you are being built up as a member in the Body, then you are in the highest virtue. In other words, we are under the highest requirement to produce the highest virtue.

Our spirit must be restless until the Lord really shepherds us to arrive at this kind of experience, where we are really being built up with others, and we enter into the reality of Bethel, and know the God of Bethel. In our Christian life there is a great danger, and that is that we may focus on ourselves, that we would focus on our personal attainments, that we would focus on some kind of individual, independent spirituality. This is a great danger. This is missing the target. That is why we must move forward to enter into the building. Spirituality is a matter of the Body. Spirituality is not something independent. It is not something individualistic. Spirituality is a matter of the Body of Christ.

Saturday

Eph. 4:13 – Footnotes 13¹, 13², 13³, 13⁴, 13⁵

Spirituality is not a matter of having a relationship with God and nothing else matters. If that is your concept you always feel that you are right because you have a relationship with God and nothing else matters. In Ephesians 4:13 it tells us, “Until we all arrive ...” it does not say, “Until I arrive ...” but this is the way we read the Bible, “Until I arrive ...” and I do not care if you get there. No, Ephesians 4 says “Until we all arrive...” If the Triune God would not limit His individual dispensing to each one of us, and He would dispense all His supply to you as an individual, what kind of person would you become? A cancer. You would become a cancer. What is cancer? It is the unrestricted growth of cells. This false, individual spirituality would harm you, and would harm the Body of Christ. In other words, cancer cells grow and multiply, but they do not care about the body. It is an uncontrollable growth of cells that takes away nutrients from the rest of the body, and that little by little, kills the body, and it separates from the body. It destroys the body while it nourishes itself by depriving the body of all the nutrients. Let us suppose that all the food you ate this morning, the tamales, the beans, the cheese, the arepas (Colombian dish), the rice, the chicken and, the potatoes, all of it would be directed to your nose. So, tonight you go to sleep and all that food, all those nutrients are going to your nose. What will happen tomorrow? You’re going to have a bigger nose, right? So everything you eat tomorrow, everything goes to your nose, so your nose starts to grow, and grow, and grow. Is that normal? Is that healthy? Of course not, but that is the false, individualistic and independent spirituality.

Look, we all have this problem. Do not think of anyone else; think of yourself. We all need the mercy, and grace to be saved from our false, independent, individualistic spirituality that damages the Body and damages us. Therefore, it is so necessary, and that is why this is the most crucial advance, that we enter into Bethel as the reality. So then we would come to know the God of Bethel; the God of the Body of Christ. What is God’s goal? For us to have a tremendously big nose? No, this is ridiculous! The goal of God is the building up of the Body of Christ. It is not your independent, individualistic, and false spirituality, but it is the building up of the Body of Christ. Look, even if you say, “I want to be an overcomer”, that will divert you from the goal. Before, my idea of being an overcomer was that I would grow, mature, and then as soon as the age comes to an end, I would slide my way into the kingdom and be at wedding feast; praise the Lord, I’m there! Is that your thought? Is this your idea of being an overcomer? Yes, well we have to understand that this will divert us from the goal. And in fact, you cannot overcome without the Body. There’s no such thing. There is no such thing as overcoming without the Body. You cannot overcome on your own; you need the Body of Christ. Who are the overcomers? The overcomers are those who live in the reality of the Body. The overcomers are those who live in Bethel. They live in the reality of the Body and keep the principles of the Body. What are the principles of the Body? The oneness, I reject all division and I keep the oneness. The principle of the Body is fellowship. I receive the fellowship, I participate in the universal fellowship of the churches in the Body of Christ. This is a continuous fellowship, it is like a bloodstream that is continuously flowing into the Body of Christ.