

SERMON GENESIS 28:10-22 'GOD IN UNEXPECTED PLACES' + suggestions for reflection
Series 'God moves in a mysterious way' #6
IBC Eindhoven, 7 March 2021

INTRODUCTION

Do you desire to be in the house of God? Where is the house of God? Some people enter a church building and believe this is a house of God? Or a cathedral whose imposing dimensions help you to get a sense of the greatness of God.

Today's passage tells us about Jacob in Bethel. Hebrew for 'house of God'. What does the Bible teach us about God's dwelling? What does this narrative tell us?

- * Verse 10: Jacob left - as a fugitive - away from Beersheba - 7 wells - away from his father's house - the comfort of his mum - away from his heritage - but now most importantly away from the wrath of his brother Esau.
- * Verse 11: a certain place (3x) - peculiar way of saying, because we know the place is called Luz (v19). Three times 'mokum' = 'place' in this verse. This way of saying tells us something about Jacob. We learnt in 25:27 that Jacob was a quiet man, staying among tents. And now he was forced to leave the safety of his home, a lonely wanderer. He had received directions, but for him it was a step into the big unknown. And now he just happened to arrive at Luz (only 75 km). Never been there before. For Jacob just a coincidence. Could have been any place. And he went to sleep because the sun had set. Indeed, the sun had set over Jacob's life. Into the big dark unknown. This would continue to be his situation until in 32:31 we read that the sun would rise upon Jacob.
- * Verse 12-15: dream - no control over his actions, speech or thoughts. Someone else took control. And this was a big surprise. Read the KJV: 3x 'hineh' = 'behold': ladder, angels, LORD. Then the LORD speaks: I am the LORD.... [confirming that he is the heir of the Abrahamic covenant] and then once more a 'behold' - I am with you. The 'behold' I expect is for us as readers for this is not what we would expect God saying to this Jacob after all he had done. Amazing words. Astonishing promises (7x). Awesome revelation.
- * Verse 16-22: and this was Jacob's response - fear and awe. God moves in a mysterious way.
- * Verse 18-22: next day Jacob set up the stone as a pillar and poured oil on it and called it Bethel = house of God. Then he added a conditional vow - how dare he? - if... then I will give a tenth...

GOD IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

- * Has the sun set over your life? Marriage broke up, friendship lost, your beloved has died, loss of health, of job security, perhaps you sinned and now you suffer the consequences... The sun has set over your life. Are you ready to meet God in your miserable circumstances?
- * Reminds us of Psalms 139:7-12 *'Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.'*
- * How can darkness become light? When you are offered forgiveness. Psalm 130:4 'with you there is forgiveness, therefore you are feared'
- * God in unexpected places = most unexpectedly in all history is the cross of Calvary. 't Is mystery all, th'Immortal dies, who can explore his strange design'
- * 1 Corinthians 1:23 'Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.
- * But forgiveness is not mentioned in this narrative. Although Calvary is the most unexpected place for God to reveal Himself, this idea seems still remote in this narrative

BETHEL = HOUSE OF GOD

- * What makes Luz a house of God? Where does God dwell?
- * We may think of comfort and safety and happiness, the place where you can be yourself. But these are typical modern definitions of house and home.
- * Psalm 24:1 'The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it' - His Spirit already hovered over the dark waters before creation.
- * God is everywhere, but what makes Jacob name this place 'Bethel' - when we experience a certain place as a house of God?

- * The only thing we can say from this passage is: the house of God is where God reveals Himself, where God speaks.
- * Hebrews 3:5-6 'Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.' // Colossians 3:16
- * In closing Psalm 23 ending with the famous words 'I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.' - David didn't mean this literally. He wasn't a priest. But dwelling in the house of the LORD is being in the situation where we hear God speak and listen and respond. That was so typical of David - he loved the word of God - composed beautiful Psalms so he could meditate upon these words. The LORD is my Shepherd ... even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death... there in the presence of my enemies... the house of the LORD is where we hear, listen and respond to God's word. And therefore, the house of God could be anywhere on earth. Even in your home, in the midst of your fears and anxieties or joys and blessings. House of God in unexpected places.

SUGGESTION FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING

1. Has God ever spoken to you in an unexpected place or moment? If so, recall what happened, give thanks to God and if you would like, share this with someone else. If not, recall when was the last time that you really sensed God speaking to you. How did you respond?
2. Read Hebrews 3:5-6 again and para-phrase this in your own words.
3. What do you need to hear God speak to you? What can you do to make it more likely to happen and what could the church do to make people more ready to hear God speak?