**GOD MEETS JACOB AT BETHEL**

 March 4, 2018

Genesis 27:1-28:22 / Key Verses 28:20-22,

 “Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father’s household, then the LORD will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.’”

From Genesis 12 to now, we have been studying about God of Abraham and God of Isaac. From today’s chapter the main figure moved to Jacob; the third generation in Abraham’s line. As we have studied, God had been faithful to Abraham and Isaac. Since Jacob was born in a godly family, he heard about his father and grandfather’s God many times. But as for himself,probably he had no clear personal relationship with God yet. In today’s passage, God visited Jacob in his dream when he was in most sorrowful and fearful situation. God who visited Jacob when he was in most sorrowful and fearful situation is so gracious and wonderful. Jacob became an exile because of his lie and deception but gracious and sovereign God visited him and gave him great vision and promise. Moved by God’s awesome visit, Jacob made a personal vow to God for the first time in his life and by this, his personal relation with God started. Later God could continue to help him using his first personal vow. So today we learn the importance of our personal decision and personal commitment to God. Furthermore, we learn that God of Jacob is not only sovereign God but also gracious God. God of Jacob gives us great hope that he can change any sinner into a useful man of God and a blessing to others. I pray for those who have no personal relationship with God yet that God may visit them and give them great vision and promise andbless them to make personal decision toward God.

1. Jacob gets Isaac’s blessing (27:1-46)

In verses 1-4, Isaac had become blind. When he had become blind, he felt that he would surely die soon. Actually, he did not die until he was 180 years old-around 60 years later. Perhaps his blindness made him feel that his death was near. So, he asked Esau his favorite and older son to go hunting to get some wild game for him and prepare the kind of tasty food he liked. He would eat it and then give Esau his blessing. According to God’s sovereign will, Isaac had to bless Jacob because God already revealed through Rebekah from her womb that he chose Jacob as the bearer of God’s covenant blessing. Rebekah must have told Isaac God’s sovereign will many times. But Isaac forgot about it. Physically blinded Isaac seemed to be blinded spiritually too.

In verses 5-17, Rebekah overheard Isaac speaking to Esau. She respected her husband as God’s servant although he became old and blind. She knew that the one he blessed would be indeed blessed. She believed that the blessing of the firstborn belongs to Jacob, not Esau, for this was God’s word to her when the two boys were in her womb. So, she coached Jacob to pretend to be Esau in order to get his father’s blessing. Jacob was hesitant because he was afraid that his deception could be exposed and bring a curse rather than a blessing. But Rebekah was determined. She said, “My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say…”

So, Jacob dressed in Esau’s clothes, put goatskin on his arms and neck (Esau was hairy), took the delicious meat dish and bread that Rebekah had cooked and went to his father Isaac. He lied to Isaac. Isaac was a little suspicious, but he believed Jacob’s lie and blessed him. This was not the covenant blessing—that would come later—but it was a promise of material abundance and a promise that nations and peoples would serve him and he would be lord over his brother.

As soon as Jacob left, Esau came in from hunting and he too prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father. When he learned what Jacob had done and heard the poor blessing that his father had left for him, he was furiously angry. He decided to kill Jacob. But here is a remarkable thing. Isaac was not angry at Jacob or Rebekah after he realized that he was deceived by Jacob. Perhaps later he came to know that it was right for the blessing to go to Jacob.

Rebekah had no choice; she must send Jacob away. She decided to send him to her brother Laban for a while. Then she talked with Isaac. She complained about the Hittite women Esau had married and suggested that they take a hand in finding a wife for Jacob. So, Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and sent him to Paddan Aram, to his mother’s people, instructing him to find a wife among Laban’s daughters. Rebekah taught Jacob the supreme value of God’s blessing but she also taught him to lie and deceive. Lying and deception are never good and the means are not justified by the end. If she had talked to Isaac directly, it would have been good. But somehow she didn’t. She paid dearly for what she did. Because of Esau’s wrath, Jacob had to leave home and live as an exile in a foreign land. Rebekah lost the son she loved-as far as we know, she did not see him again, for she died before his return. But God is sovereign. He used these difficult things to train Jacob and ultimately to bless him. Before Isaac sent Jacob away, now he gave him the covenant blessing given to Abraham.

1. The God of Bethel (28:1-22)

Jacob left Beersheba and started for Haran; his mother’s back homeland. The sun set and it began to grow dark. Jacob was tired, and his heart was full of sorrow, for he was leaving home for the first time. He found a rock for a pillow and lay down under the star to sleep. He was fearful because humanly speaking he did not know about his future and now he is in the wild open country all alone at night. From a human point of view, he was a worthless fugitive and a wanderer without peace because of his sin of lie and deception. Now he did not even have a roof over his head. But that very night, the Almighty God, the Creator and Possessor of heaven and earth, came to visit him. God did not wait until Jacob surrendered and came to him. God came first. That lonely wilderness became the gate of heaven. In his dream, Jacob saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven and the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Above it stood the Lord. He spoke to Jacob. He introduced himself as the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac. He promised him the land and descendants like the dust of the earth. He promised, “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.” God went on to solve Jacob’s immediate problem. In verse 15, he said, “I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

Until this moment, to Jacob God was the God of his father and grandfather. He had no personal visit from God. But now when he was in most sorrowful and fearful situation; when he was in most needy situation, the Creator God who had called his forefather and father came to him as well. So, Jacob woke up and for sure he couldn’t sleep the rest of the night, for an awesome fear of God filled his heart. The next morning, he took the stone he had used, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on it and called that place “Bethel.” Bethel means “house of God.” Then Jacob made a vow. He said, “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father’s house, then the Lord will be my God and this stone that I set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.” (28:20-22)

Jacob was not interested in God’s plans. He did not think about God’s calling to be a source of blessing in God’s redemptive work. He was only concerned about his own urgent security problems. He promised God that if God would indeed do as he said and solve his immediate problems, then God would be his God and he would give him a tithe. His faith is very much self-centered and worldly but important thing was that his faith was real. He knew that God is a living God. This vow became the handle by which God could take hold of Jacob’s life. It meant that Jacob began his life of personal faith finally. He began his vow prayer talking about God in the third person but he concluded by talking to God in the second person saying God as you. “He said, ‘of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.’” He no longer lived on the borrowed faith of his parents. His own faith was weak and small, but it was his own. It would grow through God’s training. Someday he would become a very mature man who could bless others.

There has to be a point in everyone’s life when he or she meets God for themselves and makes their personal decision and commitment to God. Abraham had made a decision to leave his homeland according to God’s command. Isaac had decided to obey God and stay in the land of promise. Jacob made a conditional vow as his personal decision of faith. God accepted them all. God helped Jacob to keep his vow and later changed his life from a deceiver to blessing-giver with open hand.

I want to share my personal testimony; how God had visited me when I was in most sorrowful and fearful situation in life. I grew up in a poor and sorrowful family background. In my childhood, what made me sorrowful most was not poverty or the suffering caused by poverty but parents’ fighting. In my memory, in my home there was always constant fighting between my mother and father. My mother was always complaining to my father who had no job and irresponsible and authoritative just like many Korean men in those days. Because of such family environment, I was emotionally unstable and fearful. I had sympathy toward my sorrowful mother and I had fear toward my father and any man with authority and in my puberty period, I was even more fearful because of my guilty conscience due to my lustful sin which I did not know clearly at that time. In school I worked hard and received people’s recognition as an honor student but deep inside of me, I had sorrow, fear, weariness, low self-esteem, and future anxiety. When I became a college student, one day, I was invited to church by my sister and heard about God for the first time. On that evening, in my personal journal, I wrote one sentence of prayer, “Is there so-called God? If so, please help me.” I wrote this one sentence of prayer not knowing that it was a kind of prayer and soon I forgot about it. After that, amazing thing happened in my life. Later I came to know that God heard my innersilent crying prayer. After one month, when I started my second semester of the second year in University, God visited me through my senior high school alumni. God led me to UBF church and in UBF church I heard many words of God. Around after 6 month of bible study, a wonderful thing happened in my life. God opened my spiritual eyes and gave me faith. Bible became my favorite book and Sunday became my favorite day because I could attend SWS on Sunday. During weekdays, I hardly could wait for SWS because the word of God was so sweet to my soul. But, after graduation, even though I accepted God and wanted to live for God’s mission, I had no firm assurance of God’s particular calling for campus mission. So, I made a conditional vow, “*If God send me one student whose heart is open to the word of God, I will really know that you called me to serve campus mission*.” I made such conditional vow because during the school year, I spent tremendous time to preach the word of God expecting that I could bring some students to God. But I couldn’t see any visible fruit at that time. That’s the reason of why I made such conditional vow to God. God amazingly answered my conditional vow by sending a student who was waiting for the bible study. Now he became a professor shepherd in Korea and one time he visited to our church. This kind of vow prayer was made once again when I had to go to army service. I made 3 conditions to continue to join in campus mission; a place close to Seoul where our UBF church was, once a month regular leave to attend UBF church SWS, a place where I can have enough time to read the Bible. God miraculously, unbelievably,and very dramatically answered my 3 conditional vow and prayer very preciously. So, during the army service I was full of thanks and successfully could finish my army service keeping my faith of campus mission. Even after that, I could marry M. Langue in God’s abundant blessing. I cannot forget how God helped me when I was in most sorrowful and fearful situation and in lack of assurance of my future direction. In Canada, I haven’t made any conditional vow to God. Even though I have many challenges to serve campus mission in Canada, I want to serve God’s campus mission to the end without any condition because I have more than enough evidence that I can trust in God and believe God’s complete love and his calling for campus mission.

In conclusion, God of Jacob is sovereign and gracious God who gives hope for any sinner. God of Jacob is the same God who is working in the same way in and among us now. Our God is not far from us. He is near us. Jesus our Saviour’s another name is Immanuel which means God with us. In Jesus, God is near us. He is our true friend, comforter, provider, and protector. Most of all, he is our Saviour who saves us from our sins and Lord who is really worthy to receive our honor, love, and glory, and everything. May God really bless each of us to accept God who is sovereign and gracious and make a personal decision and commitment to him so that we may live as a blessing.