

JACOB'S DREAM

Rev. Arne Bau-Madsen

Lesson: Genesis 28:10-22

In our reading from the Word we heard the story of Jacob's dream. You may remember that Jacob had left his father Isaac's camp in Beer-Sheba and was on his way to a place called Paddan-Aram in the land of Haran, which was where his mother, Rebekah, had come from.

You may also remember why Jacob had left Beer-Sheba. He had left because he had done something very wrong, and now he was afraid what might happen. The bad thing he had done was to steal the blessing from his brother Esau. Isaac, their father, was very old and completely blind, and Jacob had tricked him into believing that he was Esau, and then he was given the blessing instead of Esau.

When Esau heard this, he became very angry; so angry indeed, that he swore he would revenge himself upon Jacob, and even kill him. The reason Esau became so angry was that the blessing Jacob stole was a very special blessing. It was the one that Abraham had received from the Lord and Isaac after him, namely, the promise that they would be the fathers of a great nation, the greatest nation in the whole world. And now Jacob had been given this blessing instead of Esau, to whom it really should have been given. No wonder Esau felt angry; and when Jacob found out, he became very afraid, and fled to the land of Haran.

He traveled all day, and he probably walked pretty fast to get away from Esau, and at sunset he was so tired that he went to sleep right on the ground, using a stone for his pillow.

Then he had a wonderful dream. He saw a tall, tall ladder, or perhaps rather a wide and magnificent staircase reaching all the way from earth to heaven. Above the staircase he saw the Lord Himself, and there were angels going up and down the stairs, all the way up to the Lord, and all the way down to Jacob. And then the Lord spoke to Jacob, and gave him His blessing.

This was a marvelous dream indeed, and Jacob was so moved by it that when he woke up, he called the place Bethel, which means the house of God. Before he went on his way to Haran, he raised up the stone he had used for a pillow and anointed it with oil.

But the Lord did not make this story part of His Word just to tell us what happened to Jacob a long time ago. He did it so that we may learn something about Him and also about ourselves. Would you believe that every night when you go to sleep, the very same thing happens to you? Well, you may not dream about angels, though perhaps sometimes you do; but the fact is that every night when you are asleep, the Lord sends His angels to you to keep watch over you, just as He sent them to Jacob. The Lord Himself is with you and blesses you by refreshing and ordering your mind while you sleep, so that you wake up feeling rested and ready to start another day.

There is also another thing we can learn from this story, namely, how we are to worship the Lord in His house, the church—or Bethel, as Jacob called it. You should not go to sleep of course, but your body and mind should be in a state of peace. You ought to try very hard to sit still and not disturb others, and you should try to shut out all the things that can draw your mind away from worshipping the Lord.

If you sit in church and think about what is going on outside, what the weather is like, and what you are going to do after church, then you are not really worshipping the Lord. But if you let all these thoughts fall asleep, and pay attention to what is going on, then the same thing happens to you that happened to Jacob. Just as the angels in the dream came down the ladder from the Lord to Jacob, so will the reading from the Word and the children's talk enter into your mind. And your prayers and songs will rise up to heaven and to the Lord, just as the angels went up the ladder from Jacob to the Lord.

But really to worship the Lord you also have to do what Jacob did when he woke up. Do you remember what he did? Yes, he raised up the stone he had used for a pillow, and anointed it with oil. Now, a stone means truth, and oil means good. What you should do after the service is over and you leave the church is to remember what the Lord taught you and think about what it means. That way you raise up the stone of truth in your mind. Then as you try hard to obey what you learned, to live a good life; you pour the oil of good over the stone.

That is how we should worship the Lord, and if we do that, we will receive His blessing and will be able to continue our long journey through life on earth with new strength and hope, trusting in the Lord's love and protection. *Amen.*