

This House of God

Genesis 28:10-17,

Sunday after Epiphany January 11, 2015

Beloved of the Lord.....Most of us, at one time or another in life, ask ourselves the question, "Where is God?" Why is it that God doesn't just show Himself or reveal Himself to us so we can have proof? Then it would be easy to believe. We read this lesson of Jacob and his dream and we wonder: "Why can't I have a dream or revelation like that from God?" These are natural questions of course, but they are still the wrong questions. The real question we should all ask ourselves is this: Who are we to tell God how to reveal Himself? Isn't that God's choice since He is God and we are not? And doesn't God have the right to be angry with sinners who try to tell God what to do so they will believe?

Today is the first Sunday after Epiphany. During the short season of Epiphany we remember the Wise Men who made the long journey to see the baby Jesus. Why did they do that, and what made them wise? The answer is found in John 20:31 which says, "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." God thus wrote the Bible to reveal His salvation to us sinners and that is the simple answer of how God reveals Himself to men. The Wise Men were able to learn of Jesus and follow the star to Jesus, because they read and studied their Bibles, which was the Old Testament at that time. In like manner if you truly want to know God, stop trying to tell God what to do and start listening, for "blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it." You will find God here in this House of God if you listen to God's Word. Concerning the House of God, Luther thus said, "Where God's Word is heard, as was the case here, there is God's house." When we thus hear the Gospel and learn of Jesus, that stairway to heaven is revealed and we see God, not with our earthly eyes, but with our spiritual eyes. Wherever then in this world the Word of God is preached, taught, or spoken by Christians, there is the House of God, and through Jesus we see the stairway to heaven. When you come to church then every Sunday, Ecclesiastes 5:1 tells us all what we should be doing, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil." Fools go to church thinking they are doing something for God. Wise men go to church knowing all God has done for them. Let us begin now with part one:

I. God is omnipresent, namely in all places at the same time, diligently guarding and protecting His Church, each and every believer, morning, noon, and at night. We begin with some necessary background for our lesson. First remember Jacob had a brother named Esau. They were twins, born close together, but not identical twins. Esau was older, but God had foretold that the older would serve the younger. Jacob, the younger, in a rather deceitful way, had received the blessing from the father. When Esau discovered

what his brother had done, he had vowed to kill Jacob, but Esau would wait until his father had died. That information, by God's design, was revealed to Jacob, and so the parents sent Jacob away, telling him to go to Padanaram, which was the place where Jacob's mother originally came from. This was hundreds of miles away, a foreign country. So Jacob fled from Esau, leaving family and home. So the Bible says, "And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran."

This then was a time where Jacob's life was being threatened, a very stressful time, and also a lonely time. He had to leave his beloved father and mother, his childhood home. It was at this time however, God sought to comfort Jacob with a wonderful revelation in a dream. "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it." Of course this ladder or stairway connected heaven and earth. God Himself was waiting at the top. But even more, there were angels coming down this stairway and going up, continually, from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven. What does this mean?

It means that wherever God's children are on earth, even if they are strangers in a strange land, the Lord is still with them, guarding and protecting them from all harm and danger with His holy angels. "The Bible tells us that the good angels – A. Are holy spirits confirmed in their bliss; B. Are of great number and great power; C. Praise God, carry out His commands, and serve the Christians, especially the children." In the Bible such angels are called "ministering spirits", for a minister is one who serves somebody else, and these angels serve God's children. Psalm 103 says "Bless the Lord, ye His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His that do His pleasure." Psalm 91 says God "shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. Thy shall bear thee up lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." Indeed, if God allowed us to see these angels every night when we go to bed to sleep, we would not worry at all about thieves or robbers, murderers or devils. These angels are far stronger than Superman, or Hercules, or any such fictional character, and more importantly the strength of God Himself is behind each good angel. Regarding Christian children and the angels which watch over them, Jesus said "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." It is with love for their Father that the angels do all things. So we pray "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." May we rejoice and be happy doing God's will as the angels above.

Of course the greater lesson here is that our Lord above is with us always wherever we live in this world. So He said to Jacob, "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee." It doesn't matter then if members of our congregation who believe in Jesus live in Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota, Iowa, Oklahoma, Tennessee, or California, God is always with them in His own person, and also by His angels, diligently guarding and protecting His Church on earth, morning, noon, and night. So King David knew this continual presence of the Son of God also, for David writes, "If I take the wings of the

morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.”

He is not only with us then, but He leads us also, and He leads us in a gracious way, which will benefit us. Now of course the path God chooses for us may not be easy and smooth, for we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God above, but nevertheless in whatever He allows or doesn't allow, it is still His right hand which leads us. This is why David said “Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me up.” The Right Hand of God is Christ, just as a man's right hand and arm are usually the stronger. God thus by this term “right hand” is telling us that Jesus is our strength, and Jesus will also lead us through this vale of tears to Himself in heaven. You should thus not only believe that Jesus is with you always, but also wherever He leads you, because His blood was shed for you, He will be your strength and comfort in all that lies ahead. Jacob did not have to then worry about his future, or going to this strange land or finding a godly wife, for God would be with Jacob in all his travels, and his journey would end in heaven, hence the stairway. So the Lord said to Jacob and promised, “I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” God would not only give Jacob a godly wife so that he would have many children which would spread out in many directions, but even through Jacob's Seed “all the families of the earth would be blessed.” This seed was Christ, hence it was the Gospel promise that Jacob had already heard through his father Isaac.

In this world then dear believer, we do not need to live in the fear of terrorists, or the devil, or hell, for Christ has revealed to you the stairway to heaven by His blood. 1 John 5:11 says, “This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” When you possess this everlasting life through Jesus, not only should you be certain your sins are forgiven, but you can also be certain the gates of hell cannot prevail against you. Satan knows just as well as you, that all your sins are forgiven through Christ, so what can Satan do? All he can really do is work to make you feel like you are not forgiven, or you feel alone, or you feel all is lost because our world is so bad today. He can also vex you and torment you to a certain extent, but all his efforts are in vain once you remember Jesus and His great love for you revealed upon the cross. Nothing can erase the blood of Christ, which washes you clean. When you remember Jesus, Satan is again defeated and must flee. So the Bible says “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” Likewise Romans 16:20, “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.” Note then in your battles with the devil, the world, and your flesh, both the necessity and power of God's Word to conquer all your foes. And this brings us to our final point, part two:

II. Jacob did not know this place was the house of God. The Bible says, “And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” The word dreadful here does not mean fearful or terrible, but it means awesome, incredible, or inspiring. So Jacob is saying “How reverential and holy is this place!....This is none other than the House of God and the Gate to heaven!”

What does this mean? It doesn't mean that we must all go to Bethel, for there we will find a stairway to heaven, but rather this means wherever God's Word is spoken in this world, there is God's house and the stairway to heaven. So Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.” Heaven is revealed through Christ, and Christ is the Word who gives heaven by the remission of our sins. Again Luther rightly said, “Where God's Word is heard, as was the case here, there is God's house.” That is how the Wise Men first learned of Jesus their Savior, by the Word they read in their Bibles, and that is still how we learn of God our Savior today. As for the question then, “Where is God?” The answer is He is here in this House of God, not so much our physical church building, but wherever the Word of God is preached, taught, expounded and explained rightly. If then you want to know God better, learn of Him more deeply, or if you want to get closer to God, be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools. Stop talking, shut your mouth, and be more ready to hear God's Word, for there in the Word, God will reveal Himself. Remember your Baptism. You cannot get closer to God, than by your own Baptism which is still working in you so that you repent and continue to believe. God does not hide himself in baptism, but He comes to us with a gracious washing and cleansing, a renewal of the Holy Ghost saying, “Now ye are clean through the Word I have spoken unto you.” Likewise commune often to obtain strength for a holier life. He comes to us with heavenly food saying, “This is My body, This is My blood, given and shed for you for the remission of sins.” If you are hungry, namely sorry for your sins, Take and eat, eat and drink. “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. Amen.”