

Anglican Church Noosa
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Genesis 28 & 29
Call | Covenant | Cost ~ The Awakening
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So this is our second last week in Genesis, as we've tracked through the generations of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

We have called this series Call, Covenant, Cost. And over these weeks, we've seen God **call** a flawed family, and yet establish a spectacular **covenant**. And we have begun to see the immense **cost**—not just a financial cost, but the deep, personal, transforming cost of walking with the living God.

Today, our focus shifts squarely onto Jacob. Up until this point, Jacob has been a character defined by manipulation. His name means "heel-catcher" or "supplanter," which is exactly what he's been doing since birth. You'll remember that when he was born, he was grasping Esau's heel as his twin.

He tricked his brother Esau out of his birthright; he deceived his blind father Isaac to steal the blessing. But as Genesis 28 opens, the running has finally caught up with him. He is forced to flee for his life, leaving behind everything he knows, sent away to the distant land of Haran.

Our topic today is The Awakening. We are going to look at two very different but really connected awakenings that Jacob experiences in these two chapters.

First, in chapter 28, he has a **theological awakening**—an awakening to the presence and grace of a sovereign God.

Second, in chapter 29, a **moral awakening**—it's kind of an awakening to the reality of his own sin and the costly place of real life where God transforms his people.

Whether you are young or old, whether you've walked with Christ for fifty years or are still trying to figure out who he is, these two chapters speak directly to how God meets us when we are at our lowest point.

So ... firstly, let's look first at ch 28, where we find Jacob alone in the wilderness.

The text tells us that he reached a certain place and stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking a stone, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep.

Think about the vulnerability of this. He's not the favoured son anymore, sitting safely in the tents with mum. He's a fugitive, sleeping in the dirt with a rock for a pillow.

It's dark, literally and metaphorically.

He's got no wealth, no family presence, and no guarantee of a future. He's completely empty.

And it is precisely here, when Jacob has nothing left to offer, nothing and no one to manipulate, that God steps in.

Jacob has a dream. He sees a stairway, a ladder, resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And there above it stands the Lord.

Imagine that right now. Do you have the mind picture?

Notice what God **doesn't** do.

He doesn't open the conversation with a lecture.

He doesn't say, "Jacob, you're a liar, a thief, and a disgrace to your grandfather."

Law and judgment could rightly have fallen on Jacob that night. But instead, God pours out pure, unadulterated grace. And He introduces himself by saying: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac."

God then repeats the magnificent covenant promises. This is quite incredible. God made these promises to Abraham, he then made the same promises to Isaac, and now, at this time of desperation, He promises Jacob the land; descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth; and he promises that all peoples on earth will be blessed through him and his offspring.

Three generations. One consistent covenant.

And then comes v.15, one of the most beautiful verses in all of Genesis: "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."

I'm wondering if those words make you think of another time, when similar words were spoken. Any thoughts?

At the end of Jesus' ministry, before his ascension, at the time of giving the Great Commission at the end of Matthew, Jesus says to the disciples - go and make disciples and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Anyway, back to Jacob. When he wakes up, he says something profound: "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

This is Jacob's **first great awakening. A Spiritual Awakening**. He awakens to the reality that God is not a localised deity bound to the family tents in Beersheba. God is here, in the barren wilderness, with his GPS on a wandering sinner. Jacob wasn't the one who sought out God; God sought Jacob. Jacob didn't climb the ladder to reach heaven; heaven came down to touch the dirt where Jacob was sleeping.

For us, this points directly to the heart of the gospel. The human condition is very much like Jacob at that time. We are broken, we are naturally inclined to manipulate our way through life, and left to ourselves, we are spiritually bankrupt. We can't climb a ladder to get to God. All our moral striving, all our religious efforts, all our good deeds are too short to reach heaven.

But the good news of the Christian faith is that God has provided the ultimate ladder. Centuries after Jacob slept on that stone, another man stood by a river and spoke to a young seeker named Nathanael.

In John ch 1, Jesus says, "Very truly I tell you, you will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Jesus Christ is the true ladder. He is the bridge between heaven and earth. He came down into our dark, broken world, took our flesh, died on a cross, and rose again so that a holy God could dwell with unholy people.

Jacob's awakening at Bethel is a beautiful foreshadowing of the gospel of grace: God meets us ...not when we have cleaned up our act, but when we are stranded in the dark, showing his saving presence through Christ.

Jacob responds by setting up the stone as a pillar, pouring oil on it, naming the place Bethel—which means the House of God—and he makes a vow.

Now, if we look closely at his vow in vv 20-22, we see that Jacob is still a bit of a bargainer. He says, If God will be with me, and if he will watch over me and give me food and clothes, then the Lord will be my God.

Jacob's faith is undoubtedly real, but it is immature. He's awake to God, but his heart is still learning how to trust without negotiating.

Now this brings us to ch 29, and Jacob's second awakening.

He continues his journey and arrives in the land of the eastern people. He comes to a well, meets his cousin Rachel, and is introduced to uncle Laban.

At first, everything looks wonderful. Jacob is welcomed into the home; he falls deeply in love with Rachel, the younger daughter, who is described as lovely in form and beautiful. Laban asks what Jacob's wages should be for working for him, and Jacob offers a massive price: "I'll work for you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel."

So there's seven years of gruelling labour as a shepherd. Yet the text tells us that those seven years seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. It's a beautiful romantic picture isn't it?

But then comes the wedding night. After the feast, in the pitch dark of the bridal tent, with the bride heavily veiled according to ancient custom, Laban brings his daughter to Jacob and the marriage is consummated.

Then we read v 25. It is one of the most stark, ironic sentences in Scripture: "When morning came, there was Leah!"

Imagine the shock. Imagine the sudden, jarring awakening in the light of day.

Jacob rushes to Laban and cries out, "What have you done? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?"

Laban smiles coolly and replies, "It's not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one."

There's quite a bit of poetic justice and irony here, isn't there?

Jacob, the younger brother who pretended to be the older brother to deceive his blind father in the dark, has now been completely deceived in the dark by an older relative using a younger sister and older sister. Jacob the deceiver has been thoroughly and utterly out-deceived.

And this is Jacob's **second awakening. His moral awakening.**

He learns the cost of character transformation.

When God calls us into his covenant by grace, he takes us exactly as we are, but ... he loves us too much to leave us as we are.

God doesn't just deliver Jacob from Esau; he delivers Jacob from Jacob.

And the schoolroom God uses to shape Jacob's character is the house of Laban.

Jacob wanted a quick blessing; God gives him twenty years of hard labour under a deceptive relative to burn away his pride and self-reliance, and to mould his manipulative nature.

This is the "**Cost**" bit. Growth in holiness is often painful. Sometimes God allows us to experience the painful consequences of our own traits, or he places us under difficult people, or difficult bosses, or challenging family circumstances; not to destroy us, but to wake us up to our need for integrity, patience, and absolute dependence on him.

As we look at the end of ch 29, which we didn't read today, the focus shifts to a heartbreaking domestic tragedy.

Jacob is given Rachel as well, but he must work another seven years.

He loves Rachel more than Leah.

The household is filled with rivalry, favouritism, and pain. Leah is unloved, cast aside, and neglected.

But look at how the ch 29 closes. v.31 tells us: "When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive."

Leah begins to have children, and with each child, she gives a name that reflects her spiritual journey.

First, Reuben: "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."

Then Simeon: "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too."

Then Levi: "Now at last my husband will become attached to me."

She desperately seeks the validation and love of her husband. She thinks children will buy that. But then she has a fourth son. And look at what she says when Judah is born in v 35: "This time I will praise the Lord."

Something broke through in Leah's heart.

She stopped looking at her husband for ultimate fulfillment and turned her eyes to the Lord.

She stopped saying, "Maybe now Jacob will love me," and instead said, "This time, regardless of my circumstances, regardless of whether I am loved or unloved, I will praise Yahweh."

Leah had her own awakening—an awakening to the truth that God's love is enough, even when human love fails.

And here is the astonishing grace of God wrapped up in this messy family tree.

It wasn't through Rachel, the beautiful, favoured wife, that the line of the Messiah would come. It was through Leah, the unloved, weak-eyed, neglected sister.

It was from her fourth son, Judah, that the line of the kings would descend.

It is from the line of Judah that King David would be born, and ultimately, Jesus Christ, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, would come into the world.

God works his glorious plans of redemption not through perfect, pristine families, but through the broken, the hurting, and the overlooked.

Next week we conclude this series looking at chapters 32-35, but I want to encourage you to go home and read the next 2 chapters. There's another sermon in those, a sermon we're not going to have, but keep reading this saga, as we see the relationship between Rachel and Leah go sour, as we see Rachel manipulating her way to motherhood, and the relationship between Laban and Jacob also deteriorating. Sadly, the dysfunction continues. So before next week, read chapters 30 to 35.

But, as we pull these two chapters together, we need to ask ourselves: **what kind of awakening do we need today?**

For the younger ones among us, or those exploring faith: Have you had that Bethel awakening? Have you realised that God is real, that he knows your name, and that he is pursuing you with his grace even when you are running or feel completely alone?

You don't have to climb a moral ladder to reach him. Because there's Jesus, the true ladder, who came down for you.

For those of us who have been Christians for a long time, but perhaps find ourselves in a difficult season—maybe in a workplace or a family situation that feels unfair, where you feel like you are being treated like Jacob in the house of Laban: Could it be that God is using that to awaken your character?

Could he be stripping away your self-reliance so that you learn to lean entirely on his covenant promises?

And for anyone here who feels unloved, unseen, or secondary—like Leah: Know that the Lord sees your sadness. He hears your cries. He is the God who chooses the weak things of the world to shame the wise. He invites you to lift your eyes above your earthly relationships and say, "This time, I will praise the Lord."

Let us pray.

Almighty God, we thank you that you are the God of Bethel, the God who meets us in our darkness and our brokenness. We thank you for Jesus Christ, our true ladder, who connects us to

your endless grace. We ask that you would awaken our hearts afresh today. Shape our characters, comfort our sorrows, and help us to trust your sovereign plan, knowing that you will never leave us until you have done what you have promised. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.