

Empire Church of the Brethren

Sunday Service Sermons

09 March 2025

Reaffirming Our Relationship

Text: "So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with in, Bethel." *Gen. 35:15*
Homecoming is always one of the highlights of the high school or college year.

It is a time when school spirit and support are worked up.

Alumni return to renew their acquaintance with friends, to revisit their old haunts, and to relive their experiences.

It is a happy occasion, a time to reaffirm relationships.

Jacob had a different sort of homecoming when he returned to Bethel.

Bethel was the place where he had met God when he fled from his home and from the wrath of his brother Esau.

There he had seen a ladder stretching from earth to heaven and had seen the messengers of God ascending and descending between earth and heaven.

There he had received a promise from God and had made a vow to God.

It had been a place of meaningful spiritual experience.

Twenty to thirty years had passed, and life had brought a variety of experiences to Jacob.

He had married, had a large family, and become wealthy.

And he had fled again, this time from Laban, who was both his uncle and father-in-law.

He had reconciled with Esau and was back home in Canaan.

So Jacob went back to Bethel.

He renewed the vow he had made with God so many years before, which had included a vow to tithe.

He reaffirmed his relationship with God.

A time of stewardship emphasis, particularly a pledge day or commitment day, gives us the opportunity to reaffirm our relationship with God.

In reaffirming our relationship we remember the beginning.

What had happened at Bethel?

Jacob had met God personally.

This was the beginning of Jacob's personal experience with God.

It was only after these times that God could be identified as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God had given a promise to Jacob.

It was the reaffirmation of the promise God had made to Abraham.

Jacob's grandfather, and to Isaac, Jacob's father.

God would work through Jacob.

Jacob made a vow to God.

In response to the promise made by God to Jacob.

Jacob made a vow to God.

He vowed to serve God and worship him.

With this he included a vow of stewardship, to tithe.

What happened since Bethel?

Jacob had become rich and self-sufficient.

Jacob was no longer the wanderer fleeing from his family, looking for a place of refuge.

He had become a success.

Jacob had disappointment in his family.

His daughter Dinah had been raped by Shechem.

It was a terrible disappointment and a tough personal blow.

Jacob had trouble with his neighbors.

Following Dinah's personal tragedy, Jacob's sons had acted deceitfully and had massacred the Shechemites in revenge.

Jacob and his family had apparently drifted from the vow.

Why do we need a Bethel?

In a time of personal need, Jacob went back to the place of beginning.

He went back to the place where he had first affirmed a relationship with God to reaffirm that relationship.

Often we need to make that journey emotionally and spiritually, of not physically.

Our needs may be the same as Jacob's needs.

When we look at what had happened to Jacob since Bethel, we realize that there is hardly a contemporary family that has not faced those same problems in some measure, more affluent than ever before, with the accompanying self-sufficiency, disappointments, problems with interpersonal relations either at home, at work, or with neighbors; and drifting away from the commitment made to the Christ.

To Bethel, to God, we go to reaffirm our relationship.

In reaffirming our relationship we return to the basics.

As well as "back to Bethel," we could also say "back to the basics."

What are those basics?

Cleansing.

Jacob had his family cleanse themselves from idolatry.

One cannot go into the presence of God with the vestiges of idolatry clinging to him or her.

We need to cleanse ourselves from the idolatry of self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, and self-interest.

Conversion

Christ must be personally accepted.

It was at Bethel that Jacob first met God personally and made a commitment to God.

It was at Bethel that Jacob followed God.

Commitment.

In his vow to God, Jacob made a commitment.

At Bethel, for the first time, Jacob pledged to tithe.

If one is hesitant about pledging to give, perhaps he or she ought to look to this scriptural precedent for pledging.

Continuation.

Jacob made an altar at Bethel, and there he worshiped God.

We continue the commitments we make to God through regular worship.

Our commitments take on meaning as they are reinforced through the regular worship of God.

In reaffirming our relationship we receive the blessings.

The blessing of an enlarged promise from God.

In looking at the blessing Jacob received from God, we are aware that we can receive the same blessings.

Blessings are not always defined materially.

In fact, the greatest blessings are spiritual.

The blessing of renewed fellowship with God.

In this account we are told again of Jacob's name change to Israel.

Jacob means "the supplanter," and his whole previous history had been an attempt to supplant someone, to get the upper hand, whether with Esau or Laban.

Israel means "he who strives with God."

How long the silence between Jacob and God had lasted we do not know.

But we do know that fellowship between Jacob and God was renewed.

The renewing of the fellowship with God is always a great blessing.

This is a day for reaffirming your relationship with God.

It begins with an act of faith.

Take the step of faith for the Savior now.

Bethel means "house of God."

Here in the house of God you can reaffirm your relationship to him.

God is not only waiting for you, he is waiting for all of you.