

Memorial Moments

Text: Genesis 35:9-15 The Passion Translation

9 After Jacob returned from Paddan-Aram, God appeared to him once again and blessed him,

10 saying, "Your name was once Jacob, but no longer. Your new name is Israel!" God named him Israel

11 and said to him, "I am the God who is more than enough. Go and have many children, and they will multiply. A nation and a gathering of many nations will come from you; and you will be the ancestor of kings.

12 I will give you the land which I gave to Abraham and to Isaac, and after you are gone, to your descendants."

13 Then God ascended into heaven from the place where he had spoken to him.

14 Jacob set up a stone pillar to memorialize the place where he had met with God. He poured over it a drink offering and anointed the pillar with oil.

15 Jacob called the place where God had spoken to him Bethel.

Introduction

When Rob invited me to preach for this service, [my first opportunity to preach at Hillside Church, by the way] he suggested I use this as an opportunity to speak about what God has been telling me this year. As I considered this, I was reminded of this verse in Psalm 66: "Come and listen, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he did for me,". That's what I want to do today. Just as God spoke to Jacob marking changes in Jacob's life and name, God also speaks to us. How do we mark these moments and how do these moments change us?

Please pray with me for God's Spirit to take over this time.

Kevin, thank you for reading the scripture for us today. In this passage we learn that God appeared to Jacob, blessed him by changing his name to Israel, gave him a new identity and renewed a promise and then Israel responded by making a memorial to God.

Most of you know things about Jacob's earlier life. Like all the rest of us, Jacob had a complicated story. Born as a twin he was holding onto his slightly older brother's heel when they were born. Jacob actually is translated "heel grabber", but can mean things like "trickster" or "cheater". And Jacob did his share of deceiving, with his mother's help. The birthright that should have gone to older twin Esau, was given by father Isaac to Jacob instead. Jacob began to fear his brother would kill him in anger over this episode so he ran away to his uncle's in another country. Jacob's story has it all—dreams of angels and wrestling matches and having his bride switched at the last minute. I told you it was complicated.

I. What God tells Jacob

In the passage we're considering today many years have passed and Jacob has been told by God to return to his homeland. Verse 9 says "God appeared to him once again and blessed him." Over and over God has been at work in Jacob's life, never giving up on Jacob. The same is true for me and for you. When we agree to a relationship with God, God comes to us **Once Again to bless us**, even when we might feel we don't deserve God's blessing.

Well, what did God tell Jacob? God tells Jacob that instead of being known as the trickster or cheater, he's now to be called Israel which means "may God preserve" or "prince with God." Jacob's been given a new name. This means he now has a new identity and a new destiny. No longer is he Esau's little brother, the one who stole the birthright. He's now the one through whom God will keep on forming a special people. In fact, this people will come to be known as the people of Israel.

We at Hillside can relate to that, can't we? We have a new name and are anticipating God revealing new parts to our identity as a body of believers and a new destiny. These are exciting times for us.

Then, God tells Israel more. God identifies himself as God Almighty or El Shaddai, or as this translation renders it, "the God who is more than enough."

This year God has been teaching me more and more what it means that he is my El Shaddai, my All Sufficient One, the One Who is More Than Enough. I have been prompted to use an ancient practice called A Breath Prayer at times when I need reassurance and am seeking wisdom and peace. You can Google this term to find out more details. The form of breath prayer I've been using is a short prayer spoken as I inhale and then as I exhale. When I inhale, I use the name of God—El Shaddai—and then when I exhale, I pray "Guide my thoughts" or "Guide my steps". You can select any name for God that holds meaning for you and then pray what you need at the time as you exhale. Praying in this way has grown my ability to trust in The One Who Is More Than Enough because I focus on God and ask for what I need trusting that will be provided.

Let me offer one caution. If you try using the breath prayer and do not sense a greater closeness to God, don't give up. And don't think that something is wrong with your faith. Ask God to show you another way that is right for you to become closer to him and then wait to hear from him.

A final thing God tells Jacob is that the land God has all along promised to Abraham and Isaac will be the land for Jacob and for his descendants as well. In other words, God is saying, "Jacob/Israel, you are my chosen one. Through you my chosen people will be born. It's not a mistake that you carry on the line after your father, Isaac. This is my plan for you."

And then God leaves. The moment is over. This is just like times in our lives when we hear from God—it's an exciting moment and then God leaves and we have to decide what to do next. So, Israel now must decide how to respond.

II. How Israel Responds

It's significant to note how Israel responds to this meeting with God. First, he sets up a stone pillar. Why? He wants to mark the place where he had met with God. Why? **Israel knows that things are going to be different for him from now on.**

Have you ever had that experience? Like his father and grandfather before him, he's having a memorial moment, an experience of hearing from God and choosing to respond in submission and obedience. He is expressing confidence in the One True God and committing himself to follow God the rest of his days. He marks this further by pouring a drink offering over the stone and then anointing the stone with oil. Israel is pouring himself out, giving himself fully to God.

When I was in my late 30's God used a study of the book of Romans to get my attention. Specifically, when we reached chapter 12 verse 1, I came face to face with the fact that though I'd made a profession of faith as a ten-year-old I had not taken an important further step. I came to realize that I was going through the motions of being a follower of Christ. I was doing a lot of things **for God**, but I was not fully submitted **to God**. I was holding back. Jesus was not really the Lord of my life, I was. God spoke to me, as God often does, through a verse of scripture, in this case Romans 12:1.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

I responded not with a stone pillar but I could have for this was a Memorial Moment for me that changed me forever. This yielding meant the Holy Spirit could now be active in my life. What a difference that makes, right?

Israel responds in a second way to this encounter with God by giving a name to this place. "He called the place where God had spoken to him Bethel—the House of God." He's come home at last. Israel recognizes that God has met with him, that God is not a distant deity, but one who dwells with Israel. He's expressing gratitude for God's constant presence in his life, for God's promise of many descendants, for land, for ancestors who will be kings. We know that one of Israel's ancestors is to be Jesus, the King of Kings.

III. What God's been Telling Me

There are two other things God has been telling me this year that I'd like to share in closing. First, God has been using me to pray for a young woman I know. And to guide my praying God gave me this verse, **Psalms 37:4**, to pray for her:

"Take delight in the Lord [Become soft and pliable in God's hands], and he will give you your heart's desires." This young woman has experienced several disappointments in her life causing her to question her faith and to be angry with God. It's hard for her to believe right now that God wants the very best for her, to help her have the most fulfilling life possible. Her sadness and anger are getting in the way of her taking delight in the Lord. She's become hardened toward God, and God still loves her and is still drawing her to himself. I believe she will soften and become receptive to her Lord once again. Of course, what's happened as I've prayed for her is that God has been using this to soften **me** and make **me** more pliable and yielded. What a promise—to know that God will give me, give this young woman, give all of us our heart's desires!

And finally, I come to the hardest thing God's been telling me this year. Some years ago I was led to seek God to find out what my life verse was to be. A life verse is a guide to help you know what to commit to, what to let God work on, a promise to rely on from God or a promise you're making to God. **I was given John 15:5** as my life verse. I've liked most of the verse, but I've really resisted the last part. Here it is: **"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing."**

I've always been made uncomfortable by that last part. My pride tells me I can do whatever I set my mind to. Jesus says that if I want to do a thing that will have true and eternal value I must rely on his help, I need to remain in Jesus, to grow my relationship with Jesus, to stay connected to Jesus as a branch stays connected to the vine.

In order to continue teaching me this truth, God gave me several new "projects" in 2019 that took me way out of my usual areas of service. In each case it was necessary for me to humble myself before God and seek his direction and help. I received support and encouragement from everyone whose help I sought. Through these projects I've made new friends and deepened friendships that already were in existence. "Let me tell you what God has done for me" as Psalm 66 says: most of all I've experienced a deeper level of joy, pleasure and immense satisfaction as I've followed the Spirit's leading. Everything I've needed to carry out these tasks has been provided. I've been given a level of contentment and peace that surpasses any I've ever known. I have been a recipient of the grace and mercy, the unfailing love and goodness and kindness of God. These 3 projects have become three more Memorial Moments for me, opportunities for me to reflect on God's faithfulness to keep on being at work in my life.

IV. What About You?

What is a Memorial Moment you remember in your life? How did you respond?

What is God telling you these days?

How are you responding today to what you're hearing from God?

We will sing now and allow time for anyone who desires prayer to come to me or to our elder in the back. You are free to come pray at the steps or pray at your seat.