

**“The Fugitive”**  
**Genesis 28:10-19**

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor  
Smoke Rise Baptist Church  
Stone Mountain, Georgia  
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Two years ago, he had a dream that he would be interviewed in Yankee Stadium after participating in the Major League All-Star Home Run Derby. What made this dream so amazing is that Josh Hamilton was banned at the time from baseball because of an addiction to drugs and alcohol and the site of the 2008 All-Star game had not been selected. Last Monday, the Texas Ranger center fielder set a record by hitting twenty-eight home runs in the first round.

Hamilton did not connect his dream to a spiritual experience, but he did say that he felt blessed to have played in Yankee Stadium before it is torn down and to have been selected by his peers and fans for the All-Star game. I have no doubt he is a changed man.

I would like to think that Jacob’s dream changed him, too, because he needed to make some improvements in his life. Unlike Josh Hamilton, Jacob did connect his dream to an encounter with God and evidently shared the details with family and friends. Today’s text uncovers some of them for us.

Our story begins with Jacob fleeing for his life. I’m not surprised. He was not an innocent man accused of a crime like Dr. Richard Kimble, played by David Janssen in the television series, “The Fugitive,” or the 1993 movie by the same title, starring George Harrison. He has connived to get everything he wanted and now he is running away empty.

You recall that Jacob was the second son born to Isaac and Rebekah. His twin brother, Esau, was born moments before him with Jacob hanging on to his heel. He spent his early years thinking of ways to get his brother’s birthright and took advantage of the opportunity when it came. When Esau, the rugged outdoorsman favored by his father, Isaac, came home one evening famished from an unsuccessful hunting expedition, Jacob tempted him with some of the food he had prepared. Jacob offered Esau a hot meal in exchange for his birthright. Esau agreed and Jacob got what he wanted.

A few years later, Jacob, with his mother’s help, tricked his dying father into believing that he was Esau and giving him the coveted final blessing. When Esau discovered what happened, he vowed to kill Jacob. It was at this point that Jacob had to flee from his brother’s murderous rage. With assistance from his mother again, Jacob quickly left Beersheba and headed north toward Haran to live with his uncle, Laban, until Esau’s anger subsided.

After the first day’s journey, he stopped in Luz, eleven miles north of Jerusalem. Alone for the first time in his life and scared, he bedded down for the night under the open sky. He placed a rock near his head for protection from wild animals or intruders. While he slept, he had a dream that had a profound impact upon him.

In his dream, he saw a staircase reaching from heaven to earth. Angels were ascending and descending and God spoke to him.

“ ‘I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. 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.’ Then Jacob woke up from his sleep and said, ‘**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.’ Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz”  
Genesis 28:13-19.

I am intrigued by Jacob’s initial reaction after waking up from his dream. “**Surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it.**” **Why did he not know it?**

I believe the last thing that Jacob expected that night was a divine encounter in a strange place. He was merely passing through Luz and had a lot on his mind. Evidently he slept outside under the open sky in an ordinary place that resembled many others he had seen. When he bedded down for the night, I think it is safe to say that he was not expecting a visit from the God of his father and grandfather.

Where was the unlikeliest place that you had an unforgettable encounter with God? Were you startled and caught off guard like Jacob? Did you memorialize the spot or give it a sentimental name? Have you shared the experience with anyone?

What did you learn from that divine experience? Are you less likely to confine God to your expectations? Do you see every place as sacred and each experience as fertile ground for a divine encounter? I hope so.

On my recent trip to Israel, I recall standing in front of a home in Nazareth that a family lived in during Jesus' time. Some speculate it was his boyhood home. If not, he probably lived in one like it close to this one.

It was nothing like any of our homes. It consisted of two rooms in a cave. There was a road that ran in front of it and you could imagine a family living there and the children playing outside the entrance near that well worn road.

I vividly remember my thoughts and feelings as I stood and gazed at it. "Why here? Why a humble dwelling like this? Why then?" Then I silently responded, "Why not? If Jesus could come from such a humble place as this, then no one can hide behind feelings of inferiority or inadequacy."

This setting also reminded me that God is not limited to our expectations and ideas. Just when we think we have Him or life figured out, He surprises us. He certainly did Jacob. He has me, too, and I assume you as well.

Why was Jacob unaware of God's presence on that lonely hillside? He never dreamed that God would show up at such a time and place along his journey.

I'm not sure that Jacob believed that God would visit him in that place for another reason. You see, this was not a good place for him to be. This was a place of shame, guilt, fear, confusion, despair and alienation. This wasn't a place for God or anyone else that knew him to come to him. Jacob was a con man, a deceiver reaping what he had sown and he deserved to be alone and suffer in silence.

**Come to think of it, why was God there?** For the same reason you and I would be if Jacob was our son. God was doing what any loving parent would do that was worried about a wayward child. Jacob made a mess of his life and needed help. It wasn't time to let him go and spiral out of control. It was time to go find him and remind him that he was still loved in spite of his many mistakes and that his family needed him to assume the mantle of leadership handed down to him.

In other words, it was time for Jacob to grow up and become responsible. It was time for him to get serious about life and become a servant leader, helping those that needed him as the covenant with his ancestors stressed. It was time for him to bless people rather than bless them out.

It was also time for Jacob to get serious about his faith and recognize his dependence upon God. The Lord would make this journey of faith with him just as He did Jacob's ancestors and provide the wisdom, understanding, strength, courage and confidence he needed. He, like Abraham and Isaac, however, needed to let God lead him.

**What impact did this experience have on Jacob?** I would like to think that he woke up a new man and that his words of reverence and act of worship in response to this encounter meant that he was going to get serious about his faith, responsibilities and future. At least I want to think that it began that lifelong process and there are indications that it did.

Let's allow this story to intersect our lives this morning. **Is it time for you to wake up?** Do you need to make some changes? Is it time for you to get serious about faith, responsibilities and your future? Is it time for you to come to grips with your past and change the course of your life? Is it time for you to become a positive role model and leader? Who needs you to grow up and assume the mantle of leadership in your family and become a servant leader? Who needs you to move from Luz to Bethel?

How many encounters with God and wake-up calls have you missed? I have to believe that this was not the first time that God tried to reach Jacob. It was, perhaps, the first time that Jacob got away

from his family or faced a problem that he and his mother could not solve that made this encounter possible. "Surely the Lord was in this place and I was unaware of it" Could you say the same thing?

**This morning, are you so focused upon a destination or goal that you cannot see the value of the journey and the importance of relationships?** Are you at such a low point in life that you think even God cannot reach you? Are you, too, living in fear and shame and with so much guilt that you feel that you deserve to languish in misery forever?

Aren't you impressed with the fact that God visited Jacob while on this journey at the lowest point in his life and did not reprimand him or heap more guilt upon him? Have you noticed that not a word of condemnation was spoken to this guilty man?

Why? Was God unaware of Jacob's glaring faults? Of course not. Then what was God's intent that evening? What lesson did Jacob need to learn in that moment through that divine encounter? He needed to know that he was redeemable. Sure, he deserved condemnation, but God's amazing grace gave him what he needed, not deserved. Under the circumstances, no loving parent would do differently that wanted to redeem a child that had lost his way.

I don't know what you have done, who you have hurt or how badly you feel this morning, but I want you to know that God has not given up on you and I would be willing to say that no one else that truly loves you has either. You may have given up on yourself, but they haven't, and their support is all you need in order to turn your life around. If you don't do it, you only have yourself to blame.

You may be on the other side of this equation this morning. You may be a struggling parent or grandparent of a wayward child. **Who needs you to come to their aid in their hour of greatest need?** Who around you has messed up his or her life so badly that they are reeling out of control? Who needs you to love them at their worst and hear that you still believe in them? Who needs you to be the healing, comforting, forgiving, encouraging and guiding presence of God in their life at this time? Are you willing to be that person?

**How can you?** You can't. You don't have enough grace and mercy or willpower, but I know one who does. Ask the God of Jacob to help you do for someone you love what He did for someone He loved. He will. He will give you wisdom, understanding, insight, patience, strength, courage and stamina. He will go with you down a road that few are willing to go and no one wants to travel. I hope and pray you will let Him.