

Surprised by God's Presence Genesis 28v10-22

Some people have a lasting impact on society (e.g., Edward Jenner and vaccination for infectious disease) and their work is present in our lives. David Attenborough's work & TV programmes make him relatable, but he's not dynamically and relationally present in our individual lives. *What happens when God is no more to people than a skilful, remote creator whose words have been scripted down?*

1) Knowing God's Presence (28v10-17)

At the beginning of our passage, Jacob knew about the LORD, but didn't experience God's personal presence and so know him for himself. He has just sinned badly, thinks he is alone and is on the run from Esau. But the LORD has bigger, life-giving, loving plans for and through Jacob. The stairway/ staircase he sees in the dream God gives him (v12) is probably part of a Ziggurat (like the one at Ur). This one reaches all the way from heaven, God's dwelling place, down to the ground where Jacob is lying. God has come down the stairway to be with Jacob (v13, see NIV footnote & CSB translation) and, standing there beside him, speaks directly to him. God confirms the blessing of Abraham to Jacob and promises always to be personally present with Jacob, powerfully caring for him wherever he may walk and go (v14).

God's presence is personal, powerful and particular to our individual lives & circumstances. Jacob realises that 'God really is in the house' and is afraid (v17). This is real, heaven is meeting earth, and so he says, "The LORD is in this place and I didn't know it" (v16). And when we encounter the personal presence of the Lord, we will often be equally surprised. *Might the Lord be challenging us to move deeper into his presence at the moment, in these Covid times and at this point in our life as a fellowship?*

Some churches don't want God to walk down the staircase in this way, instead strangely finding a remote, static God more comfortable. But the presence of the Lord is a wonderful thing, it is life itself. To resist or move away from his personal presence is to move towards exile and the loss of his glory. To move towards his personal presence is to move towards the new creation.

2) Welcoming God's Presence (v18-22)

In John 1v51, Jesus tells us HE is the fulfilment of the staircase Jacob saw. Jesus is the one who makes heaven meet earth. Jesus is the one through whom God walks down the staircase to meet us where we are. And Jesus is the one who then stands beside you and says "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28v20). And so, the question for each of us this morning: "Is Jesus in the house?" Maybe you know that the Lord is calling your name for the first time at the moment. Maybe you know he has walked down the staircase and is knocking on your door, inviting you into a deeper rest in his presence or a closer reliance on him. Jacob shows us how to respond in v18-20. Jacob recognizes the immense significance and value of what is happening (v18-19), and so he doesn't rush past the moment. He marks the significance of it and speaks with God (v20), recognizing the reality of God's presence and promise, and offers his life back to the Lord he has just encountered so powerfully (v22). "Is Jesus in the house of our lives and fellowship?" He delights when he hears us saying "The Lord, Jesus Christ, is my God" (v21), with all that means, and finds us offering our lives to him in loving adoration. He longs to fill the house of our lives, individually and together. *"Is Jesus in the house?"*

