

Where We Are

Who We Are. Where We Are. Where We've Been. Where We're Going #1

Genesis 35:11-15

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him. His faithfulness reaches to the skies.

In all of our homes, there is a wall that exists for memories. A techni-color picture of mom, or dad, or both, resides there in a faded wood frame. Every time you pass by it, you still wonder what life was like in the times when photographers snapped pictures from box cameras with collodion dry plates. But still, you smile brightly when you look up at it. There is also shelf that exists for nostalgia. It might even be where that baseball resides that Tommy Lasorda signed for you on March 17, 2008, just before he and the rest of his Los Angeles Dodgers boarded a plane for the West Coast never to return. Their decision to leave still irritates you every time you glance at it. There is also a coffee table that is home to photo albums. Each picture in each album contains handwritten notations memorializing the moment. Every time you thumb through them, you sing *Precious Memories, How They Linger* to yourself as an act of praise to God for the memories He's allowed you to make thus far.

Walls, shelves, and coffee tables may exist in homes to memorialize where we've been and what has been. They are good. They are meaningful. But friends, I want to tell you today that the Lord God Almighty doesn't exist, move, and have His being in what has been. He exists, moves, and has His being in the present. Because in the present, He has the future in mind. And he calls us in the present to move forward in light of what we've learned in the past. Consequently, the walls, shelves, and coffee tables that contain our spiritual story is meant by God to be the fuel that motors our spiritual engines forward and the batteries that keep our provident compasses pointing north.

Last week, we looked at who we are. We are a body of followers of Jesus Christ called the Genesis Church of Vero Beach. We devote ourselves to the Apostle's Teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42). Today, we are going to look at where we are. And where we are right now reads a lot like where Jacob was when the Lord spoke to him in Genesis 35:11-15. Jacob had a past. Some of it good. Some of it not so good. But in this passage, he chooses not to look at his wall, shelf, and coffee table. He had a future. But in this passage, he chooses not to create more room on his wall, shelf, and coffee table. Instead, he chooses to live in the present, in fellowship with God, with the future in mind. We can too and Genesis 35:11-15 tells us how. Turn there with me.

¹¹ And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will be among your descendants." ¹² The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you. ¹³ Then God went up from him at the place where he had talked with him. ¹⁴ Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. ¹⁵ Jacob called the place where God had talked with him Bethel.

How We Live in the Present with the Future in Mind:

1. Obedience in light of the Promise (11-12)

- **Christopher Columbus:** (1) In elementary school, I learned a little rhyme about Christopher Columbus that I still remember: "In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue." (2) But we residents of the Sunshine State should beg for editing that sounds like this: "In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. But in 1493, he brought the citrus seed for you and me." (3) The reason Columbus brought citrus seeds with him to the New World is because he had every intention of planting them. (4) The divine injunction to be fruitful and multiply works the same way.
- **For Jacob:** (1) There was a divine injunction: "be fruitful and multiply." It's the same divine injunction God gave to Adam and Eve at creation and Israel when they got back into their land after Babylon Exile. But here, and only here, the injunction is connected to a promise of God: "the land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you."
- **For Us:** The divine injunction is "go and make disciples of all nations. Baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe everything I've commanded you" (Matthew 28:19). And it too is connected to a promise: "lo, I'm with you always, even until the end of the age."

- **App:** It's God desire that we plant our citrus seeds with descendants in mind. For each time we decide to obey the divine injunction, our citrus seeds go in the ground. And future generations benefit from the decisions we make.

2. Remembrance in light of the Past (13-14)

- **Memorial Stone at Boot Hill:** (1) In Tombstone, Arizona, there is a famous cemetery called Boot Hill. It's where many individuals from the Old Wild West were buried. (2) One of those stones reads: "Here lies Lester Moore. Four slugs from a .44. No Les, no more. (2) Lester Moore's pillar at Boot Hill reminds people in Tombstone that Lester Moore walked among in the past. (3) Jacob erected a sacred pillar that stood to remind everyone that God walked with him in the past.
- **For Jacob:** To memorialize and commemorate God's communication to him, Jacob set up a stone pillar. Joshua did the same thing when he led the 12 tribes to remove stones from the riverbed and stand them up in the Promised Land. Samuel did the same thing after Israel defeated the Philistines. He called it Ebenezer: "stone of help." They were erected as memorials to commemorate God's love and communication for those who saw them, to say to them, "here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by thy help I come."
- **For Us:** God will give us a sacred space. Where that is and when that is in the hands of providence. But it will happen. But he's already given us the most sacred space of all: our hearts. Our hearts contain our Ebenezers and each time we testify to his love, mercy, and goodness in our journeys, we tell others: "hither by thy help I come."
- **App:** "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands" (Ps 143:5)

3. Nearness in light of the Present (15)

- **A Bethel in Every Town:** (1) Do a Google search for churches in every town in America and you will most likely see the name of a church with "Bethel" in the title somewhere. (2) There's a reason for this. It means "House of God." And it's the first "house of God" recorded in the Scriptures: a place that exists to foster nearness with God and each other in the present. And it's right here in this passage. (3) Friends, we don't have "Bethel" in our title. But we are a "Bethel," building or no building.
- **For Jacob:** He called the place Bethel because it marked the spot where God talked with him. The essence of the verb "talk" implies that God's communication will continue in the future.
- **For Us:** Our Bethel, our House of God, is Genesis. Genesis means "beginnings." God began his communication with our Bethel, our House of God, in 2015. He continues to communicate with us today. May we, like Jacob, listen to Him.
- **App:** "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lam 3:22-23).