

Call to Spiritual Renewal

God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau". So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments. Then let us arise and go to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone. Genesis 35:1-3

Bethel was the place where God first revealed Himself to Jacob. The name Jacob literally means deceiver, and reflects Jacob's lifestyle in the early years of his life, scheming and deceiving his brother and father to obtain his father's blessing and his brother's birthright. God had revealed to Jacob's mother, Rebekah that His blessing to Abraham and Isaac would include Jacob, but Jacob and his mother were not willing to wait on God. Because of his deceitfulness, it was necessary for Jacob to flee from his brother's wrath. When he stopped to rest, while he slept, God, in His grace, appeared to him and blessed him with a promise, "*Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done with you what I have promised you*" (Genesis 28:15). After Jacob awoke, he called this place Bethel which means 'the house of God'. Using the stone which had been his pillar, he set up a monument to the Lord, stating, "*this stone which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that You give me I will give a full tenth to You.*" (Genesis 28:22).

Jacob continued on the journey to his uncle Laban's house in Haran where he dwelled for twenty years. After working seven years for his beloved Rachel's hand, he was deceived by Laban and was given her sister Leah. He then worked another seven years for Rachel. Jacob continued to work for his uncle and God blessed all he did. But in his relationship with Laban, he was treated with deception, misunderstanding and resentment. Although, the Lord had called Jacob, had forgiven him and had immensely blessed him, He did not take away the consequences of Jacob's sin.

Then one day, the Lord spoke to him, "*I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go out from this land and return to the land of your kindred*" (Genesis 31:13). So, Jacob took his family and possessions and began the journey back, but he stopped short of where God told him to go. He settled in the wicked city of Shechem, thereby failing to live in complete obedience to God. During his time in Shechem, Jacob's daughter was raped by the Shechemites and his sons acted in revenge by murdering the men of Shechem and plundering their possessions.

But again, God, in His grace, lovingly called Jacob back to Bethel to dwell and to erect an altar. God was calling Him to spiritual renewal. Jacob said to his household, 1) put away the foreign gods that are among you. 2) purify yourselves and 3) change your garments. 4) Then let us arise and go to Bethel and make an altar to God (See Genesis 35:1-3 above). (Above background information regarding Jacob taken from Genesis 25-35).

Are you in need of a spiritual renewal in your life? Have you stopped short of where God has told you to go? Is God calling you back to a close intimate relationship with Him? Genesis 35:1-3 gives four directives to spiritual renewal.

1. Put away the foreign gods that are among you. Today, in America, we may not have the graven household images Jacob's family possessed, but we have our own idols. Anything that comes before your devotion to God is an idol. It may be possessions, family, friends, pleasure, career, etc. Jacob's family buried their idols. Are you willing to mortify (kill) your idols? Jesus tells us, "*Do not lay up treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth or rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" (Matthew 6:19-21).
2. Purify yourselves. You may not outwardly look like the world, but do you inwardly look like Jesus? God sees the condition of the heart.

God's word says, "*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me*" (Psalm 51: 10). "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" (I John 1:9).

3. Change your garments. God's word says, "*His bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*" (Revelation 19:7b-8 – emphasis mine).

How will you be clothed when you meet Jesus, your Bridegroom? Colossians 3:12-17 describes how you should be clothed. "*Therefore, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on (clothe yourself with) a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. And let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*"

4. Return to the place you first met God and worship Him. "*Worthy are You, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power for You created all things and by Your will they existed and were created*" (Revelation 4:11). "*Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing*" (Revelation 5:12).

Is God calling you to return to God centered worship? This worship, by the power of the Holy Spirit, must totally encompass every aspect of your life. "*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect*" (Romans 12:1-2).

*"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,
are being transformed into the same image
from one degree of glory to another.*

For this, comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”
(2 Corinthians 3:18)

Is the Lord Christ calling you to spiritual renewal?
Today, if your Bridegroom comes, will you be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure?

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