**Jacob’s Forgotten Vow**

(Genesis 35:1-7)

INTRODUCTION:

1. Our study today is based on Genesis 35:1-7 where we find God telling Jacob to go to Bethel and build an altar.
2. Why did God command this? Because nearly thirty years earlier, Jacob had made a vow, but seems to have forgotten it. And God is now calling on him to fulfill it.
3. There are several lessons that we can learn from Jacob’s forgotten vow which can be applied to our service as Christians. To do this I want to…
   1. Look at the historical background of this event.
   2. Make some practical applications to our lives.

BODY:

1. **The historical background (Gen. 28:10-22):**
   1. (28:10-17) Thirty years earlier Jacob left Beersheba headed to Haran fleeing Esau after stealing his birthright and stopped on the way at what is now called Bethel where he had this dream.
      1. In this dream…
         1. Jacob saw angels ascending and descending on a ladder between heaven and earth.
         2. God promises to be with him, bless him, and safely return him to his home, which was of great importance to Jacob at his present time of distress.
      2. (28:18-22) The dream prompted Jacob to make a vow saying that if God would be with Him he would…
         1. Make the Lord his God.
         2. The stone upon which his head had rested set as a pillar would be God’s house (for him and his family—he would seek the Lord there).
         3. He would give God a tenth of all that God gave him.
   2. For the next twenty years, Jacob lived a blessed life in Haran as God promised.
      1. He prospered both in family and in wealth as a servant of Laban, who was less than upright in his dealing with Jacob (Gen. 30:43 – “So the man [Jacob] became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys.”).
      2. As had been promised, God then allowed Jacob to return home by keeping him safe...
         1. From Laban, who was at first pursued him with harmful intent when God warned Laban to do nothing to Jacob (Gen 31)
         2. From Esau, who was coming to meet him with 400 men, and who Jacob thought would surely seek revenge, but instead sought reunion (Gen 32-33).
   3. By the time of our text (Gen 35), Jacob had been living in Canaan **ten years**.
      1. He settled in the city of Shechem (Gen. 33:18 – “Now Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram, and camped before the city.”).
      2. The problem, however, was that he had forgotten and not gone back to Bethel, where the Lord had appeared to him and where he had made his vow, so God commands him to return to Bethel (Gen. 35:1-7).
2. **The application: Remembering our vows is important because…**
   1. God expects us to do so (Eccl. 5:4-5 – “When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.”).
      1. Keeping any covenant or vow we make with God is a serious matter…and time does not change that. God expected it to be paid thirty years later.
      2. This includes the vow, or vows, you made when you became a Christian, which include…
         1. The vow to submit to God, as did Jacob, as your Lord and Savior (Acts 2:36) with the understanding that He will be “with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).
         2. The vow to continue in sin no more and to serve Him as “slaves of righteousness” because you have “been set free from sin” (Rom. 6:1-2, 18).
      3. Are we faithfully keeping these vows?
   2. We are prone to forget our vows after God has fulfilled His side.
      1. We saw how God fulfilled His vow to be with Jacob, protecting and prospering him. But Jacob had not.
      2. Just as was true of Jacob, this same forgetfulness, or failure to follow through, seems to occur most often when our vows are made in times of trouble.
         1. These vows used to be called “foxhole conversions,” referring to when men would in the extreme duress of war make promises to follow God if He would keep them alive.
         2. People make vows to God when fearful of…
            1. Sickness, serious surgery, fear of death, etc.
            2. Financial problems, loss of their business, etc.
            3. Not being able to marry one they love, etc., without such a vow.
      3. But understand that such vows are just as binding as those made upon careful reflection!
   3. We are prone to forget our vows when things are going well.
      1. In Jacob’s case, God had blessed him with a nice family, extreme wealth, and had given him a settled and peaceful life in his home country.
      2. Sadly, these same blessings continue to be a hindrance to God’s people remembering and keeping their vows. Thus, God specifically warned Israel about this and we should listen as well (Deut. 8:11-14, 18-19 – “Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; 12 otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, 13 and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery…18 But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. 19 It shall come about if you ever forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today that you will surely perish.”).
      3. We cannot let the *blessings* God gives us cause us to forget God!
   4. Forgetting our vows result in being influenced by the world.
      1. Jacob had made a vow to **make the Lord his God**.
         1. Doing so meant having no other gods before the Lord (Ex. 20:2-6 – “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 “You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”)
         2. While Jacob lived in wealth and peace, he and his family had grown accustomed to and accepted the foreign gods, the idols, of the people around them (Gen. 35:2 – “So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Put away the foreign gods which are among you, and purify yourselves and change your garments”).
      2. In similar fashion, if we forget our vows to God, we can be influenced by the world and led astray from our commitment to Him (2 Tim. 4:9-10 – “Make every effort to come to me soon; 10 for Demas, **having loved this present world**, has **deserted** me and gone to Thessalonica…”
         1. I have witnessed young Christians who were once zealous for Christ become lax concerning their vows to God and be influenced by their peers, the media, their teachers, etc., and lose interest in or even completely reject all spiritual matters.
         2. I have witnessed many adult Christians become lax in their vows to faithfully attend, to study, and pray, be influenced, and deceived by materialism and worldly pleasures and renounce their vows to the Lord, their brethren, their spouses, and their families.
      3. So again, beware of “forgotten vows!”
   5. If we have forgotten our vows, we may need to go back to the beginning.
      1. Jacob was told by God to go back to Bethel, to the beginning place of their covenant.
      2. In a similar way, Jesus told the church at Ephesus to go back to the beginning (Rev. 2:4-5 – “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.”)
         1. They had left their “first love” and were to “remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first.”
         2. For Christians who have left their “first love”, they too need to “do the first works” (the fundamentals, such as Bible study, prayer, worship with the saints, etc.).
   6. When we fulfill our forgotten vows, there are renewed blessings!
      1. When Jacob fulfilled his vow, God appeared to him and renewed the promises that had been made to Abraham and Isaac.
         1. Gen 35:6-7, 9-12 – “So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. 7 He built an altar there, and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed Himself to him when he fled from his brother…9 Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. 10  God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; You shall no longer be called Jacob, But Israel shall be your name.” Thus He called him Israel. 11 God also said to him, “I am  God Almighty; Be fruitful and multiply; A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, And kings shall come forth from you. 12 “The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, And I will give the land to your descendants after you.”
      2. And it will be the same for anyone of us!
         1. It may be that you have forgotten the original vows, or commitments, you made when you first obeyed the gospel of Christ.
         2. If you will return to Christ in full repentance and fulfill your vows of service to Him, His blessings can be yours again! (1 Jn. 1:9 – “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”).

CONCLUSION:

1. Are you a Christian but not living the dedicated and committed life to God He desires? Then, like Jacob, you have forgotten your vows and you need to come back to the Lord in full repentance that the blessings of heaven may be bestowed upon you again!
2. If you are not yet a Christian, these same blessings can be yours if you will only accept the gospel of Jesus Christ and vow to serve the Lord in obedient faith by repenting, confessing Christ, and being baptized into Christ.
3. Will you come?