Hi,

Happy Friday. Today’s updates:

* My Sunday class will be the third week of *Biblical Women You Want to Know, but Probably Don’t*. It will be on [my new Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* My 3pm Monday class on Matthew and my noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet next week, both on [my new Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.
* The Weekly Bible Study is attached.

Does this pandemic make you want to run away? In the sequel to yesterday’s story of sibling conflict, Jacob runs away. (I imagine some of us would like to run away from this pandemic, only there is no place to go!)

***Genesis 28:10-19 (The Message)***

**Jacob left Beer-sheba and went to Haran. He came to a certain place and camped for the night since the sun had set. He took one of the stones there, set it under his head and lay down to sleep. And he dreamed: A stairway was set on the ground and it reached all the way to the sky; angels of God were going up and going down on it.**

**Then God was right before him, saying, “I am God, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. I’m giving the ground on which you are sleeping to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will be as the dust of the Earth; they’ll stretch from west to east and from north to south. All the families of the Earth will bless themselves in you and your descendants. Yes. I’ll stay with you, I’ll protect you wherever you go, and I’ll bring you back to this very ground. I’ll stick with you until I’ve done everything I promised you.”**

**Jacob woke up from his sleep. He said, “God is in this place—truly. And I didn’t even know it!” He was terrified. He whispered in awe, “Incredible. Wonderful. Holy. This is God’s House. This is the Gate of Heaven.”**

**Jacob was up first thing in the morning. He took the stone he had used for his pillow and stood it up as a memorial pillar and poured oil over it. He christened the place Bethel (God’s House). The name of the town had been Luz until then.**

*Running away*

I doubt that John Newton had Jacob in mind when he wrote “Amazing Grace.” Some of us may even think that grace is largely limited to the New Testament. But this story is all about God’s grace, the fact that God would be present with Jacob, this deceitful and unworthy man. But that is what makes grace amazing, puzzling, perhaps even infuriating at times.

After trying to have children for nearly twenty years, God had finally answered Isaac’s and Rebekah’s prayers. She became pregnant with twins. It was a trying pregnancy that forebode great difficulties for the family. Esau was the older of the twins and Jacob the younger. Esau was the “field and stream” type, while Jacob was more “hearth and home.” Esau was his father’s favorite. Jacob was the apple of Rebekah’s eye. The rivalry between the brothers that had begun in the womb only escalated as they grew older. Once, Esau had exchanged his birthright as the oldest son for a bowl of stew that Jacob had prepared. Esau had even sworn an oath on it, and such an oath could never be undone. From there, things only got worse.

When the elderly Isaac prepared to give his blessing to Esau, Rebekah and Jacob connived to trick the old man and steal the blessing for Jacob. Not surprisingly, Esau was terribly angry at this thievery perpetrated on him by his own mother and brother. Rebekah decided that Jacob must leave and head northward to escape Esau’s wrath. So, ostensibly in search of a wife, Jacob fled.

When Jacob is about sixty miles from home, he stops for the night and has the most remarkable dream. First, Jacob sees a stairway (“Jacob’s ladder”) filled with angels making their way to and from the heavens. Second, Jacob realizes that God is standing next to him! There is nothing about Jacob’s life or character that would make him worthy, at least in our eyes, of such a visit, but perhaps that is the point.

Up to this point, the only time Jacob has even uttered God’s name was when he used it in a lie as he tricked his father. Yet, God has come to Jacob. And God extends to Jacob the remarkable promises that God had made to Abraham and to his son, Isaac. Now, the covenant will pass to the treacherous Jacob. The land will be Jacob’s. His offspring will be countless. All the families on the earth will be blessed in Jacob and his family. What promises! So over the top. The covenant must pass from Isaac to a son – but to Jacob!? We are reminded yet again that with God it is never about our worthiness, but always about his grace and grace alone.

*The response of the exiled*

When Jacob awakens, what is his response to this remarkable encounter with God? First, he is awestruck. Who wouldn’t be! I imagine that he fell on his knees, emotionally and spiritually overwhelmed by what had happened. But he didn’t stop with what he had experienced and felt and heard. Jacob worshiped God. Jacob took the stone which he had used as a pillow while he slept and anointed it, setting it apart for God. In other words, Jacob consecrated the stone. He then made promises of his own, including a vow to give back to God one-tenth of all that God would give him – which would, of course, be one-tenth of everything that Jacob would ever have, as all things are a gift from God.

Perhaps Jacob wasn’t such a poor choice after all. He may have been conniving and deceitful, but his first response to the presence of God is to worship. Would that be our response, or would our minds turn to wondering what God is getting ready to do for us. Do we really place the worship of the Lord God Almighty at the center of our lives?

Yes, Jacob cherished God’s words in his head and in his heart. But he went the next step. He also cherished God’s visit with his hands, taking the concrete step to set aside for God’s use a portion of all that he would ever have. Jacob understood that this was the only appropriate response to God’s grace. God had not asked this of Jacob. Jacob was not being obedient; he was being loving and grateful. How can we be any less grateful?

It is easy for us to approach worship as a time for us to get spiritually fed or to pick up some helpful tips for the coming week or to get reinvigorated before heading back into the “real world.” But this is all wrong. Worship is not about us but about God. Worship is to be centered upon our Lord, not upon ourselves. The blessing is that as we more intently focus our worship on God we find ourselves fed in ways we never imagined possible. We discover who we were meant to be, who God created us to be.

‘til Monday, grace and peace,

Scott