

It All Belongs to God

Sermon Notes · Week One of Three

Genesis 28:10-19 | Bethel AME Church

¹⁰ Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set....¹² And he dreamed that there was a stairway set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ And the LORD stood beside him...¹⁶ Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!"

Genesis 28:10, 12-13, 16 (condensed)

Following the Message

The name. Bethel didn't come from denominational tradition. Ray and Gloria almost avoided it. It came from Ray's college roommate Oliver Byrd — a Baptist who knew nothing of AME naming custom — who heard them describe their calling and remembered Jacob's story and said: "That sounds like Jacob. Call it Bethel."

The man on the run. Jacob isn't seeking God in Genesis 28 — he's fleeing the consequences of deceiving his father and stealing his brother's blessing. God meets him mid-flight, on a borrowed stone, before Jacob has cleaned up anything.

The stairway. The Hebrew word for the ladder Jacob sees (*sullam*) likely pictures a great ramp connecting earth to heaven — not a ladder Jacob climbs toward God, but a structure God built to come down to him.

The discovery. "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it" (v. 16). Jacob doesn't discover a new fact. He wakes up to one that was true the whole time.

Three truths about the God who owns it all, from Paul's sermon to the Athenians (Acts 17:24-28):

- **He Made It** — creation belongs to God alone. We can reshape, remix, and edit; we cannot originate.
- **He Renews It** — God sustains what looks finished. Thirty-eight years of this church's history is the evidence.
- **He Redeems It** — God buys back what was lost, on His timing. Bethel became debt-free in 2020, months before the pandemic — redeemed just in time for the storm.

Putting This Into Practice This Week

1. **Name your Bethel.** Find one "certain place" from your own life where you can now say, "surely the Lord was there, and I didn't know it." Write it down. Tell somebody.
2. **Tell one renewal story out loud.** Not a prayer request — a finished testimony. Something God already brought back from the dead in your life.
3. **Do your own succession inventory.** Name one thing you're currently founding — a role, a habit, a way your household prays — and take one step to prepare it to be handed off well.
4. **Mark something as God's.** Pick a room, a paycheck, a calendar page. Say the words out loud: this belongs to God. Practice now for the harder things we'll talk about in two weeks.

For Reflection

1. Where is a “certain place” in your own life where you can now see God was present, though you didn't know it at the time?
2. Where have you seen God renew something in your life or family that you had quietly written off as finished?
3. What are you currently building or leading that someone else will eventually inherit? Have you started preparing them for it?

It all belongs to God. Not to Gloria and me. Not to whoever stands in this pulpit after us. It never did.

Next week: “Does It All Belong to God?” — naming the gap between what we say and how we live.