

Kev's sermon notes for eGroups

Sunday, Dec 13, 2020 at 9:30 AM

Broadcasting from Ballantyne Campus – Charlotte, NC USA – **with a live audience**

Pastor: Steven Furtick

Sermon Title: "But God Said – Don't Bury Your Blessing – God brings the greatest gift out of impossible situations. - Do we know Bethlehem better by what was buried there or by what was birthed there? Out of Bethlehem came Jacobs greatest pain – out of Bethlehem came Gods greatest purpose - Name your season as to what God is bringing out of it - Yes the facts might be bad, but the favor is greater."

Elevation Worship:

- Walk on Water: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTeuW-1XduU>
- My Testimony: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NyH9mDYEck>
- Jireh by Maverick City Music: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6lpeYozFjY>

Scripture for this week:

- **Ep 3:20:** 20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.
- **Luke 4:19:** 16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
- **Micah 5:2:** A Promised Ruler From Bethlehem - 5 Marshal your troops now, city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod. **2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."** 3 Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. 4 He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.
- **Luke 1: 28 to 38:** The Birth of Jesus Foretold - 26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." 29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." 34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive

is in her sixth month. 37 For no word from God will ever fail.” 38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

- **Gen 35: 16 to 20:** The Deaths of Rachel and Isaac - 16 Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. 17 And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, “Don’t despair, for you have another son.” 18 As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin. 19 So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). 20 Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel’s tomb. 21 Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder. 22 While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father’s concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it. Jacob had twelve sons: 23 The sons of Leah: Reuben the firstborn of Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. 24 The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. 25 The sons of Rachel’s servant Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali. 26 The sons of Leah’s servant Zilpah: Gad and Asher.
- **Numbers 6: The Priestly Blessing** - 22 The Lord said to Moses, 23 “Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: 24 “he Lord bless you and keep you; 25 the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; 26 the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.””

Pastor Steven Furtick: Sermon Title: “But God Said – Don’t Bury Your Blessing – God brings the greatest gift out of impossible situations. - Do we know Bethlehem better by what was buried there or by what was birthed there? Out of Bethlehem came Jacobs greatest pain – out of Bethlehem came Gods greatest purpose - Name your season as to what God is bringing out of it - Yes the facts might be bad, but the favor is greater.”

- Please consider joining an eGroup (small group) so you don’t have to walk this walk alone? – See [www.elevationchurch.cc](http://www.elevationchurch.cc).
- Interested in leading an eGroup? See: [www.elevationchurch.cc](http://www.elevationchurch.cc).
- **Here comes church:**
  - Year-end commitment offering – Recall video of Pastor Furtick and Holly Furtick – This year end offering is called “**The Favor Offering**” - that ends on 12/13/2020. See [www.elevationchurch.org/favor](http://www.elevationchurch.org/favor).
  - This week’s focus: 13 min video of “Follow the Favor or Favor Flashbacks” – and to honor a family (Alysia and Quincy) that started the first watch party in New Mexico (and one of the very first watch parties). Here are some examples:
    - **Elevation Youth:** Over 1,300 teenagers connected to eGroups in 45 different countries
    - **Outreach:** Over \$9M giving to Outreach efforts in 2020 – over 20K hours during Love Week 2020 – and Profile of The Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina – the largest food bank in the state of NC and has been in operation for 40 years.
    - **Elevation Worship:** “Rattle” and “The Blessing” added to the Graves to Gardens album at the last minute – How the song “Rattle” helped Caleb (a 5 year-old fighting cancer) – where his worship set an example for all of those around him. Elevation Worship has produced 248 songs that have been streamed 2.7 billion times.

- Over 11,000 have given their lives Christ in 2020 through Elevation Church. Over 21,000 have been baptized at Elevation Church.
  - When the global pandemic hit, there was both faith and fear – and by the favor of God elevation church was able to donate \$9 million this year to reach partners – over 600K meals – over 30K volunteers serving over 8k hours – over \$500K for disaster relief - \$150K of flood supplies – over 500K tablets to inmates this year – over \$100K to church plants.
- **Opening prayer by Pastor Furtick at the conclusion of “Jireh - You Are Enough” - “Do you believe that our Lord is more than enough? Lord we set our expectations today according to Ephesians 3:20 – that you are able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine – more than we can comprehend – more than what we conceive in our minds – that is revealed by your spirit today – thank you Lord for this moment of connection with you – our source. We do not measure our lives by our abilities based on our own resources – at times we are limited but today we come into your presence – to remind ourselves that you are always enough – in this and in every season – and we thank you for it – in Jesus’s name. Amen.**
- **Opening Prayer #2 by Pastor Furtick – “We decree and declare that you are a good God – What you started You will finish – What You spoke You will bring to pass – we declare this over every family – every life – every business – every community – every nation – Thank you Lord that Your word never returns void – and accomplishes the purpose from which you sent it – We stand in that purpose today remembering the bigger picture – and remembering that we have a part to play – We call on our faith together by moving forward – in the face of tremendous uncertainty – confident of Your favor – may the favor be upon you and upon your family and for thousands of generations – and your children – and your children’s children - May His presence go before you – Go beside you and all around you – The angel armies of God are ready to fight for us – thank you for the Holy Spirit that resides in us – in all of our comings and in all of our goings – even during moments of sadness, weeping, and mourning – and during our rejoicing – We give you glory and we thank you that You are for us – for being greater than anything that is against us – and the gates of hell will not prevail – and no weapon formed against us will prosper – We stand with this testimony and we give you praise. Amen.”**
- Today is the day of the Lord’s favor: Today is a very special day today – for we are declaring this to be the year of the Lord’s Favor. See Luke 4: 13 to 30. This year the Lord spoke to me about this so much that it bypassed my logic – It is the year of the Lord’s favor. This is the day that the lord has made – this is the season of the blessing – this is the season for miracles – this is the moment that God has chosen to meet with us – and we are here for such a time as this – and please give Him a great praise for this.
- See Micah 5:2.
- The title of this message is “But God Said”
- A prophet speaking eight centuries before Christ prophesied Ben-Oni what was going to happen in Bethlehem – the time of spiritual compromise and tension, Micah was a prophet that spanned over three kings – and preached about justice, mercy, and humility.
- **See Micah 5:2. At the time of Micah’s writing, the northern kingdom was a mess – and he spoke about a future promise – one of the things that keep us anchored in our faith is to know that Christ was born in the least likely place – “but you Bethlehem small amongst the clans of Judah” – God brings the greatest gift – out of impossible situations.**

- If ever we needed a Christmas story, we need it right now. If ever we need to believe that where we start doesn't need to be where we finish, we need it this year – For what we see is no match for what God has spoken. – And we need this reaffirmation right now – And it is a great thing that God does not see our lives from where we are – we know that our light started with God – and if do not understand this – we will not be able to grasp the concept of finishing with the favor of God.
- Can we get a sonogram for our soul - like we can do for a heart exam? Is there a machine for that to check beneath the surface? You know – the stuff that pissed you off this week that has impacted your ability to hear God's voice – is there a machine that can detect this type of blockage or perhaps what God has put inside of you that is growing? Today is the day for a spiritual sonogram – to talk about the little thing that is growing inside of you – that God has put inside of you. In order to do this we need to go to Luke 1:28 to 39.
- See Luke 1: 28 to 38.
- What does favor really feels like? Fear, Inconvenience, interruption and insecurity – in the case of Mary she did not feel highly favored – and this often gets left out of the Christmas story – the relationship between fear and favor cannot be overstated – to really follow the favor of God and step out into what is not familiar (not your thoughts, your pursuits, your objectives, and your goals) – to be part of the bigger picture of what God is doing (and not be so seized and sabotaged by what has been, what could have been, or what the world says) – to really know that favor showed up, you have to look around and see that fear is there too – because until you find fear, you have not really found favor – the angel tells Mary she has to choose favor over fear – this is the choice.
- See Gen 35: 16 to 20
- Recall the sermon series “Death to Selfie” and a study of Jacob in 2014 – and the stuff that we do when we don't appreciate our own favor from God. Recall that Jacob labored for seven years to win Rachel but an uncle slipped in Leah instead – and Jacob labored 7 more years to win Rachel – and this is the difference of working for vs. working from – the law gets you to work for – Grace gets you to work from – so we don't just finish with favor – like we are fighting for it – we start with favor like we're fighting from it - the things we strive after and chase after – and we set our hearts on.
- **Key note:** Here is Jacob's offspring found in Gen 35: “23 The sons of Leah: Reuben the firstborn of Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. 24 The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. 25 The sons of Rachel's servant Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali. 26 The sons of Leah's servant Zilpah: Gad and Asher.”
- **Key note:** See a recap a five week “Death to Selfie” series and a study of Jacob at the end of this document.
- Great comment from Pastor Furtick in 2014: *“We sow what we reap. If we live a lie, we'll eventually wake up lying next to Leah. When we pretend to be something in order to get something, we'll work for one thing, but we'll wake up next to something else. Jacob's wives are an illustration of law and of grace. He had to work seven years before marrying Leah. This illustrates the law of the Old Testament--working to get God. But Jacob married Rachel and then served his seven years for her. This illustrates grace--in Jesus we get God, then serve Him out of that love.”*

- The Bible tells us that Jesus will reign over the throne of Jacob.
- See Gen 35:16 to 20.
- Ben-Oni = child or son of my trouble or sorrow – Rachel is naming a child out of the pain that she is experiencing – from her perspective, this child is costing her life – and here we see the confluence of Benjamin (representing the kingly tribe of Israel) – where Jacob renames his son after losing the only woman that he ever loved – who just lost the thing that took him 14 years to obtain – and this is good instruction for us – because Jacob re-named his son – not what he was about to bury but rather what was birthed into life (out of what was buried).
- Kev note: Benjamin is derived from Hebrew בְּנִימִין, Binyāmīn, translating as "Son of my right (hand) and was the last-born of Jacob's thirteen children (12 sons and one daughter), and the second and last son of Rachel.
- The right hand is the hand of blessing and authority.
- **This is not a cotton candy Christmas message – for many of us, we have had to bury a lot this year – even as a ministry we've had to bury every plan we had relating to opening campuses – and for many of us they were funerals that we had to have.**
- It was not that Jacob had to bury his favorite wife that inspired me the most.
- There's something else that I saw now that I did not see five years ago – over her grave Jacob erected a tomb for Rachel – See vs. 19 – Rachel was buried just outside Bethlehem.
- Let's now go to Micah who 8 centuries before Jesus – out of Bethlehem will be born a ruler who will dash the princes-of-men into pieces and His Kingdom will have no end.
- Let's now go to Luke 1 where Mary – who was highly favored - birthed the world's greatest salvation.
- **So now ask this question: Do we know Bethlehem better by what was buried there or by what was birthed there?**
- **Jesus was not even supposed to be born in Bethlehem and picked a bad time to come into the world – and we think everything has to be just right for God to do anything in our lives – God will give us the greatest opportunity at the least possible moment – in this year we are presenting a question – are we going to label this year based on what we buried or by what was born? – Jacob renames his son – Son of My right hand or Son of my blessing or Son of Authority. So my message to you today is don't bury your blessing.**
- **As we journey along the way, we lose a lot of things – and the temptation is to identify with those things that we lost – and then we start labeling our lives according to those losses – and this limits us to what we can receive – but if you can make a decision at this point in the year – to call His name Jesus – Jesus came from Bethlehem – Jesus was born in the place that Rachel was buried – the same place that David came from – this is why Micah says "out of you, Bethlehem will come" – the salvation of the world came out of a small impossible place – and this is why I called it the year of the Lord's favor – because God said it was.**
- But God said.
- Rachel named her son Ben-Oni – our facts are trying to name our lives right now – we need to please favor over facts.
- Let's break this down further: Rachel has a baby and died during labor – and God saw potential in Mary that was far greater than her experience of giving birth to Jesus.
- **Out of Bethlehem came Jacobs greatest pain – out of Bethlehem came gods greatest purpose.**

- **So what are you going to get out of it?**
- Out of Bethlehem came a great king – and Mary had to believe that – that the favor of God was on her life – and we need to believe that as well – to believe that the purpose of God is working in our lives.
- **Mary experienced both favor and fear – see Luke 1:34. Christ is being birthed in all of us and so is his purpose – and so is the fruit of the spirit. Mary shows us how to choose favor over fear or favor over facts – by not putting limits on our lives from prior experiences – an addiction, a divorce, a lack of financial net-worth – or any failure that we let defines us – that forms the basis of our identity - and this is what happens when we focus too much attention on what we buried versus what was born.**
- We limit our understanding of things based on our experiences but God sees our potential – Just like God did with Mary.
- **If we experienced so much loss, pain, fear, and uncertainty during this global pandemic – where we bumped her head against the thing that we thought that was never going to happen – and after so many cycles of disappointments, we start to identify our lives by what we buried.**
- **2020 probably got a bad rap – because we only focus on what we buried this year – but we do not yet know what is going to be born from what we buried – there might be a better job on the other side of this – there might be more peace on the other side of this – perhaps God shut down some systems and some things to give us better focus.**
- **I love Jacob – God changed his name from Jacob to Israel – and so Jacob renamed a situation during a time of grief – that was born in pain but was also born in purpose. When we only focus only on what we buried, we can also bury the blessing. Name your season based on what God is bringing out of you – not what you have buried.**
- **What did you get out of 2020? What did you learn about yourself? Did God give your grace to confront your difficulties? Did you learn how to seek the Kingdom? Did you learn how to walk by faith? Did you learn that He is enough? Did you come to learn that a lot of things that kept you busy in the past were not very fruitful?**
- If you have the faith to know that what is being born is greater than what you are burying, proclaim this as your testimony.
- Bethlehem is not the place where Jacob buried Rachel – it was the place where my savior was born.
- And with this bold faith, let's focus on the favor of God this year.
- When the angel speaks to Mary and Mary asks how can this be? The angel responds by who – this it is blessing.
- We pray for those that experienced a difficult loss this year – and to come along side you and pray for you – as you mourn the loss of “your Rachel.”
- See Luke 1:38.
- Mary's first statement is I am a virgin and this is the fact – Her 2<sup>nd</sup> statement is “I am the Lord's servant – This is the Lord's favor.
- Yes the facts are bad, but the favor is greater.
- We are always having a funeral at the same time we are receiving favor – Rachel is dying at the same time Benjamin is being born.
- Here are words of a song that Pastor Furtick wrote while in Selby-NC as a new pastor: “I am the righteousness of God – made holy by his sacrifice - perfected by his blood – I am a brand-new

creation – made by His hand – and I know who I am – I am a child of the Father most high – I am part of His plan – and I am who God says that I am.”

- Mullie (sp?) from Shelby NC suggested that Pastor Steven change the phrase to “who’s I am.”
  - See Luke 1:34 to 38.
  - Mary was a virgin according to her own experiences – in verse 38 Mary says that “I am the Lord servant” – this is **who’s** she was – so we need to remember this year that the world can call us Ben-Oni – and your emotions can call this year a waste – but his father named him “son of my right hand.” See Micah 5:2: Though you are small among the clans of Judah – Though the womb is a virgin womb – Though Bethlehem is not the place that you intended to give birth – out of you will come your glory Lord – and we confess to you Lord that the suffering of this present time are not even worthy to be compared to glory that will be revealed in your people. We are your servants – we are your people – we are you sons and daughters – and we receive your blessing – as the Lord told Aaron to bless his people as it is written in Numbers 6 “24 “he Lord bless you and keep you; 25 the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; 26 the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.””
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Kev’s supplemental Notes:

#### **Elevation Church Sermon Notes from Pastor Steven’s Death to Selfie series – A five-week study of Jacob**

##### **Week 1: JUST CALL ME JACOB** (Genesis 32:22-31, Genesis 25:21-26, Luke 9:25 Matthew 20:16, Exodus 3:14-15)

- Pastor Steven shared that our series is called Death to Selfie because a selfie illustrates the conflict that exists inside each of us. Just as Jacob wrestled with his family, with God, and with himself to find himself, we wrestle in the conflict between who we think we’re supposed to be and who we really are.
- Jacob had a me-first mentality. As Pastor Steven pointed out, we live in a me-first culture, in which we all subconsciously strive to be recognized. We don’t always take pride in a particular possession; we take pride in having more of that possession than someone else. We want to be thinner, smarter, or better than others.
- Jesus asked in Luke 9, “What good is it to gain the whole world and lose yourself?” We all grasp at things like status and security, but in the process of grabbing at stuff, we run the risk of losing our very selves.
- Pastor Steven explained that God cannot bless who we pretend to be. We don’t fool God with our disguises, and the blessings we get when we pretend are not even real blessings that we can fully enjoy for ourselves.
- In Exodus 3, God told Moses that He is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He didn’t say Israel, He said Jacob. He wanted to be known as the God of the guy who was a deceiver. God is not just the God of the parts of us that are pretty. He’s the God of our failures and our selfishness. Everything in our lives will change when we admit, “I’m just Jacob,” God says, “I will be the God of Jacob too.”

##### **Week 2: STARVING SONS** (Genesis 25:24-34, Hebrews 12:15-17, Luke 15:11-24, Romans 8:29)

- In Genesis 25, Esau comes in starving from an unsuccessful hunting trip. He asks Jacob to give him a bowl of beans, and Jacob asks Esau to give him his birthright in exchange. Esau says that the birthright is no good to him since he’s dying of hunger, and agrees. The writer of Genesis even said, “Esau despised his birthright.” In



reality, Esau's birthright gave him double the inheritance, but he gave it up in a single moment for a bowl of beans. In what looks like the worst negotiation in human history, Esau gave up so much for so little. But, as Pastor Steven preached, as silly as this seems, it's the same pattern that we still follow today.

- **BEWARE OF MISTAKING GROWTH FOR MATURITY.** As Pastor Steven remarked, we can grow up on the outside but stay small on the inside. We need to ask ourselves if we've really grown up or if we're still governed by childish selfishness and impulsiveness.
- Esau got in trouble because he got too hungry. He was so hungry that he was willing to do anything to satisfy his appetite. He wanted immediate gratification, and became dramatic, saying he was about to die. Pastor Steven drew a parallel between Esau's hunger and our spiritual hungers. When we get too hungry, everything gets blown out of proportion.
- As believers in Jesus Christ, we have a birthright, a spiritual inheritance. We possess everything that Jesus possessed because when Jesus ascended into heaven, He sent His inheritance down to us by the Holy Spirit. -But for every birthright, there is a bowl. We sell our peace by choosing to eat worrisome thoughts. We sell our joy by eating from a bowl of things to grumble about. We sell our testimonies by indulging in our tempers. -Esau chose the bowl and later tried to be restored, but was denied. Hebrews 12 would even call Esau "godless" for his mistakes. Luke 15 tells the story of another son (the Prodigal Son) who chose the bowl, but was fully restored to his father once he came to himself and realized the error of his ways. However, there's another Son—Jesus. He was tempted with "bowls" in the desert for 40 days, but never gave in. He survived on the Word of God, not the desires of the world. And He did it so that we might have a chance to be restored as a kind of firstborn sons in God's eyes. We're all Esau, having chosen the bowl. But when we come to ourselves and choose Jesus, we can always be restored. We don't have to live as starving sons anymore—God's grace puts an end to all of that.

**Week 3: WHEN GOD SHOWS UP IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE** (Genesis 28:10-22, Genesis 32:10, Genesis 35:1-7, Psalm 103:2-5, Romans 12:1)

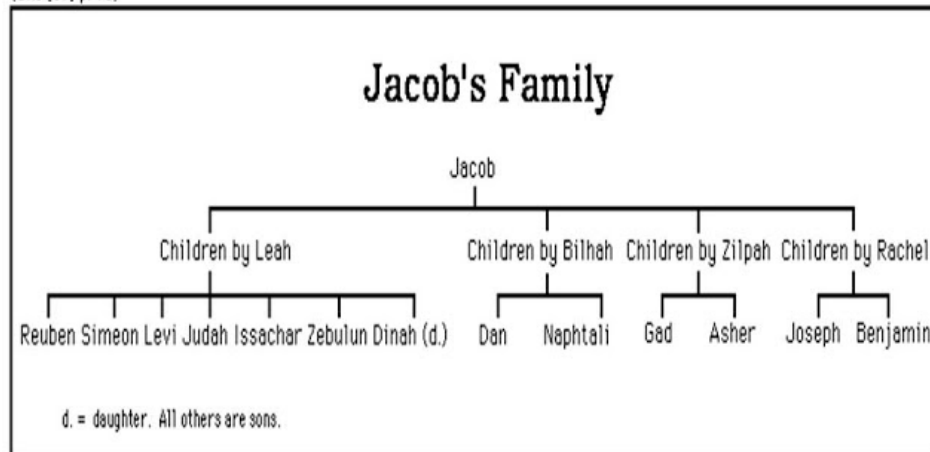
- In Genesis 28, Jacob was on the run from his brother, Esau. He was traveling from the land of his father, Isaac, to the land of his relative, Laban. One night he stopped at a place called Luz, and while he was sleeping, God revealed Himself to Jacob in a dream and gave him a great promise. When Jacob woke up, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it," and he renamed the place Bethel.
- To Jacob, Bethel was just a rest stop. He didn't expect to meet God there. In our lives full of ambition, we often sacrifice contentment. But like Jacob, we need to wake up to God's presence in every moment.
- After Bethel, Jacob proceeded to the land of Laban, where he was tricked into marrying Leah, and had to work many years for the hand of Rachel, the woman he loved. It was there that he had the sons who would become the 12 tribes of Israel. He eventually had to run from Laban with his family, and 20 years after his dream, God tells him to return to Bethel and build an altar there.
- Often, we can become dissatisfied with life as we see it. However, as Pastor Steven suggested, we can "go back to Bethel" any time in our lives and remember the places where God has spoken to us.
- **BETHEL IS A PLACE OF REMEMBRANCE.** We need to continually return to Bethel, whether we're in success or in trouble, to remember the times God did it and no one else could have. Psalm 103 instructs us to not forget the Lord's benefits. By doing a 360° turn to look back over our lives, we will be reminded of all those Bethel's-- all the things God has spoken to us, done for us, and promised us.



- **BETHEL IS A PLACE OF REVELATION.** Pastor Steven preached, Bethel is not just a place, it's a Person Who is with us and within us wherever we go. When God shows up in the middle of nowhere, He opens our eyes and changes NOWHERE to NOW HERE. God is here with us right now, and He's been here all along. God doesn't wait until we've "made it" to bless us.
- **ETHEL IS A PLACE OF RESPONSE.** -The first time at Bethel, Jacob made a conditional oath to God, saying if God did certain things, he would serve Him. But after going through struggles, Jacob returned with a limp and built an altar to God. An altar is a place of sacrifice. He was no longer negotiating his relationship with God, but laying down his life before God. Bethel makes us realize that what we really need most is God's presence going with us through everything.

**Week 4: SISTER WIVES** (Genesis 29, Genesis 30:1-24, 2 Corinthians 5:20 Matthew, 1:1-2,17, Matthew 21:42)

- After his encounter with God at Bethel, Jacob precedes to the house of his uncle Laban. There he meets Laban's beautiful daughter Rachel, and he falls in love with her. Laban agrees to let Jacob work for him seven years for Rachel's hand in marriage. He works seven years, but on the wedding night, Laban tricks Jacob and gives him his older daughter, Leah, instead. After waking the next morning and discovering he has married Leah, Jacob goes to Laban, who agrees to give him Rachel also, if he will work another seven years.
- As Pastor Steven preached, we sow what we reap. If we live a lie, we'll eventually wake up lying next to Leah. When we pretend to be something in order to get something, we'll work for one thing, but we'll wake up next to something else. Jacob's wives are an illustration of law and of grace. He had to work seven years before marrying Leah. This illustrates the law of the Old Testament--working to get God. But Jacob married Rachel and then served his seven years for her. This illustrates grace--in Jesus we get God, then serve Him out of that love.
- Leah was not loved by Jacob, so she strove to win his love by bearing him many sons. She even gave Jacob her maidservant to get more sons for him. But even after all her striving, Jacob still didn't love her. All of us have faced some sort of rejection, like Leah. We try to earn acceptance through achievements. We think that maybe the next job, getting the next A, doing that next thing will make "them" finally accept us. But as Pastor Steven proclaimed, "What Jacob rejects is what God selects." When God saw that Leah was not loved, He enabled her to conceive. God looks at what people don't want, and says, "I choose you." We all have flaws and defects that cause us to be rejected, but God chooses us.
- God chose Leah to bear Judah, whose name means praise. From the line of Judah, God brought forth Jesus, the Savior of the world. Pastor Steven declared that when God wants to bring Jesus to a generation, He always chooses the Leahs, the rejected ones. We are a chosen people, set apart to bring Jesus to the world.



- As Pastor Steven said, it's possible to be like Rachel, outwardly looking like we've got it together, but inwardly hurting and miserable. Just because someone's life looks beautiful from the outside, doesn't mean it's fruitful on the inside. We're all struggling with something, and we need to be careful thinking someone else's life is perfect because we have no idea what they're going through. We live in a world that emphasizes external beauty so much that many people have figured out how to be liked by people, but don't really like themselves.
- The sisters' struggles with rejection and frustration resulted in a big complicated family mess. But while all they saw was the mess, God saw the nation of Israel being formed. The twelve sons that came from these sisters became the twelve tribes of Israel. God worked through the mess to fulfill His promise to Abraham. - When we face rejection and frustration, we need to remember that it's not about us. It's about something much greater.

**Week 5: CALL IT WHAT YOU WANT** (Genesis 35:16-21, Genesis 26:18, Romans 4:16-17, Luke 1:5-25; 57-80)

- As Jacob is heading back home, he is expectant of good things ahead for he and Rachel. There was great joy in the camp when Rachel began to give birth; there was a sense of joy that God was blessing Rachel and Jacob. But then, she begins to have 'great difficulty' in labor. Sometimes we ask God for things that we don't know how much it will cost or the magnitude of the request. Rachel prayed for this child for so long but she did not know it would cost her very life. They called the midwife and she said, 'Don't despair because you have another son.' As she breathed her last breath, Rachel says that her son should be named Ben-oni, which means 'son of my sorrow.' Ben-oni could also possibly mean 'son of my strength.' No one is quite sure; she is naming him out of her pain. In fact, Rachel never even had the opportunity to hold the child that she'd prayed for over so many years. Pastor Steven preached, 'At all times in your life, there is something that is being born and something that is dying. There is something new that God is giving life to and others that are dying. It's not 'all good' for anyone. As they report to Jacob, we imagine that he was conflicted; he wanted to honor Rachel and her chosen name of Ben-oni, but he deliberately changes his son's name to Benjamin and removes the ambiguity surrounding his name. Jacob declares, 'I will not let my son be called 'my son of my sorrow.' I refuse to look at him as a burden.'
- Pastor Steven preached, 'Often times, true strength is only produced by great sorrow; maybe someone's strength in a situation was born out of a time of sorrow in their life.' In ancient culture, the father had the

official naming rights. Knowing this, Jacob overrides her recommendation and declares his name will be 'Benjamin', which means 'son of my right hand.' The right hand is the hand of blessing; the father takes the right hand to bless the first born son. Jacob is declaring, 'I choose to call him a blessing. Pastor Steven said, 'If life has labeled you in some way outside of God's word, take the label off because the only one who gets to name you is the one who made you.' Then he expounded, 'There are some situations in your life that you need to rename, and there will be a blessing in it when you do.'

- Pastor shared the example of Pastor Levi Lusko who lost his daughter to an asthma attack. The family refers to her death as, 'When Lenya went to heaven' and not when 'Lenya died.' This is a great example of renaming a tragedy in your life. They recognized that this is not the end of Lenya life! She is in heaven with Jesus In verse 20, it says that Jacob set up a pillar, blessed Benjamin, and then the text refers to him as 'Israel.' It says that 'Israel moved on.' Pastor Steven continued, 'That's a message to us. It's not too late to move on' Jacob moved on with some losses and with a broken heart. He moved on without the one he had given the best years of his life to and for. But he still moved on again.