

Introduction

- Do you ever try speaking to someone who is just not listening to you?
 - perhaps they are reading the paper or watching the TV...
 - some people think God is like that - distant, perhaps even uninterested in us.
- But is God like that?
 - what a difference we see when we read the Bible!
 - the God of the Bible reveals himself as a Creator who wants to be part of our lives. God wants to be involved in every aspect of our lives
 - yes - even school!
 - yes - even our work!
- We're going to learn today about someone who discovered that God was interested in them even though they had run away from home and thought no one cared about them.
 - Jacob had lied to his Dad and deceived him. He had seriously cheated his brother and his brother hated him. In fact, his Mum had found out that his brother was so mad, he wanted to kill Jacob. His mum told him to leave home as soon as possible to save his skin.

No Sat Nav required!

- In our reading today, we find Jacob on the run. Where is he?
 - *"In a certain place".(v.10)*
 - no Sat Nav in those days but God knows exactly where Jacob is.
- It would be a mistake to think that we can only meet with God when we come to a church on a Sunday morning › that's not how God views the situation at all, but perhaps the problem lies with us. Is this the only place we pray, or read the Bible, or think about God at all?
- So, Jacob, alone, without family, fearful for his life, exhausted, falls asleep and dreams
 - in the dream God shows Jacob something that we can all learn from
 - God is very kind, and because we are creatures with five senses, God uses images to help us understand His character and His plans
 - here God uses the amazing picture of a ladder or a stairway going from Heaven to earth › **and it's a very well used thoroughfare**
- The dream was showing Jacob that God was not far away and uncaring, but nearby and active:
 - often in ways we don't see or can't understand.
- Jesus, just before he went back to Heaven, said this to his friends:
 - *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...I am with you always..." (Matthew 28:18,20)*
 - it's the same sort of picture
 - The Lord of all being active in this world - and being interested in the ups and downs of our lives
 - adults, teenagers and children in churches across Scotland today could tell you of times when they have prayed for God's help and found it.

God makes promises

- Are you ready to learn at school this year?
 - Jacob had lots to learn about God and the special things God was going to do with Jacob, through Jacob's family. God was going to bless the whole world, but Jacob had to decide whether or not he would trust God
 - the same goes for everyone one of us here today: God has made promises to us and wants to do special things through us.
- In the Bible there are promises about God accepting us, forgiving us, having a relationship with Him through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ

- will we listen to Him and trust Him?
- for instance, "Whoever comes to Me I will never drive away (John 6:37)
- and "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9)
- or "To those who believe in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12)

Heaven's gates at the school gates?

- One of the great themes in the Bible is that God meets us where we are:
 - when under pressure, when doubting, when worried, when lonely or when life is good.
- All of these things are found in Jacob's story (and in our story)
 - and as we go into school, or work, or in our homes we need to know that God is prepared to meet us there too.
 - the Bible says: " Give all your worries and cares to God, for He cares about you" (1 Peter 5:7)
 - God cares. God loves us.
- If this truth was ever in doubt it is dispelled once and for all in the most remarkable way in the coming of His Son, Jesus into the world.
 - don't count God out of any part of your life: at school, in the playground, making the lunches, having tea at the end of the day, helping the person who is sad, laughing with your friends on the way home.
 - Rob Bell said: "This is why it is impossible to have a 'secular' job. If you follow Jesus and you are doing what you do in his name, then it is no longer secular work; it's sacred. You are there; God is there. The difference is our awareness"

Change of name

- Let's go to the end of our story...
- Jacob was near the town of Luz but that day he gave it a special name - 'Bethel' which means 'House of God'.
 - Jacob had learned that even when he was upset, anxious, or unsure of the future, God was there with him.
 - what about you?
 - whatever your school is called I wonder if you would think of re-naming it?
 - just between you and God!
 - you don't need to change your uniform or the sign outside the school gates, but remember that God is there with you even if you didn't realise it.
- *Jacob said, "Surely God was in this place and I was not aware of it"*
- Could you fit your school name into that sentence?
 - "Surely God was in '.....' and I didn't realise it'.
 - let's go with confidence into our school day, or wherever we are found, aware that the Lord is working there already waiting for us to respond to Him.