

# Geography of the Spirit

by Harold Erickson

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*The sermon explores the concept of the Geography of the Spirit, highlighting the different places and experiences in our lives where God meets with us and blesses us.*

**Duration:** 49:28

**Scripture:** Genesis 28:12, Genesis 32:28-29, Exodus 3:2, Matthew 6:33, John 1:51, John 4:7-26

**Topics:** "Geography"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the story of Jacob from the Bible. Jacob had deceived his brother and had to leave home. One night, as he slept with his head on a stone, he had a dream of a ladder connecting heaven and earth, with angels ascending and descending. The speaker explains that this ladder is a symbol of Jesus Christ, who serves as God's communication between heaven and earth. The sermon emphasizes the importance of surrendering to God and experiencing His blessings.

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## Transcript

The topic that we shall be using this evening is the Geography of the Spirit, and we find the scripture to back up that theme in the thirty-second chapter of Genesis, verses twenty-eight and twenty-nine, Genesis thirty-two. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel, for as a prince hath thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. Jacob asked him and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name.

And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. He blessed him there. We're going to look at Jacob tonight, as you can well understand from the text.

There was a spot in Jacob's wanderings in the geography of his life which is known as the Place of Blessing. How many of you have ever stood before a map? You have said, I have been there, or I was born there, or this happened here, there, or somewhere on that map. Well, Jacob could have taken the map of Palestine, and he could have put his finger on a certain spot and said, God blessed me there.

About a year and a half ago when I made that trip into Israel and Jordan, we went one day by automobile north of Jericho, traveled a road that was a very good road, but our car was heating up a little bit. It was a very hot day. So we stopped at a river with a fairly good-sized steel bridge across it, and our driver signaled to some boys who were down by the river, called to them in a language that they understood but which we didn't understand, and soon they came carrying up with some drums full of water for the old

desoto that was being used to haul us around the country.

And while they were filling the radiator, he said to us, because he was our guide as well, he said, Can you guess what this river is? We said, No, we don't know what this river is. Well, he said, This is the Jebuch. And he said, Do you see how the river widens out over here to the east, and that there's a small island in the middle that's covered with grass and willows and a few other things? Yes, it was perfectly plain.

It was just a matter of a few feet from the bridge. He said, There aren't many spots like that in the Jebuch. Most of the places, it is a narrow river between the high walls of the hills around.

He said, We here in Israel, we believe fully that that spot over there is where Jacob wrestled with the angel. He said, That seems to be about the only spot big enough for his cattle and his family to have stayed while he went off over on the other side of the water and the angel wrestled with him. Well, then that river really took on new significance.

Stand there on that steel bridge and look down on that white spot in the river and think that that is where Jacob had his midnight wrestling. We too could stand there on that bridge and point and say, God blessed him there. Well, whether that was the exact spot or not, that isn't the important thing.

The important thing, my friend, is that each one of us has in his and her life some very, very definite place where God has dealt with us. That's the important thing. Now, just to bear review of the life of Jacob.

First, you remember that through deception he had taken the birthright from his brother Esau. He had had to leave home. He spent a lonely night at Bethel, the first night away from home, with his head upon a stone.

He dreamed as he lay there, and as he dreamed he saw a ladder set between earth and heaven with the angels of God ascending and descending upon that ladder. The amazing thing is that when you turn to the first chapter of John's gospel, you find the explanation of that event. That ladder was a type of Jesus Christ.

Christ is God's method of communication between heaven and earth. But that's a sermon by itself. We two wives for cattle.

He was constantly face to face with the deception that he himself had practiced, and for twenty years this thing went on. He became rather wealthy, but because of the deception that he had met in the household of Laban, and which he himself had practiced too, there was no love lost between those two men. He decided that the time had come, and God had spoken to him too, and said, Get thee down to Bethel.

But one night he pulled out, and he didn't have the common courtesy to go to Laban and thank him for the fact that at least he had had a home on his ranch. He pulled out, and as he goes down the line he hears that his brother Esau is coming to meet him with four hundred men. This was twenty years after he had deceived Esau.

He thought everything was well. He thought that somehow time had erased the guilt of his deception. But time doesn't erase any guilt, my friend.

The sinner will find that out. If you are here tonight, my friends, if you have sinned against Almighty God, if your life has been filled with deception, with impurity, with any number of the scores of sin that human

beings are accustomed to doing, do not think for a moment that the rolling years will in any wise diminish the guilt of your sin. It just doesn't happen.

The guilt of man will be just as great when he stands before the judgment bow of God as it was on the day when he committed the sin. That's a lesson we need to learn. Jacob thought otherwise.

Now it comes to him afresh that twenty years had done nothing to wash out the guilt of deceiving his brother. I have met some men in my day who have had something of the experience of Jacob, and I'll just mention one or two of them. I remember a man in one of the places where I was a pastor who helped us build a church, and I discovered that this man had not been inside of a church for twenty years, the same length of time that Jacob had been out of fellowship with God.

What had happened to this man? Well, I probed a little bit deeper, and we'd become good friends during the time when the church was being built. I discovered that this had been maliciously attacked while he was singing in the choir of an evangelical church. Twenty years before, someone had begun to spread a malicious rumor about him.

He said it wasn't true, and I knew it wasn't true, but he said, I got so bitter that someone in the choir would say something like that about me. He said, I walked out of that church with a great bitterness in my heart. He said, I was a professing Christian.

I had given my heart to Christ, but he said, from that moment when I let the bitterness into my heart, I lost my peace with God. I lost my love for God's people. I never went back into the church.

He attended the service in which we dedicated the church. From then on, he began to come rather steadily. The church was dedicated in September.

By February of the next year, during the winter, one night as I gave the invitation, this man came forward and knelt at the mourner's bench, and my, what a complete coming back to God there was in his life. He went on in the things of the Lord. He eventually became the chairman of that church.

He's gone home to be with the Lord now. But what a jewel! And yet, as he lay there upon his knees, he had to deal with a number of things. One of them was the bitterness in his heart against those who had slandered him.

Now, they were to blame. I believed the man. He said, I do not have to confess anything to God of the thing that they accused me of, because I never was guilty of it.

He was a very honest man. But he says, I have to confess how I hated those people, and how bitter my heart has been, and how I have lost my love for God's people. Well, it was a complete coming back of an old backslider.

But oh, how he came back, and how God filled his soul. Well, now that's the experience that Jacob had. You know, friends, God does not always meet us in church.

There are some strange and unlikely places where God meets with us. Our meeting with God is not conditioned upon church buildings or holy emotions. It is conditioned upon that moment in our life when we begin to realize that without God, everything is lost.

Let me give you a few examples of that. Moses stood on the desert floor and heard a voice out of a burning bush. That's where God met him.

The woman of Samaria, with her heart full of sin, met the Lord Christ on the edge of a well when he had sent the rest of the folks away, for he knew she'd be there. And what a meeting she had with the Lord in that place. Onesimus had run away from his master Philemon in Asia Minor, had made his way to Rome, had evidently stolen some money from his master, and like the prodigal son, had wasted it in riotous living.

And then he finds Paul the Apostle, and God met with that man in a prison cell, very likely, for Paul led him to Christ. He says, he's my son. Led him to Christ.

There is a saying that the Indians in Latin America, as they leave their sacred shrine, say, adios Christos, adios, as if Christ was contained within the walls of the church. And to them he is, because the only Christ they know is the Christ of statuary. Niches all around the church of saints and Christs and apostles and so forth, and when they leave the church, they've left Christ.

Isn't it wonderful, my friend, that Christ very frequently follows a man when he goes out of church? He's been in the habit of doing that down through the years. God has met with some of his saints in very strange places. He met with Dwight L. Moody on Wall Street in New York City many, many years ago, with the towering financial institutions of Wall Street all around him.

And there he found a room in one of those banking houses, and his soul was so filled with God that he had to ask God to hold his hand. Dwight L. Finney, pardon me, Charles Finney, on the day when he was converted, in his law office, asked--no, he didn't even ask God. He just tarried before the Lord.

He'd been converted under a tree the same day. Later on, in his law office, he said, God met me in waves of liquid love as his Spirit filled me. God made out of that man a great, great saint.

And Luther, walking up the sacred stairs in one of the large churches of Rome--and by the way, one of the things that really tears at your heart when you visit Rome is to stand at the top of those stairs and look at all the people that come up on their knees. It's hard on nylon hose. It's hard on your trousers, because there are many, many steps.

And there are literally scores of these poor, deluded people that walk on their knees up that stairway. We stood and looked at it. And Martin Luther was on his way up those stairs, but he heard a voice.

A word from the Lord came to him that he had read in the Latin Bible that he studied in the monastery, that just shall live by faith. And he got up and walked out. Because when that echoes in your soul, you don't have to walk any sacred stairs anymore.

Oh, how wonderful it is that God dwelleth not in temples made with hands. He meets men where the need is the greatest. He meets them when their souls are overflowing with longing for himself.

Now, I want you to notice a few characteristics of this place of blessing. The Lord blessed him there. Where? First of all, at the place of fear.

Jacob had a great company. He had become rather wealthy. This had taken place through his own shrewdness.

And Jacob was the kind of man who was not easily caught by God. I mean by that, he was a hard man for God to get a hold of, because he was so resourceful. He could handle just about every situation.

Now, that's the trouble with some of us tonight. The reason God hasn't really had a chance to do a revolutionary thing in our lives is because we are so desperately resourceful. We know how to handle absolutely every situation and justify ourselves in doing it.

That was the kind of a man Jacob was. But now, evil tidings came. Esau was coming.

Four hundred men. And the fear of his sin got the best of him. And so he decided to divide the company, his sons and daughters, his wives, his servants, his flocks, into two companies.

And the old fellow was shrewd. He put the women in front because he still believed that Esau had a little chivalry left and would not hurt the women and the children. But he couldn't sleep that night.

So when he had gotten everything arranged, done what he could, he went across the Jabbok. It wasn't very far. He would wade across, but he wanted to be by himself.

And there in the darkness, he began to think. Listen, my friend, there are people who carry within their breasts some awful fears. Fears concerning transgressions that were done long ago, but the years have not erased the fear.

I dealt with a young man some two or three years ago who came into the inquiry room in a United Gospel campaign in a certain city. He sat on a chair in front of me and literally wrung his hands. Why did he do that? Because he was a young man who hadn't stayed straight morally.

He had been playing around with the affections of some young women. He opened his heart to me and he said, my heart is filled with a desperate fear tonight. He said, I'm afraid that one of these young women is pregnant because of my folly.

He was living with that fear. I trust that he came to Christ. I'm not fully sure, but at least he wanted to come to Christ for forgiveness for that folly.

But oh, what fear there was in his heart. Not only this, but Jacob was now at the place of separation. It says he was left alone.

Very frequently, God has to detach us in order to bless us. Now, some people can't endure being alone. It's the worst thing they can think of.

If they happen to be alone, they've got to turn on the television set, or they've got to have some loud music blaring. Something to sort of buck them up. Because they're such poor company themselves, you see.

We've lost the art of being happy by ourselves. So, we need racket noise in order to somehow assure ourselves in the situation. Well, there's nothing wrong about being alone.

You've got a good conscience. If you're a Christian, if your sins are forgiven, if you have the companionship of the Lord Jesus, if you have good books to read, there's nothing wrong about being alone. It's enjoyable.

But some people can't stand it. And Jacob was left alone, and it was hard on him. Exceedingly hard.

You see, here was a double-minded man. Here was a man of a mixed life. There was faith, and there was unbelief in this man.

You discover that in the character of this man. There was honesty and dishonesty. There was courage and there was fear.

There were times when he worshipped God. There were other times, and that was most of the time, when his God was Jacob himself, because he trusted tremendously in himself. Am I speaking to someone tonight? Let me tell you something.

Psychologically, this is true. If a man is a divided personality, he can never be quite at peace when he's alone. It's the wholeness of a man's personality that makes him wholesome, both to others and to himself.

But Jacob wasn't a whole man. He was divided. You know, the psalmist prayed, Unite my heart to fear thy name.

That's what Jacob needed to pray. So, God separated himself. Now, let's make just an application of that.

It's a good thing when God separates us from the crowd, because there are too many people who are perfectly willing to go to hell, because the crowd disapproves of them being Christians. They haven't the nerve, they haven't the courage to stand up in the midst of the crowd and say, by the grace of God, the rest of you can go where you want to, but I'm going to bow my knees to Jesus Christ. What a blessing it is when God detaches men and women from the crowd, so that the crowd doesn't drag them down to perdition.

Oh, God has many ways of detaching us, putting us by ourselves where he can really talk to us. Sometimes he'll lay us on a hospital bed where there's only one direction to look, and that's straight up. And in those hours, God has reached many a man, many a woman, who otherwise would never have found Christ.

Then we notice that the place of blessing was a place of darkness. It was night when God pinpointed this spiritual crisis in this man's life. How frequently the night of sorrow, the night of grief, the night of pain and loss and poverty and spiritual hopelessness, when every star has gone out and both the moon and the sun have stopped shining in our sky, that in that darkness some promise of the living God comes into our life and gives us new hope.

God blessed him there. Friend, are you in darkness tonight? Are you in spiritual darkness? Are you in a place of utter confusion, and you say, oh preacher, I wish you knew the utter darkness in my soul? If you were going to be honest, you'd have to say that. You'd have to say, I have no peace, I have no assurance, I have no understanding of spiritual things, I have no rapport with God in my life.

The whole thing is darkness. Maybe darkness because of backsliding, darkness because of sin and transgression, darkness because you knew better, but you have never quite had the courage to put Jesus Christ first as Lord and Master of your life. But in the midst of that darkness, God can reach you if you want him to.

We go a step further and we find that it was a place of wrestling. You see, the outward act of the angel wrestling with Jacob was only the sign of the inward struggle that souls have who are not right with God. It was the outward symbol.

Now, this is not a question of dealing earnestly with God in prayer. Don't think for a minute that God blessed Jacob because Jacob wrestled so hard. I want you to see clearly that the blessing of God did not come upon Jacob until he quit wrestling.

When the angel smoked the sinew of his thigh so that the poor fellow had such a pain that he couldn't move but just clung to the angel, that's when it said God blessed him there. Oh, my friend, it isn't our wrestling in prayer. It isn't our thinking that by prayer we are going to get God to do something for us that he wouldn't do any other way.

That isn't God's method of blessing. It's when we come to the helplessness of clinging to him that he can bless us. God blessed him there.

When he had been stricken helpless, there was no other way out. There was positively nothing that he could do. God blessed him there.

But one or two more words and we shall close this message. I think it can be said truly, as the poet puts it, that this self in Jacob was the one thing that God was trying to deal with. The one thing he's trying to deal with in all of our lives.

This cruel self, says the poet, oh how it strives and works within my breast to come between thee and my soul and keep me back from rest. In thy strong hand I lay me down, so shall the work be done, for who can work so wondrously as the Almighty One? And it was Theodore Monod, the great Protestant preacher of France of an earlier generation, who found himself one day at Keswick in England. There was a whole week of struggle within his heart.

He was a converted man, but he was not a yielded man. And when at last the victory of the Spirit came into his life, he wrote a song that you have heard many a time, I'm sure. I can't quote, I'm not going to quote the whole thing for you, but I'm just going to give you the last, the first stanza and the last.

This is the way it reads. Oh, the bitter shame and sorrow that a time could ever be, when I let the Savior's pity plead in vain and proudly answered all of self and none of thee. Then the last one, higher than the highest heavens, deeper than the deepest sea, Lord thy love at last has conquered.

Grant me now my soul's petition, none of self and all of thee. It was the place, furthermore, of self-revelation. For the angel asked Jacob, what is thy name? Then Jacob turned around and asked the angel what his name was.

But the important thing was that the angel asked Jacob, didn't the angel of God know his name? Yes, he did. But you see, the name Jacob means the planter, the one who took the place of another. And whenever the name of Jacob was used, it always had that connotation for Jacob himself.

You took your brother's place and you did it by hook and by crook. It was the one name that stood for the major sin in this man's life. And the moment he spoke that name, it just dragged out the whole business every time.

And the angel wanted this man to face himself. You see, friends, the disclosure of our true selves is one of the great works of the Holy Spirit. Most of us want blessing.

We want to be able to say, God blessed me there. But, friend, if we are going to be completely honest, we have to realize that the background of every blessing is a humiliation in which God asks us, Brother, just exactly what are you? And that's when we bring out what we are. We try to hide that from ourselves as much as we can.

We try to hide it from other people, especially. We want them to have the best possible opinion of us. Like I mentioned to the women yesterday afternoon in speaking on Revelation 3:20, Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If any man will hear my voice and open the door, I will come in. I will sup with him, and he with me. There was a door.

Inside the door, the man himself, outside the Christ of God. But the Christ of God spoke to the man within and said, Look, you're lukewarm. You think you're rich and increased with goods, but you are poor and miserable and blind and naked, and you think that by keeping the door shut nobody's going to find out.

But I know. Listen, my friend, that's probably the situation in your life tonight. I don't know.

You don't dare to let Jesus Christ have his way in your life because you know that if you're going to let him have his way in your life, the very first step will be a step of humiliation. For if we're going to face Christ and do business with him, the first thing we do is to become utterly honest about ourselves. The self-revelatory work of the Holy Spirit begins to be manifest.

And that was Jacob's situation. God pulled out the whole sordid story, and Jacob bowed his head and said, Lord, it's true. It was Evan Roberts who said this, Do not be afraid of any fresh revelations of yourself to yourself.

God knows what you are all the time. Now he wants you to know it and to benefit from it. He goes on to say this, God gives grace for self-knowledge gradually.

If we saw all we are in a moment of time, we would despair. I think that's true. The most courageous hour in any man's life is the hour in which he honestly faces himself.

That is the hour in which, above all other times, he needs to get his eyes on the grace of God. And the grace of God is always there for that kind of an hour. Now, in closing, notice the glory of the blessing.

He blessed him there. Have we ever prayed, Lord, bless me? What did you mean? What do you mean by blessing? Well, I think this helps us to understand. First of all, he got a new name, and the new name stood for a new nature.

Thou shalt no more be called Jacob, but Israel, a prince with God. The princely men and women in the eyes of God are the broken men and women, the ones who have faced God and faced themselves and faced the hour of utter humiliation. Not only that, he made a new discovery.

He said, I have seen God face to face. And a man never forgets that. That becomes the theme of his song.

That becomes the underscored statement of all of his testimony. And then it says, as he walked away that morning, that he walked away as the sun rose upon him. Listen, friend, it was a new day.

Every day is drab and dull and without meaning as long as Christ is not in the life. But when we've done our business with God, a new day dawns, and it becomes a day like no other day in our lives, the sunrise after the surrender. Someone said this, he had a limp in his leg, but he had a leap in his soul.

He did. That's the important thing, my friend, to have a leap within your soul so that one knows that he's walking with God. And he had a new relationship to his brother Esau.

He went forward and met Esau. And the strange thing is that when he met Esau, they fell upon one another's necks and embraced one another. You see, when God has done something in a man's life, God goes before that man and changes the relationships to his fellow man.

I want to give you a little story right here. A friend of mine who is a retired Salvation Army officer was preaching in Montana some years ago, and God was moving in the meetings. The people from the various churches were coming to the Salvation Army to hear him preach.

And he said, as he was preaching one night, there was a very stately woman who stood up, and in the middle of his sermon, she came to the mourner's bench. She told him later, I'm the busiest woman in our church. But she said, I wasn't right with God.

She lay on her knees until the sermon was finished. And then she was dealt with, and she stood up with the most expressive victory on her face. She gave a testimony that convicted a great number of souls that night.

But here is the thing that was happening. She had three sons in the service of the United States. One of them was stationed with the army in Germany, one was with the army out in the Aleutians in Alaska, and the third one was on a ship outside of San Diego, about two days out of San Diego.

And here is the aftermath of that story. And I can vouch for the truth of this, because my Salvation Army friend told me this. He said she got a telephone call from her son in Germany.

I think it was either that same evening or the day after, I forget, but it was very close to her own experience here. He said this, Mother, he said, I had to call you and tell you that I have been gloriously converted. And she said, son, that's true of me too.

And then she got a telephone call from San Diego two days later. And one of the other boys said, Mother, I had to call you when we got into port. Two days out in the Pacific, he said, I got under such a burden and conviction of sin, I didn't know what to do with myself.

And he says, I crept behind one of the turret towers on the battleship, and I just cried my heart out to God, and he says, I've been converted. Well, the mother said, son, that's what had happened to me too, two days ago. Well, the fellow up in the Aleutians, he couldn't call by telephone, so he wrote a letter.

He said, Mother, what in the world is happening at home? Somehow or another, I have a feeling that things are strangely different at home. I don't know why, but he said, God has been speaking to me. And he says, one day, a couple of days ago or whenever it was, you wrote the letter.

He said, there came such a strange feeling over my soul, there was only one thing to do, and that was to pray. And he says, I prayed to God, and I said, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. And he says, God did something wonderful.

He took away all my sins, and I know that I'm saved. And all of that happened because a mother, a church woman, the busiest woman in her church, but without any vital contact with God, let go and let God. And God met her there.

And when God met her there, it was like an electric current. One went to Germany, another one across the Pacific two days out, another one up in the Aleutians, and three sons found the Savior at the same time. You know, friends, if you and I would just simply bow our hearts and let God have his way in our souls in that way, we would, we could never quite understand how God would work in other hearts.

When Jacob bent his head in the presence of the angel that wrestled with him, God took all the enmity out of the heart of Esau. And when he met him, they fell on their necks and embraced. God goes before us when we come before God.

Shall we bow our hearts in prayer? Lord Jesus, we pray tonight that if there are any Jacobs here who are wrestling and have been wrestling for a long, long time, will thou just help them tonight to surrender? And then the place of surrender shall be the place of blessing. Grant it, Lord, for thy name's sake. Amen.

Let's hold steady in prayer. Let's talk to God for a moment. Brother Nyquist is going to come up and suggest a song.

Amen. Let's find hymn number 242. Lord Jesus, I long to be perfectly whole.

I want thee forever to live in my soul, break down every idol, cast out every foe. Now wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Shall we stand as we stand? Lord Jesus, I long to be perfect.

I want to be open to your needs tonight. It may represent any number of needs. You may be a backslider.

You may be an unconverted man. You may be a professing church member, but you've come to the conclusion that you have never met Christ. You may have problems in your life that are still there because of the transgressions of yesteryears that have never been cleansed.

You may be just an empty soul who longs for the fullness of God, but you've heard God speak tonight.

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