

Week 9: The Where and When of Worship

Jacob's journey of faith brought him back to an important place where God had intervened in his life twenty years earlier. When Jacob had fled from Esau for his life and stopped to rest, God revealed himself to Jacob for the first time at the place he named Bethel (Genesis 28). Now, two decades later, God called him to return to the same place and appeared to Him once again (Genesis 35). For Jacob this place brought a reminder of God's faithfulness in the past, an experience of God's presence in the present, and an offering of hope for the future. As a result, Jacob set up a pillar as an act of worship because he knew God had revealed Himself at this special place, and the "where" of worship can affect our mindset of worship.

As we look closely at Jacob's story, we learn that the "when" of worship is significant as well. Jacob made an offering of worship after he had experienced God's supernatural protection on the trip and blessing upon his arrival (Genesis 35:5, 9). Without a doubt, this had to have been a mountain-top experience for Jacob. And, as we would expect, worship was the response. Yet, as Jacob left Bethel and made his way to the next town, tragedy struck. His wife Rachel, the love of his life, lost her life in childbirth. Here, once again, Jacob sets up a pillar at her burial as an act of remembrance and worship. With regard to the "when" of worship, Jacob set up pillars at a moment of elation and in the midst of tragedy.

Scripture Reading: Genesis 35:1-21

Questions

1. What is an important place in your personal journey of faith? What took place there that was so impactful? Have you returned to the place since that time? What was that experience like?
2. When is worship most natural to you – in times of elation or times of sorrow? What attributes of God do you more easily recognize in each of these seasons? What does it look like to worship in times of elation and in times of tragic difficulty?

Prayer

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You are worthy of our worship. Thank You for memories of Your faithfulness that are tied to particular places and seasons. May these memories from our past bring about gratitude in our hearts and thanksgiving from our lips. May Your work in the past also be the foundation for our hope in the future. Even when times are painful and hard, may our eyes look up to You, and our hearts know that You are close. May You be particularly close to those who are suffering right now in our congregation and community. Through times of elation and times of difficulty, may we better understand your character and respond with worship. In Jesus' name, Amen.

