

## **Between Bethel and a Heap of Ruins**

Do you know who you are in God?

Do you know your place in spiritual becoming?

Can you perceive God's mission upon you?

*Dave Harvey, Rescuing Ambition (Crossway, 2010), pp. 11-12*

For the past couple decades, I had a condition that kept me from sleeping well. The technical term was apnea .... So I went to see the doctor. "I'll remove your uvula," he said, "then you won't snore. You'll sleep better." Now, I didn't even know I had a uvula, but I freaked when he suggested its removal .... For some reason, though, I let them do it. They cut out my uvula. And now I can sleep.

But here's something I didn't expect. When I lost my uvula, I found my dreams. You see, because I never slept well, I never dreamed. I know experts would say I dreamed and just didn't know it—but that doesn't matter because I don't ever remember dreaming. Not once. I was dreamless. That's a boring way to spend a night.

I didn't even know I'd lost my dreams until I found them—or, rather, they were returned to me. Actually, they were rescued, airlifted from some cold, lifeless crevice where dreams hibernate until the arrival of deep sleep. Or something like that.

All this may sound strange, but it's true. My dreams were rescued by a guy with a scalpel.

Lots of people live without dreams. They move from one day to the next without the refreshing effect of a memorable dream .... But there are dreams we can lose that are much more significant than those I was losing. Not the REM kind of dreams, but the dreams that drive us when we're awake. The dreams that cause us to reach beyond ourselves, to see beyond the present and to live for something more. If you're having trouble holding on to those types of dreams, that's a real problem.

I. We have been talking a lot about Jacob at Bethel...

- Bethel is a place of heaven connecting with earth...
- Bethel is where the desperate individual, pursued and threatened, becomes aware of the world above this world...
- Bethel is a place of dreams... not a place of mission.
- Bethel means the House of God, yes...
- But notice, Bethel is not heaven... Bethel is solidly on earth... but it has a heavenly ladder

As a church, we want to be a place of connection...

But Jacob must pass through Bethel... he cannot stay there... and later, Jacob must return to Bethel...

Remember Moses on holy ground? He doesn't build a temple upon holy ground... he is given a mission on holy ground.

**We can never substitute experience for mission**

Peter wants to stay on the mountaintop. He wants to build temples there. Jesus says, No. There is desperate need back down there, where the people are...

**II.** As a spiritual illustration, Bethel will teach us truths all through the OT.

Ai is first mentioned in the book of Genesis in connection with the life of Abraham, Gen. 12:8; 13:3. The Bible tells us that Abraham pitched his tent "between Bethel and Hai." Now, the name "Bethel" means, "The house of God." Ai means, "a heap of ruins."

Like Abraham, many of God's people live somewhere between "the house of God" and "a heap of ruins."

Do you see the connection?

We, as people of faith, placed between eternity and a heap of stuff that will fade away!  
The flesh can only see the stuff that will fade away...  
But in Bethel, there is a ladder to another world...

**III.** Now let me tell you another story... Joshua is leading the Israelites into the promised land... When Israel faced Jericho in chapter 6, they were commanded to destroy the city, but they were to take the wealth of the city and dedicate it to the Lord.

Why? This is back to the principle of first fruits...

A man named Achan took some of that wealth for himself and brought the wrath of God upon the whole nation.

Israel suffered a tragic defeat at Ai. 36 men died. Because of hidden sin...

This shows up the continual battle for purity of the heart. Even if God has delivered you... saved you...blessed you... temptation is at the door.

After the nation repents... God tells Joshua to go back to Ai. God promises Joshua that things will be different this time. He assures Joshua and Israel of the victory.

"Then the Lord said to Joshua, 'Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the King of Ai, his people, his city and his land.'"

The Lord calls them to return to the place of their greatest defeat. God knew that they needed to overcome Ai before they could move on in the conquest of Canaan.

We need victory over the things of the world, the lusts of the flesh, the temporal...

**IV.** There are two traps for the person who is trying to overcome a spiritual setback.

1.) Fear

2.) Discouragement

- Fear or anxiety often leads to sin. We saw Abraham lie about his wife because he was afraid that the Egyptians would kill him to take her.
- Fear will immobilize your spiritual life. Proverbs 29:25 says, “The fear of man will prove to be a snare.” When a person gets caught in a snare, he can no longer move. Many Christians are no longer progressing spiritually because they are afraid of what people think, what people say or have said, or what people can do to them. Fear will immobilize us spiritually.
- Fear will also make God’s Word unproductive in our lives. In describing the thorny ground, Matthew 13:22 said, “the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it [the Word], making it unfruitful.” For many Christians, God’s Word is no longer alive to them because, instead of walking in faith, they walk in worry and fear. Therefore, God’s Word is choked and produces no fruit in their lives.

Why are both of these things mentioned? They seem to be the same thing, right?

But they aren’t quite the same thing.

Fear is a response... Discouragement is a belief...

If you are afraid long enough, you start to believe a lie...

**V.** Don’t let fear and discouragement keep you from knowing God’s promises, knowing your place in spiritual becoming, and perceiving your mission.

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*Research credits: Greg Brown, Alan Carr, Dave Harvey*