

JACOB'S FEAR AND FAITH

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A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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“Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.”
Genesis 32:11-12

JACOB is the type of a believer who has too much planning and scheming about him, he is a wise man according to the judgment of the world. Put him down by the side of Laban, and if his relative tries to stint him in his wages, and to cheat him in all manner of ways, you will see that Jacob, in the long run, will be even with Laban. He seems to have been able to deal, even with that sharper, quite as sharply, and not to come off second best in the bargain.

Abraham never descended to any of the tricks by which Jacob sought to increase his flocks, he lived like a princely man, in simple, childlike confidence in God, willing to be injured rather than to seek his own interests, letting Lot, though a younger man, choose the best part of the land, and being quite content to take whatever remained.

Because God was with him as his portion, he had no hunger after anything else. He was worth fifty thousand of such kings as the king of Sodom, and though he had a right to the spoils of war, he waived it, saying, “I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich.”

Jacob, if he had been in such a case, would have looked very closely after all the threads, the shoe latches, and all the other things that he had captured in the war, he would have said that God gave them into his hand, and he would take good care to preserve them.

Among worldlings, Jacob would be regarded as a much more sensible man than either his grandfather Abraham, or his father Isaac, but when you come to weigh him in the balances of the sanctuary, although he was a great and good man, and a man of such force of character that he is reproduced in his descendants, even to the present generation, yet for all that, the weakness of his character lay in the human strength of that character—his power to plot and plan makes him appear as a much smaller and feebler man, in the eyes of those who can judge spiritually, than Abraham, his forefather was.

I suppose Jacob's bargaining faculty came from his mother, and she had it from her brother Laban, and Laban, with his stingy, cheating ways, was enough to infect the whole family. Rebekah, in that artful plot by which she deceived her blind old husband, and taught her son to rob his elder brother of his father's blessing, showed that the same vein was in her, and that she belonged to that plotting, scheming stock, and the mother's character was strongly manifested in her son Jacob.

Hence it is that you find him getting into all manner of trouble. Abraham had his trials, and one great supreme trial, but as a summary of his life, it is written, “The LORD had blessed Abraham in all things,” and everybody feels that Abraham's life was a most desirable one. It is such a life as we might any of us wish to live, but Jacob's life is not a desirable one. At one time he is bargaining with his famished brother about a mess of red pottage—a transaction which we cannot approve. Then, afterwards, we find

him joining with his mother in deceiving his poor old father. It is noteworthy that he, who had deceived his father, Isaac was himself deceived by his uncle Laban.

Such conduct is generally repaid into our own bosoms, our chickens come home to roost, and we get back for ourselves what we thought we had given away to others. Jacob's own summary of his life, as he gave it to Pharaoh was, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been," so full were they of sorrow and trial. I may say of him as was said of many of David's mighty men, "Nevertheless, he attained not unto the first three." There he stands, accepted and blest, for he was a man of faith, but the very strength of his character, as I have already reminded you, was the proof of its weakness and caused him many sorrows.

Our text introduces Jacob to us just before that memorable night by the brook Jabbok. He was expecting his brother Esau to come, with a troop of four hundred men, perhaps to slaughter the whole company. The patriarch's state of mind is a mixture of fear and faith. He doubts, yet he believes, he has much distrust, yet he does confide in God, at least to some extent. As two hosts met him, so he himself was the representative of two hosts. Solomon says in the Canticles, "What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies," so was it with Jacob.

There were both nature and grace, belief and unbelief, fear and faith battling together in his soul. What a picture he is of many of us in whom a perpetual warfare is being waged between the law of grace and the law that is by nature in our members—between the heavenly principle that cannot die, and cannot sin, and the old nature which is ever struggling for the mastery, and making us often cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

I. I am going, first, to speak about JACOB'S FEAR, as we have it mentioned in our text, "I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children."

My first observation is that *Jacob, in his fear, is not to be held up as an example to us.* He is not to be commended for thus fearing Esau, neither are we to imitate him in this respect. My next remark will, perhaps, seem strange to you, but I ask you to weigh it well, and consider it carefully. There is a great deal that Christians feel which they never ought to feel. There are a great many things that Christians do which they never ought to do, and there are many places into which Christians come into which they never ought to come.

It was so with the ancient believers and especially with Jacob. His experience is the experience of a good man, but it is not, in all respects, the experience that a good man ought to have. Why should he have been filled with fear at the prospect of meeting his brother? There was no necessity for it, his grandfather Abraham would not have had any such fear, and if Jacob had possessed more grace, he would not have said, concerning Esau, "I fear him." He knew that God had given him the blessing which Esau despised, again and again had the Lord appeared to him, and he must have known that he was blessed in a way that Esau was not.

Why, then, should he fear his brother? Should the elect of God be afraid of one who has neither part nor lot in the matter? Should he not rather feel that the son of the King of kings must not fear the child of Satan—the heir of wrath? The friends of the wicked Haman said to him, "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shall surely fall before him." And well may Mordecai stand upright in the king's gate, and never bow his head before Haman. Why should he fear and tremble even though Haman has the ear of the king? Mordecai has the ear of the King of kings, so he need not be afraid of anything Haman could do.

Jacob's fear was wrong, first, *because it followed immediately after a great deliverance.* He had left his father-in-law, Laban, in haste—he had stolen away by night and Laban had hurried after him. Encumbered as Jacob was with so numerous a company, which included so many young children and so much cattle, he had to move very slowly, and Laban soon overtook him. He was boiling over with rage when he started, and meant to do desperate things, but God interposed, and made him put the sword into the scabbard, so that, instead of there being any slaughter, there was as kindly a state of feeling between the two as could be expected under the circumstances.

After God had preserved His servant Jacob from the wrath of Laban, it is strange that he should have been afraid of Esau. He has been delivered once, cannot he expect to be delivered again? He has just been rescued from one peril, yet he trembles in the prospect of another.

Do you know anybody who ever acted in that way? If you do not, I do. I know where he lives, I will not say that I live with him, but I will confess, with sorrow, that I have sometimes been that very person. Have you also been one of the same sort of persons? If so, I will not say what I think of you, but I will say of myself, "How foolish I am to act thus!"

How basely am I acting towards my Lord!" He who has been with us hitherto, never changes, what He has done once, He will do again. Is His arm shortened, or His eye blinded, or His heart turned to stone? Nay, then surely, we ought to have learned by experience to trust in God, even as Jacob ought to have learned from his experience so fresh in his memory, and trusted the Lord concerning Esau as He had delivered him from the wrath of Laban.

Another thing that tended to make Jacob's fear inexcusable was that *just before, the angels of God had met him*. The chapter from which our text is taken, tells us, in its opening verse, that "Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him." Messengers from the eternal throne came to salute God's favorite, and I suppose, to escort him back to the land that was given to his fathers by a covenant that could not be broken. The patriarch was attended, before and behind, or on the right hand and on the left, by two companies of angels, yet he says, "I fear Esau."

Even in the society of those who must have borne a perfume of heaven upon their wings—standing in the midst of immortal spirits whose faces must have reflected the glory of their Lord and Master, Jacob says, "I fear Esau." Again I ask—Did you ever know anybody act in such a fashion as this?

Perhaps you say, "I never saw any angels." No, but you have, by faith, seen the great Angel of the covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ, and you have had most intimate communion with Him. At His table, how often has He revealed Himself to us in the breaking of bread! And in the reading or hearing of His Word, how often has He been set forth before us as our Heavenly Bridegroom, the Beloved of our soul! And sometimes when we have been quite alone, the bright light of His presence has surprised us, and our hearts have burned within us while He has communed with us.

Well, then, it has been very shameful on our part if, afterwards, we have feared Esau, or have been afraid of some anticipated trouble, or fearful because of bodily pain, or perhaps, put out of temper by some trifling matter in the household which should have been altogether beneath our notice as companions of the Lord of the angels. The Lord have mercy upon His servants, and forgive our unbelieving fear, for which we will not pretend to make any excuse!

Note, concerning Jacob's fear, that *it probably arose out of the recollection of his old sins*. Old sins, like old sores, are very apt to break out again. The very mention of the name of Esau brought up before his mind the day when his mother cooked the "two good kids of the goats," and took his brother's goodly raiment, and put it on Jacob, and put the skins of the kids upon his hands and his neck, that he might deceive his father into the belief that he was his "very son Esau."

Jacob remembered all that, and felt that Esau had good reason to be angry, for he had supplanted him twice, and done him grievous wrong. He was afraid of Esau on the principle that "conscience doth make cowards of us all." A sin may be forgiven by God, yet for all that, its sting may be felt by you fifty years afterwards, just as, perhaps, some of you may have had a bone broken in your boyhood, and had it very well set, yet sometimes, before bad weather, you feel a twinge that reminds you that bone was once broken.

Thus it was with Jacob, that old bone began to creak, and to threaten that bad weather was coming. If he had dealt fairly and justly with Esau, and left the Lord to settle that matter of the birthright as He had always intended to give it—if he had left God to arrange everything in His own way, and had not been so over-wise, like his clever, scheming mother, he would not have been so afraid to meet Esau as he now was.

Well, dear friends, perhaps some old sin is the cause of your fear, if so, I pray you to remember that one sin ought not to lead you to commit another, or to be an excuse for committing another. Suppose that, in your early days, you did sin in a certain fashion, or that, in your later days, you have transgressed in some other way, should you, therefore, doubt your God? You should be humble in the remembrance of your sin, but you should not, therefore, mistrust the Most High. He is always faithful, whatever we may have been. He did not, at the first, receive us as innocent, but as guilty, yet He saved us.

As we look back upon the past, we may well mourn our guiltiness, but let us not doubt our salvation if we have believed in Jesus. Even when God's people get themselves into trouble, it is very remarkable how He delivers them. They ought to be careful as to how they walk before Him, but even when they are not, and their folly brings them into a net, yet does He come and tear the net in pieces, and the poor captive bird escapes out of the snare of the fowler.

Even when we willfully wander from Him, the Lord graciously restores our souls, blessed be His name! Do not, therefore, let the remembrance of our past guilt lead us into any doubt concerning the fidelity of Him who has cast all our sins into the depths of the sea, and who will never allow them to be again laid to our charge.

There is this which is commendable to be said about Jacob's fear—it led him to prayer. What was he doing when he said of his brother Esau, "I fear him"? O brethren and sisters, if you ever say the same thing, mind that you get to the same place where Jacob was, and say it, as he said it, to his God. It is ill to say it at all, but if it is said, it is well to say it to the Lord. Go to Him with whatever troubles you have, and unburden your souls at the mercy seat.

If there be any suspicion or mistrust in your mind or heart, dark and black though the thought may be, yet go and tell Him all. He knows all about it, for He reads your heart, yet go to Him, and lay it all before Him, and ask Him to cleanse it all away. To go and tell our doubts to our fellow creatures, is like spreading an infectious disease, it does not often bring us any comfort, but it frequently causes others to have more distrust who had quite enough of their own before. We ought not to be slack in prayer, for we are ready enough to tell our neighbors all about our trials and troubles, though they cannot help us.

Note also, that *Jacob's fear led him to take a review of his life*. That was a good thing. "I am not worthy," said he to the Lord, "of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands." It is a blessed thing, sometimes, to look back upon our past history in order to revive our confidence in God at the present time. It never does to rely only upon the past and to say, "God favored me at such and such a time, and therefore, I am his."

No, you need present mercy, as you cannot live on the meat you ate long ago, so you cannot exist on past mercy alone, yet, as I have reminded you, you may have seen how the bargemen on the canal push backward to send the boat forward, and you may push backward with your experience in order to send the boat of your life forward in new confidence in God.

I do not speak for myself alone when I say that if we will review our lives from the first day until now, we shall be again surprised at the wonderful lovingkindness of the Lord towards us. Jacob speaks to the Lord, "of *all* the mercies, and *all* the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant."

Now, if anybody could have foretold, twenty years ago, to some of you, that you would be in such a good position as you are now in, you would have been filled with delight at the prospect, yet perhaps, you are not now happy in the possession of it, and if you could have foreseen all the mercy which God has strewn in your pathway, you would have jumped for joy, yet you do not jump for joy now as you look back upon it. Is not that wrong? Oh, when I think of what the Lord has done for me, personally, I reckon that I should be the very chief of sinners if I should ever mistrust Him again! I can say, and so can you, my brother or sister in Jesus—

***"When trouble, like a gloomy cloud,
Has gather'd thick and thunder'd loud,***

*He near my soul has always stood,
His loving kindness, oh, how good!"*

Then, why should any of us ever say, in unbelief—

“He’ll leave me at last in trouble to sink”?

Beloved friends, think of the places from which the Lord brought some of you. It is not so very long ago since you were living in sin—perhaps in the worst forms of sin—without hope, and without God in the world. Had you died as you then were, where would you have been? Yet now you are numbered among the Lord’s children, and you have enjoyed much of His love, and been highly favored by Him. I charge you, by the abounding mercy which you have received, let these present fears that now molest you, be driven from your bosom.

Furthermore, *Jacob was also led to seek out the promise that was most suitable to his case*, for he said, “I fear Esau, that he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.” Now notice how appropriate was the promise that he quoted to meet the case, “And thou saidst, I will surely do you good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.”

Now, if the father is smitten, and the mother and the children are killed, how can Jacob’s seed be as the grains of sand upon the seashore which cannot be counted? He had a good hold upon his God when he quoted that promise, and beloved, it may be the same in your experience. You never know the preciousness of the promises till you realize your need of them.

You may not know what keys the whitesmith has in his possession, possibly he does not know himself how many he has, but if you lose the key of your drawer, you send for him, and he comes with a great bunch of keys, and he tries one, and another, and another, and another, till at last he finds one that will fit.

God’s promises are often so little studied by His people that they are like a great bunch of rusty keys till we really need them, and then we turn them over and we say, of some particular promise, “That just meets my case. Blessed be the name of the Lord, it must have been made on purpose for me. That key fits all the wards of this lock.” And then you begin to prize the promise.

It is, I think, worthy of note that God had not said to Jacob, in so many words, “I will surely do thee good.” At least, as far as the Scriptures are concerned, there is no record of any such promise, but He had said to the patriarch, “I am with thee,” and “I will not leave thee.” So, this is Jacob’s version of the promise, and it is a true one too, because if God says, “I am with thee,” he means, “I will do thee good.”

Have you never heard brethren pray, in the prayer meeting, “Lord, Thou hast promised that where two or three are gathered together in Thy name, Thou wilt be in the midst of them, and that to bless them, and do them good”? Well now, that last part is what they have tagged on to our Savior’s words. He did not say, “and that to bless them, and do them good,” because it was not necessary to say that.

If the Lord is in the midst of them, He must bless them, and do them good, so Jacob felt that if the Lord had not put it in just those words, He implied it when He said, “I am with thee.” How could the Lord be with him except to do him good? That was his translation of the original text which came out of God’s lips, and that is what the Lord really meant by it. Jacob had gone below the surface and spied out the hidden meaning, and if you should ever be able to see more in a promise than is in it, it is in it.

I seem to contradict myself by that paradox, yet it is true. If the Word of the Lord should, in its literal construction, not actually contain all that your faith can see in it, yet over every promise there is this law of God written, “According to thy faith, be it unto thee.” And you may rest assured that your faith will never outrun the promise of God. He will keep His promise, not only to the letter, but to the fullest possible meaning that you can impart to it.

II. But I must not say any more about Jacob’s fear, or I shall have no time for speaking about HIS FAITH. Yet I have really been speaking about it while I have been talking concerning his fear.

First, *Jacob's faith was based upon God's promise*. He mentioned his fear of Esau, and then he turned to the Lord, saying, "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good." Oh, what a hold he had of God! "'Thou saidst.' Thou cannot lie, and 'Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good.' You cannot go back from Thy word, and 'Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good.'"

He seems to hold God to it as men hold their fellow men to a promise which they have given. There is nothing that he can see in which he can trust. God seems to be doing nothing—to be quite still, yet Jacob reminds Him of His promise, "Thou saidst." The promise is sufficient for Jacob without any act or deed as yet. "Thou saidst, Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good."

I must also remind you that *this was what Jacob said when he began to pray*. If you turn to his prayer, you will see that he began by saying, "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me," and so on, that is the beginning of his prayer, and the finishing of it is, "And Thou saidst." That should always be both the beginning and the ending of prayer.

You must never go beyond God's promises. If He has said anything, that is enough for you, but do not expect that your whims and fancies will be indulged. You must begin your prayer by saying to God, "Thou saidst," and when you do that, the weakest saint or sinner may plead so as to prevail. You can never get a stronger plea than the Lord's own promise. You can never strike a blow that will more effectually clinch the nail than this, "Thou saidst. Thou saidst."

O brethren, I scarcely know how to put this matter before you as I ought, because if God says a thing, who is there among us who shall dare to give Him the lie? If it was years ago that He said it—if it is an old promise, even in the oldest book of the Old Testament—yet there is no such thing as time with God, one day is with him as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day, and the promise is just as good as if He had made it at this very moment.

If you could hear God speak now, you would not doubt Him, would you? Well, but did He at any time utter this promise? Then it stands fast forever, for He has never spoken in secret so as to change what He has said in public. Every promise of God is sure to all those who put their trust in Him. Jacob's faith rested, in its beginning and its end, upon the promise of God, this was the basis of it, and this alone.

Can you say that this is the foundation of all your confidence for time and for eternity? If you can, is it not a basis worth resting upon, a foundation fit to build upon? Is there any supposable weight which this rock cannot sustain? Is there any imaginable trouble which may not be endured while God's great solemn promise stands forever fast?

Yet Jacob's faith, while it was resting upon the promise of God, was nevertheless, *a struggling faith*. It was a mixture of, "I fear Esau," and "Thou saidst." Beloved, have you only a struggling faith? Then, struggle on, never give up struggling. If your faith is only like Jacob's wrestling, wrestle on, for notice that Jacob, when he had said to the Lord, "Thou saidst," and quoted the promise, stopped praying, for he was satisfied to leave the case there.

So, brother, if your faith begins only as struggling faith, it is the nature of it to increase and grow till, at last, it comes to be victorious faith. Pray for victorious faith, ask the Lord to give you the confidence that will not be daunted—the unstaggering faith of Abraham, who, though he was as one dead, and his wife far advanced in years, yet knew that God had promised him a son, and therefore believed that he would have a son, and looked for him without a doubt, and then, when God bade him take Isaac, and slay him, he believed that God would even raise him up from the dead, but somehow or other, He would keep His promise.

Beloved, believe anything except that God can lie. Believe any miracle, any impossibility, or that which ungodly men tell you is an inability. Take it all in, but never let the thought come into your mind that God can be false to you. Oh, if we only believed God as He deserves to be believed, we should be able to move mountains, and cast them into the sea! Nothing is impossible to the man to whom it is impossible to doubt his God.

A mighty faith, though it is not in itself omnipotent, yet lays hold upon the omnipotence of God, and girds itself with divine strength. Does not the Lord deserve such a faith from us? Yet we shall never

have it unless He gives it to us. Oh, that the Holy Spirit would work it in us, and preserve it in us, and perfect it in us, till faith is lost in sight, and hope is changed to full fruition! Never let us doubt the living God for a single moment.

The Lord bless you, dear friends, and especially bless any of you who have not yet believed in His Son, Jesus Christ! Oh, that they could see the sinfulness of doubting the great God, and Jesus Christ, His Son! Oh, that they would but trust Him, and confide in Him, just as they are! They would never have to lament doing so, but throughout eternity, they would have to bless the Lord who taught them this sweet way of life and peace, namely, the way of simple dependence upon the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

GENESIS 32

Verse 1. *And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.*

When he left the promised land, he had a vision of angels, ascending and descending upon the ladder, as if to bid him farewell. Now that he is going back, the angels are there again to speed him on his way home to the land of the covenant, the land which the Lord had promised to give to Abraham and his seed.

2. *And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.*

The marginal reading is "Two hosts, or camps." The angels of the Lord were encamping round about the man who feared Him, though there had been much in his character and conduct which the Lord could not approve.

3. *And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom.*

After a visit from angels, afflictions and trials often come. John Bunyan wrote, as I have often reminded you—

*"The Christian is seldom long at ease,
When one trouble's gone, another doth him seize,"—*

and though the rhyme is rather rough, the statement is perfectly true. Full often, we are hardly out of one trial before we are into another.

4-5. *And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: and I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.*

It is very proper, when we have offended other people, and especially if we feel that we have done them wrong, as Jacob had done to Esau, that we should use the humblest terms concerning ourselves, and the best terms we can about those whom we have offended.

Yet I must say that I do not like these terms that Jacob uses, they do not seem to me to be the right sort of language for a man of faith, "My lord Esau; thy servant Jacob saith thus." What business had God's favored one to speak "thus" to such a profane person as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright? Surely, there was more of the Jacob policy than there was of the Israel faith in this form of speech.

6-7. *And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him. Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed:*

"Four hundred men with him"! "That must mean mischief to me, and my company. Surely, he is coming thus to avenge himself for the wrong I did him, long ago. My brother's heart is still hot with anger against me." So, "Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed."

7-8. *And he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; and said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape.*

This man Jacob was always planning and scheming, he was the great progenitor of the Jews who are still pre-eminent in bargaining. See how he plots and arranges everything to the best advantage. I blame him not for this, yet I think he is to be blamed that he did not pray first. Surely, it would have been the proper order of things if the prayer had preceded the planning, but Jacob planned first, and prayed afterwards. Well, even that was better than planning and not praying at all, so there is something commendable in his action, though not without considerable qualification.

9. *And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD—*

Jacob uses that august name “JEHOVAH”—“the LORD”—

9-10. *Which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.*

Not even one servant had he with him when he fled away across the river, he was alone and unattended, but now he was coming back at the head of a great family, with troops of servants, and an abundance of cattle, and sheep, and all things that men think worth having. How greatly God had increased him, and blessed him! He remembers that lonely departure from the home country, and he cannot help contrasting it with his present prosperity.

11-13. *Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude. And he lodged there that same night; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother;*

There he is, planning again! And this time, perhaps, since he has prayed over the matter, he is planning more wisely than he did before, intending now to try to appease his brother's anger by a munificent “present for Esau his brother.”

14-16. *Two hundred she goats, and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes, and twenty rams, thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses, and ten foals. And he delivered them into the hands of his servants, every drove by themselves; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove.*

In order that there might be time for his brother to look at the present in detail, and see it piece by piece, and so be the more struck with the size of it. This was true Oriental policy, and crafty Jacob always had more than enough of something and planning even when it was not done with wisdom, but in this case, I think it was a wise arrangement, for which he is to be commended.

17-19. *And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee? Then thou shalt say, They be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, also he is behind us. And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him.*

What care he takes about the whole affair! We cannot blame him, under the circumstances, yet how much grander is the quiet, noble demeanor of Abraham, who trusts in God, and leaves matters more in His hands! Yet alas! even Abraham tried plotting and scheming more than once, but failed every time he did so.

20-24. *And say ye moreover, Behold thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me. So went the present over before him: and himself lodged that night in the company. And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had. And Jacob was left alone;*

This was a very anxious time for him, the heaviest trial of his life seemed impending. He was dreading it more than he need have done, for God never meant the trouble he feared to come upon him at all. He was trembling under a dark cloud that was to pass over his head without bursting. No tempest of wrath was to break out of it upon him.

However, we must admire Jacob in this one respect that, with all his thought, and care, and planning, and plotting, he did not neglect prayer. He felt that nothing he could do would be effectual without God's blessing. He had not reached the highest point of faith, though he had gone in the right direction a great deal further than many Christians. He now resolved to have a night of prayer, that he might win deliverance, "Jacob was left alone;"—

24. *And there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.*

I suppose our Lord Jesus Christ did here, as on many other occasions preparatory to His full incarnation, assume a human form, and came thus to wrestle with the patriarch.

25. *And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh;*

Where the column of the leg supports the body, and if that be disjoined, a man has lost all his strength. It was brave of Jacob thus to wrestle, but there was too much of self about it all. It was his own sufficiency that was wrestling with the God-man, Christ Jesus.

Now comes the crisis which will make a change in the whole of Jacob's future life, "He touched the hollow of his thigh."

25. *And the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.*

What can Jacob do now that the main bone of his leg is put out of joint? He cannot even stand up any longer in the great wrestling match, what can he do?

26. *And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.*

It is evident that as soon as he felt that he must fall, he grasped the other "Man" with a kind of death-grip, and would not let Him go. Now, in his weakness, he will prevail. While he was so strong, he won not the blessing, but when he became utter weakness, then did he conquer.

27. *And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.*

That is, a supplanter, as poor Esau well knew.

28. *And He said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel:*

That is, a prince of God.

28. *For as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.*

Jacob was the prince with the disjoined limb, and that is exactly what a Christian is. He wins, he conquers, when his weakness becomes supreme, and he is conscious of it.

29. *And 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.*

There are limits to all human communion with God. We must not go where vain curiosity would lead us, else will He have to say to us, as He did to Jacob, "Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?"

30. *And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.*

How he must have trembled to think that he had the daring—perhaps his fears made him call it presumption—actually wrestle with God Himself, for he was conscious now that it was no mere angel, but "the Angel of the covenant," the Lord Himself, with whom he had wrestled.

31. *And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.*

The memorial of his weakness was to be with him as long as he lived. People would ask, "How came the halting gait of that princely man?" And the answer would be, "It was by his weakness that he won his principedom, he became Israel, a prince of God, when his thigh was put out of joint." How pleased would you and I be to go halting all our days with such weakness as Jacob had, if we might also have the blessing that he thus won!

32. *Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.*

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.