

JACOB 'S MODEL PRAYER

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A SERMON

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And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD who said unto me, Return unto your country, and to your kindred, and I will deal well with you: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which You have shown unto Your servant, for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray You, 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 You said, I will surely do you good, and make your seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.”
Genesis 32:9-12.

YOU must have noticed, dear friends, how very frequently God makes the life of a man to be the reflection of his character. There is an echo in the outward experience, to the inward character of the man.

Look at the life of Abraham. He trusted God in a very eminent degree—shall I be incorrect if I say that God also eminently trusted him? The Lord spoke with Abraham as a man speaks with his friend, and when He was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, He said, “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?” And as Abraham had trusted God in so notable a manner, the Lord entrusted his seed with the oracles of God, and with the outward forms of religious worship, so that it was through the seed of Abraham that the truth was handed on, from generation to generation, until the days of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then, next, in contrast to the life of Abraham, take the case of Jacob. He begins life by cheating his brother, and however that cheating may have been overruled so as to fulfill the purposes of God, it was altogether unjustifiable. Now, as he had begun with Esau in that fashion, so he had it returned into his own bosom. When he was with Laban, he was cheated again and again—cheated even in the wife who was given or sold to him. He was a great bargainer—shrewd, crafty, not over scrupulous—the typical father of the Jews, yet you know how he was continually being overreached by Laban who could also bargain on his own account. What a bargaining life it was all through—and what a life of sorrow, although he was still favored of God. His outward experience was the echo of his inward character. As he had done to others, so was it done to him, and in him was fulfilled our Lord's declaration which had not then been uttered, “With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

Also look at Moses, practically renouncing the throne of Egypt by refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter because he esteemed the reproach of Christ to be greater riches than all the treasures in Egypt! Yet what did he afterwards become? Was he not king in Jeshurun, with a strange and marvelous power over the hosts of the Lord, and with a greater kingdom under him, according to the judgment of all who are able to weigh things rightly, than he could ever have had if he had become the ruler of Egypt, and the son of Pharaoh's daughter?

I might give you other illustrations of this fact, but I want, rather, to attract your attention to the better side of Jacob's character as we have it revealed in the prayer which I have selected for our meditation on this occasion.

The chapter from which our text is taken informs us as to the circumstances of Jacob's case at the time that he offered this prayer. He had just escaped from his trouble with Laban when he received the inexpressible honor of being met by “the angels of God.” But, lest he should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations which they made to him, a second trouble followed closely upon the heels of the first. He was soon to meet his brother, Esau, and then the great sin of his earlier years would be brought home to him. He had deceived his old father, Isaac, and had gained the birthright blessing by utterly unjustifiable subtlety—and he might reasonably expect that he was about to reap the due reward of his evil deeds!

With true Oriental craft, and also with a considerable amount of common sense, he has various plans for appeasing the wrath of his brother. And then, when he had done what he thought to be wise, he betook himself to prayer. Brothers and sisters, let us learn from Jacob's experience to expect troubles, especially if we have so acted as to bring trouble upon ourselves—but let us also learn from Jacob's action that while planning is right enough when kept within its proper bounds, prayer is much more important! We may easily go to excess in our planning; we may depend so much upon an arm of flesh, and upon our own wisdom and prudence—and have such confidence in our own scheming that it may, after all, turn out to be utter folly! The staff on which we lean may turn out to be, at best, but a broken reed—perhaps even a spear which shall pierce, and wound us. “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man”—or to have confidence in ourselves, for even if we had all the wisdom that it is possible for man to attain, it would be but *created* wisdom! Whereas, if we go at once to the Lord our God, we shall go to infinite wisdom, and we may expect to be guided rightly through all the difficulties of the way!

Prayer, my brothers and sisters, must be our first resource! But if it is the last, let it be the first as well. Let us not merely go to God's door because we have tried everybody else and failed. Let us not go to the fountain simply because the cisterns are exhausted, but let us go to our God first and foremost! And let us say, “Even if earth's cisterns did contain water, we would not forsake our God for them. And if all the forces of our fellow creatures were as real and powerful as they profess to be, we would still lean upon the arm that bears up the whole universe—the unseen arm of the faithful Creator.”

I selected this subject for our meditation, on this occasion, because it appears to me to give us *a sort of model of what prayer should be*. We shall view it first in that light, and when we have done so, I shall have a little to say about *Jacob's last plea*, for it is most suggestive. And then I shall close with a word or two upon *the answer to this model prayer of the patriarch*.

I. First, then, concerning JACOB'S MODEL PRAYER, which is one of the earliest that is recorded in Holy Scripture—at least in such detail.

I commend it for your imitation, my dear friends, first, because *of the plainness of its matter*. Jacob does not come before God with a long roundabout story, telling in general terms the fact that he was in some sort of trouble, out of which he wished to be divinely helped, but he distinctly mentions the perilous circumstances in which he found himself. He says, “O God...deliver me, I pray You, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau.” Of course God knew that the name of Jacob's brother was Esau, yet Jacob thought it was necessary to mention his brother's name in order that his prayer should be definite and clear. So he pleaded, “Deliver me, I pray you, 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.” He was probably then alluding to his dearly-beloved Rachel, and her son Joseph, though he may also have referred to the other mothers in the company, for he was a tender father, and cared for his children, and he mentioned them as being very near his heart, and especially needing divine protection. So you see that Jacob is very clear as to what he asks of God—and I urge you, my brothers and sisters, to imitate him in this respect.

When we pray, we sometimes use very roundabout expressions. We do not come straight to the point. We seem to imagine that a kind of religious etiquette forbids us from speaking plainly at the throne of grace. I am persuaded that this notion is altogether wrong, and instead of God approving this mode of speaking to Him in prayer, He would much rather have us speak to Him as a child speaks to his earthly father—respectfully, reverently, and remembering that He is in heaven and we are on earth—yet simply and plainly, for our Heavenly Father needs no garnishing of our speech, and the poor tawdry flowers of eloquence with which some of our brothers at times adorn their prayers must be displeasing to God rather than acceptable to Him. Especially must you unconverted ones imitate Jacob in this matter of plainness of speech—when you pray, never mind about the mode of your expression, but come to the main point at once. Tell the Lord that you have grievously offended Him, and mention your sins by name to Him in private. If your great sin has been drunkenness, call it by that name! If it has been uncleanness, call it by that name! Do not endeavor to dissemble before the Lord, or to cloak your sin before the all-seeing Jehovah! You need not reach for a prayer-book to see how the bishops would have you pray, nor borrow somebody's Morning Devotions to see how a certain eminent divine prayed—but go straight to God, and say, “O Lord, You know what I need! I am a poor guilty sinner, and I cannot express myself in such a way as to please my fellow creatures, but You know what I am, and what I need. Will You graciously give me the pardon of my sin, O You who alone can forgive the guilty, will

You receive me to Your bosom, You blessed Savior of the lost?" Come to the point with God, dear friends. Be explicit with Him. Let it be seen that you are not praying for the mere sake of performing a certain religious ceremony, but that you have real business to transact with the Most High! You know what your request is, and you do not intend to leave the mercy-seat until your request is granted.

So I commend Jacob's prayer to you because of the plainness of its speech.

Next, it is to be commended for *the humility of its spirit*. Notice especially these words of the patriarch, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which You have shown unto Your servant, for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." If you even hint that there is any worthiness in yourself, the power of your prayer is at once destroyed! But if you plead your unworthiness, you will then be standing where the publican stood when he cried, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." And you know how "he went down to his house justified rather than the Pharisee," who said that he fasted twice in the week, gave tithes of all he possessed, and was not like other men, especially that publican! In that way he destroyed any power that his prayer might otherwise have possessed. His self-conceit tore the chariot wheels from his prayer so that it dragged heavily, and soon could not move even an inch! On the other hand, a deep sense of sin, a full consciousness of utter unworthiness will enable you, like Jacob, to wrestle with the great Angel of the covenant, and to prevail over Him. Possibly you have not succeeded with God because you have not sunk low enough before Him. You unconverted ones, especially, if you put your mouths in the very dust, that will be the best attitude for you to assume. If you still have some relics of strength, you will not receive divine strength. If there are some remnants of the pristine idea of human merit tolerated in your heart, the robe of Christ's righteousness will not be wrapped around you! Ask the Lord to strip you of every rag of self-righteousness, to enable you to trust in Jesus alone, and to have no confidence in the flesh—either in the feelings which you experience, or in the works which you do! Your time of uplifting will follow close upon your time of falling down flat upon your face. The dawn of day succeeds the darkest hour of the night, so ask God to bring you down to that dark hour in which the night covers every hope that is born of human confidence, for then will the Lord appear to you in His brightness! So, imitate the prayer of Jacob in its humility of spirit.

The third point in which I would have you copy Jacob's model prayer is in the *arguments to be used*. The whole prayer is highly argumentative. If some of the prayers I have heard at prayer-meetings—though I must say that the fault is less in this place than in most others with which I have become acquainted—if some of the prayers at certain prayer-meetings were less doctrinal, less experimental, and more *argumentative* with God, they would be more like true prayer should be, for true prayer is just pleading with the Most High, spreading our case before Him, and then pressing our suit with all the arguments we can muster!

In this short prayer of the patriarch, no less than four arguments are used. The first is the argument from the covenant—"O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac." God had entered into covenant relationship with Abraham, and made solemn promises to him, and to his seed, so Jacob prays, "O Lord, You have pledged yourself to be the God of the seed of Abraham, whose grandson I am, and of the seed of Isaac, whose son I am—now, therefore, by Your faithfulness to Your covenant promise, help me in this dark hour of my life!" Beloved friends, this is the kind of plea that we can use with the Lord—"O God, have You not made a covenant with the Lord Jesus by which You have promised that You will save all them that trust in Him? Have You not said, 'I have given Him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people? Then, Lord, though guilty, I trust to the merits of Your dear Son, and I ask to be absolved by virtue of His great atoning sacrifice. Behold, as the earthen vessel hangs upon the nail, so hang I upon Him, and upon Him alone. Now, by the covenant of Your grace, which is ordered in all things and sure, I beseech You to manifest Your love to me." If you use such gracious pleading as that with the Lord, you will surely prevail with Him. And I urge you, also, children of God, to do the same, for the everlasting covenant is a mighty plea with God—

***"In every dark distressful hour,
When sin and Satan join their power."***

Then we pass on to the next use which Jacob makes of the promise which God had given him—"You said unto me, Return unto your country, and to your kindred, and I will deal well with you." If you and I know that we are walking in the path of duty, if we are where the Lord has bid us go, we can always claim the divine promise! The Lord is bound to protect His servants when they are in the path of

obedience to His commands. If you follow your own counsel, you must manage to take care of yourselves. But if you go where the Bible, and the clear indications of divine providence guide you, you may always reckon that the Master who sent you will protect His obedient servants, let the dangers of the way be whatever they may. If God should command you to go to the utmost verge of this green earth, to rivers unknown to song, or if He should bid you travel through distant deserts, as Mungo Park journeyed through the midst of Africa, yet He could preserve your life there, as well as here in England—and being there, sent by Him—you may rest assured that you shall hear the sound of your Master's feet behind you, or have other unmistakable evidences of His presence with you!

And, sinner, this is a good plea for you to use. You can say, "Lord, You told me to believe in Jesus Christ, Your Son, then will You not accept me, for His sake, for I have done what You told me to do? You have said, 'Call upon Me in the day of trouble.' Lord, this is a day of trouble with me, and I do call upon You, so will You not answer me?" If you argue with the Lord in such a style as this, you will find that this kind of pleading is potent with Him who is omnipotent.

Then, further, Jacob argued with God from his past history. He said that he was not worthy of the least of God's mercies, yet he had received many of them. Though he went over the river Jordan, when he left his home, a sad and solitary man with nothing but his walking staff in his hand, yet, he had come back with wives and children, and so great a number of servants, cattle, camels, goats, sheep, and asses that he had become like two bands. "Now, Lord," he said, "after all Your past mercies to me, I beseech You, do not leave me now! Have You blessed Your servant up to this moment, and can You leave him now?" I cannot tell you how often I have been comforted by the truth implied in John Newton's words—

*"Determined to save, He watched over my path
When Satan's blind slave, I sported with death!
And can He have taught me to trust in His name,
And thus far have brought me, to put me to shame?
His love in time past forbade me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink.
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review,
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through."*

So Jacob prayed, in effect, "Lord, You have often been my Helper in the past, so now deliver me, I pray You, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau." You, my unconverted friend, may ever adopt this form of pleading, for you can say, "Lord, You have saved my life many a time when I have provoked You. Let Your long-suffering, which now leads me to repentance, also move You to forgive my sin. I remember what You did on Calvary for sinners in ages long past. Did you give your well-beloved, and only-begotten Son to die for sinners, and will You not now accept every trembling sinner who seeks Your favor?" This also shall prove to be the kind of pleading that will cause the gates of God's grace to open!

The fourth argument that Jacob used was perhaps the best of all—"You said, I will surely do you good," and so on. Ah, that was the masterstroke, and in like manner, if you would succeed at the mercy-seat, you must bring down the hammer of the promise upon the head of the nail of prayer, and then clinch it, as Jacob did, by saying to the Lord, "You said," so-and-so and so-and-so. David once said to God in prayer, "Do as You have said." When a man has promised you something that you really need, you take him by the button-hole, and you say to him, "Now, you promised to give me that." And if he is an honest man, you can hold him to his own word—and shall the God of truth ever fail to perform His promise? No, that is one of the things that God cannot do—He cannot lie, and yet cannot run back from His promise, nor does He want to do so. O Christian, if you would get anything from God, find a promise of it in His Word, and then you may count the thing as good as received! When a man of means gives you his check, you count it just as good as hard cash—and God's promises are even better than checks or bank notes! We have only to take them, and plead them before Him, and we may rest assured that He will honor them!

II. Thus I have tried to place before you the points in which Jacob's prayer is worthy of both commendation and imitation. And now I want to say something concerning our LAST PLEA which seems to me to be very suggestive—"You said."

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, I need not say more to you upon this matter, for you know the value of the promises of God, and you know how to use them. But to those who are not converted, I may

perhaps speak a few words suggested by Jacob's last plea—"You said, I will surely do you good." Sinner, lay hold, as fast as you can, of the promise of God, and then plead it with Him. To this end, I would say to every unconverted one here who desires to obtain the priceless blessing of salvation—study the Word of God very diligently, and always read it with the view of finding a promise that may suit your special case. And when you read it, study it with the firm conviction that it is God's Word and that, in each promise, God is as truly speaking to you as though He had sent an angel to apply that promise personally to you! Take a text which you find to be applicable to yourself, and say, "This is what the Lord says to me as certainly as though He now spoke it in my ear."

Next, I beseech you to remember that God's Word is absolutely true. Fix that fact in your memory, and then say to yourself that the promise, being true, must be fulfilled. Next to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great object of faith is the promise of God—and if we were more familiar with His promises, we should more speedily get out of that Slough of Despond in which so many of us flounder so long! Bunyan says that "There are, by the direction of the lawgiver, certain good and substantial steps placed even through the very midst of this Slough...but these steps are hardly seen—or if they are, men, through the dizziness of their heads, step besides, and then they are stuck in the mud, notwithstanding the steps are there." Look for these steps of promise, my friend! There is, in the Bible, a promise just exactly suited to your case, so mind that you find it. Did you ever send for a locksmith to open a drawer because you had lost the key, and could not open it? He comes with a great bunch of rusty keys—very much like God's promises which you have allowed to get rusty through not using them—and first he tries one key, and then another, and another till, at last, he gets the right one—and the treasures in your drawer are spread open before you! It is just so with the treasures of God's mercy. There is one special promise in Scripture which will fit the words of the lock of your experience—and you must try promise after promise till, at last, you get the right one, and then you can say to the Lord, as Jacob did, "You said." That is the main matter—what God has said! Never mind what I say—that does not mean a thing except so far as I say what God says! Never mind what anybody else has said, but let your one concern be to know what God says!

Good Mr. William Jay, of Bath, writing upon this passage, "You said, I will surely do you good," makes four observations which I commend to both saints and sinners. The first is, *God has the ability to do you good*. Whatever good it is that you need, God can give it to you! Pardon of sin, help in trouble, comfort in distress, whatever it is that you really need, God has the ability to give it to you, and so to do you good. In the second place, *God has the inclination to do you good*. You need not speak to Him as if He were unwilling to bless you—it is according to His nature to be gracious. Love is one of His chief attributes and His lovingkindness, and tender mercies greatly abound. He as much delights to show kindness to the needy, as a generous man delights to relieve the needs of the poor. In the next place, *God is under an engagement to do you good*. "You said, Surely I will do you good." God has given a promise to seeking sinners that He will be found of them! To repentant sinners, that He will pardon them! To believing sinners, that they shall find eternal life! And then, the fourth thing is, *God has already done good to you*. This fact ought to strengthen your faith. The Lord has the ability, the inclination, and He is under engagement to do you good—and He has already begun to do it! I may say to you, my hearers, that the Lord has done you some good in bringing you here to listen to the gospel, and in making that gospel so sweet, and so generous a gospel as it is—a gospel for those who labor and are heavy laden, and who can find no rest anywhere else—a gospel for the very chief of sinners, as Paul wrote to Timothy, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." I put into your hands this plea of Jacob, "You said, I will surely do you good." Go and plead it, and the Lord do unto you according to your faith!

III. My last words which must be very few—concern THE ANSWER WHICH JACOB'S PRAYER RECEIVED.

His prayer was answered, but *it was not answered in the way he expected it would be*. When he had done praying, he found that all his plans had been knocked on the head—so you need not wonder if you find the same thing happen to you when you have done praying! Do not be astonished, my dear hearers, if, when you have gone to God in prayer, you should seem to feel worse than you did before! There is a young friend—I daresay he is here now—who told me that he came to hear me for many months—that he became outwardly reformed, and was, as he thought, going on well, till there came, one Lord's-Day

morning, a sermon [Sermon Number 732, Volume 13—THE HEART—A DEN OF EVIL—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] about the corruption of the human heart which knocked all to pieces his pretty castle in the air, upset all his hopes, and utterly destroyed his self-confidence! I am very glad it did, for his hopes and trust were all false! And, afterwards, by God's grace, he began to build upon a far firmer foundation. Sometimes, when you have been praying for salvation, God answers you by destroying all your hopes. You ask Him to save you, and you think he would do it in a way that would make you happy. But, instead of that, He plucks up all your fine plants by the roots, and turns your pretty garden into a desert because He knows that the flowers you were growing were all poisonous and must be cleared away before He can plant those which will be the plants of His right hand planting!

When God answered Jacob, He met him, not as his friend, but as his wrestling Opponent. Jacob had a fierce duel, which lasted all night long, by Jabbok's Brook. And if God really appears to you, I should not be surprised if He comes at first like an enemy, and you will have to say to Him as Job did, "You hunt me as a fierce lion." God's choicest mercies often come to us under the guise of adversities. God sends His love letters to us in black-edged envelopes, and sometimes we are afraid to open them. If we would but do so, we should soon know the lovingkindness of the Lord. Jacob was to have an answer to his prayer but, before the answer came, he had to wrestle—no, worse than that—before Jacob was fully delivered, he had to be made to limp, and all his life afterwards he went halting upon his thigh. You, poor sinner, may be made to feel your sinfulness so much that you will be driven almost to despair! And you, believer, will possibly have to fight with Satan as long as you are in this body.

Although Jacob's own plans were put on one side, and God met him as though He were his enemy, and the poor patriarch went on limping when the sun rose over Penuel, yet, *for all that, he did get his prayer answered!* His brother "Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." So, beloved, trust in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him, and your enemies shall become your friends, your doubts shall end in joy, your tribulations shall melt away into glory, and you shall prove that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

Brothers and sisters, the pith of the whole matter is this, "Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." As for you who know Him not, I pray you to trust in the sacrifice of His dear Son, Jesus Christ. As the doves hide themselves in the clefts of the rock, hide yourselves in the wounds of Jesus by trusting in His atoning sacrifice. And as for you, the saints of the Lord, return unto your rest, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you, therefore, "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him," remembering that "they who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint." May the Lord graciously give all of us His blessing and benediction, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: GENESIS 32.

Jacob had just come out of a great trouble. God's gracious interposition had delivered him out of the hands of the angry Laban—Laban the churl, who cared for Jacob only for what he could get out of him.

Verses 1, 2. *And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.* The angels of God are always around His people. It was well for Jacob to be reminded of that fact, for he was about to pass into another trouble. John Bunyan truly says—

*"A Christian man is seldom long at ease
When one trouble's gone, another does him seize."*

Certainly it was so with Jacob; for, after he had escaped from Laban, he knew that he had to meet his brother Esau, whom he had so greatly wronged so many years before. Then it was that "the angels of God met him." Go on your way in peace and safety, beloved believer, for God's hosts are all around you. You do not go unattended at any single moment of your life. Better than squadrons of horses and regiments of foot soldiers are the ministering spirits who are "sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation."

3-5. *And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall you speak unto my lord Esau; Your servant Jacob*

says thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: and I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and men servants, and women servants: and I have sent to tell my lord that I may find grace in your sight. This was a wise and proper action on the part of Jacob, for he had grossly wronged his brother, and it was right for him to make advances toward a reconciliation. He prayed to God for help, but he also used such means as he could—the means that ought always to be used when any of us realize that we have done an injury to others. We should even be willing to humiliate ourselves in order to make peace. I think that when Christians differ from one another, there should be a holy emulation between them as to which shall be the first to give way, and which will give way the more to the other. How many quarrels might soon be ended if there were this spirit of conciliation among all professing Christians! I have heard of one who had offended a brother Christian during the day. Possibly the brother Christian had offended him quite as much. But the first one saw that the sun was going down, so he turned to seek his friend, so that he might say to him, “Friend So-and-So, I was wrong in being angry today.” Half-way between their two houses, they met, and each of them said, “I was just coming to say that I was wrong.” There is no need of any arbitrator when each of the disputants is willing to say, “I was wrong.” And the trouble is soon over when that point is reached. In this case, it certainly was Jacob's duty to make some reparation to his brother, whether Esau accepted it or not.

6. *And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to your brother Esau, and also he comes to meet you, and four hundred men with him.* He would not have minded Esau coming alone to meet him, but the thought of the four hundred rough men who had gathered around this wild warrior of the desert made him wonder what they might do, and what Esau might do with their help.

7, 8. *Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels into two bands, and said, If Esau comes to the one company, and smites it, then the other company which is left shall escape.* He used the means that he judged to be the best under the existing circumstances—and I believe that God intends us always to use our best wits and judgment—and then to fall back upon Him in confiding prayer just as if we had done nothing at all! Do everything as if God were not about to help you, and then trust in God as if you had done nothing. An Arab said to Mohammed, “I let my camel run loose and trusted it to providence,” but Mohammed replied, “You should have tied it up, first, and then trusted it to providence.” And Jacob was very much of that mind, and a very sensible mind it was, not at all inconsistent with the very best of faith!

9-12. *And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which said unto me, Return unto your country, and to your kindred, and I will deal well with you: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which You have shown unto Your servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray You, 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 You said.* That is always the most powerful plea when we can quote God's own promise—“You said.”

12-19. *I will surely do you good, and make your 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, two hundred she goats, and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes and twenty ram, thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses and ten foals. And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space between drove and drove. And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meets you, and asks you, saying, Whose are you? And where go you? And whose are these before you? Then you shall say, They are your 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 drove, saying, In this manner shall you speak unto Esau, when you find him.* That was a very anxious night for Jacob. He was to have another night of still sterner work, but in doing as he did he acted wisely and rightly.

20. *And say you moreover, Behold, your servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goes before me and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept of me.* Depend upon it, our sins will come home to us sooner or later! Jacob must have bitterly regretted that he had ever wronged Esau. There was a long interval between Jacob going away, and his coming back, but his sin came home to him! And if you are a child of God, and you do wrong, it is more certain to come

home to you, in this life, than if you were one of the ungodly! As for them, they are often left to be punished in another world, but if you are a child of God, you will be chastened here for your iniquity. Remember how earnestly *David*, too, prayed about the sins of his youth and his later transgressions. And Jacob, in deep humility, must have most vividly remembered his sin against his brother.

21-24. *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 women servants, 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; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.* We know who that Divine Man was—the God who afterwards actually became man, of whom it might even then be said that “His delights were with the sons of men.”

25. *And when He saw that He prevailed not against him, He touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with Him.* For even with a dislocated hip, Jacob would not give up wrestling! He meant to hold this wondrous Man until he got a blessing from Him.

26-29. *And He said, Let Me go, for the day breaks. And Jacob said, I will not let You go, except You bless me! And He said unto him, What is your name? And he said, Jacob. And He said, Your name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince have you power with God and with men, and have prevailed. And Jacob asked Him, and said, Tell me, I pray You, Your name. And He said, why is it that you ask after My name? And he blessed him there.* He would not gratify Jacob's curiosity concerning His name, but He gave him the blessing that he craved. This was just as our Divine Master acted when His disciples inquired of Him concerning the times and seasons—He told them it was not for them to know what the Father had retained in His own power. But Christ added what was much better for them, “You shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you.” He will not tell us all we want to know, but He will give us all we need to have. What a wise and prudent Lord is ours!

30, 31. *And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.* He was lame and probably remained lame for life.

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.* Some touch of human weakness must always accompany the divinest strength that God may give us. If we are allowed the high honor of carrying the untold treasure of the gospel, we must be reminded that “we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God, and not of us.” Yet who would not be content to limp for life if he might but win such a victory as Jacob won on that memorable night by the Brook Jabbok?

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