

FAITH BLESSING THE CHILDREN

"By faith Jacob, when he was a-dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff" (Hebrews 11:21).

In a most crafty and despicable manner Jacob took unfair advantage of his hungry brother, Esau, in a moment of extremity and defrauded him of his birthright. With the assistance of his mother, Jacob deceived his father and obtained the coveted blessing. Angry Esau resolved that he would murder Jacob at the first opportunity.

To remain at home was no longer safe for Jacob. Quick counsel with his mother, who favored him above Esau, started him swiftly toward the habitation of his uncle, Laban. Jacob's heart was heavy because of his sin which made it necessary for him to leave his home and family. He was under nervous tension as he fled from the wrath of a brother whom he had wronged. Sin always comes home, and when it does misery and sorrow accompany it. Sin causes separations of one kind or another.

When the fugitive was overtaken by darkness he was in an uninhabited place, which was strewn with boulders. His scheming and lying had brought him into a condition of weariness and fear. With the stars shining down upon him, and the winds moaning about him, Jacob threw his weary body upon the earth as a bed and sought rest for his throbbing head upon a stone of the field, and had the heavens only for a canopy.

Low in spirit, and weary from his journey, Jacob soon fell asleep. During the night something unusual happened to him. When all earthly help forsook him, God visited Jacob in that lonely spot. As he dreamed he received a vision of God pushing a ladder out of the window of heaven and placing the base of it on the ground near the spot where he was lying. He also perceived angels ascending and descending this ladder. That picture, which was to him a wonderful manifestation of the grace of God, doubtless remained with Jacob the rest of his life. The vision of God above the ladder taught him that God is the Ruler of all. The ladder impressed him with the nearness of heaven to earth, as well as the fact that there was an open pathway between the two places. God had connected heaven and earth for Jacob's personal benefit.

Awaking the next morning, and realizing the significance of his vision, and knowing that he had experienced an encounter with God, Jacob was filled with fear, due to a sense of guilt. He had been unbrotherly and deceitful, but at length it had been made clear to him that all he had done on earth was known in heaven. That realization made him ashamed and afraid. Jacob's fear was truly that reverential awe which is always awakened in a person when he realizes his own sinfulness in the presense of the holy God. In deepest reverence Jacob took the stone upon which his head had rested, erected it as a memorial to his wonderful experience with God during the night, anointed it by pouring oil upon it, and then gave the place a new name. He called it "Bethel," which means "The House of God." His wonderful experience with God there made it a sacred place to Jacob. There he had become fully conscious of God's presence, power, protection, grace, and love.

Thirty or more years had elapsed during which Jacob had wandered and drifted away from God. His absence from the place of worship had a tragic influence on his life. When he became prosperous Jacob forsook his dependence on God and on His promises. Satan always tries to get God's children to depend on things rather than God. The best course for any

child of God is to dwell at Bethel, which is the place of revelation, worship, companionship with God, dependence, protection, dedication, promise and blessing.

Jacob had thought that he could do wrong and escape the consequences, but he had learned better. He came to the realization that he had wasted the best years of his life in the service of Satan. In seeing his children bring ruin upon themselves and drag the family name down to the very depths of shame, Jacob was simply reaping the fruits of his own sinful life. He learned that he could not trample God's law under his feet without coming to judgment.

As a solemn rebuke God called Jacob to return to Bethel. He challenged him to go back and start over again. What did Jacob find when he got back to Bethel? He found the old protection. During the days of his disobedience Jacob's life had been in constant peril. When one gets back to God and lives within the circle of His will, God always takes care of him.

At Bethel God had promised to Jacob and his seed all the blessings, privileges and high prerogatives of the birthright. When Jacob returned the old promise was renewed with even a greater emphasis. What God has planned for you will yet come true when you come back to Him.

During the years which followed Jacob walked by faith, but the exercise thereof caused him to have many struggles, and he had to fight hard for each victory. In spite of all his faults and failings, and each of us is just as full of the same, Jacob trusted in God and had a high esteem for His promises. It was during the closing days of his life that Jacob's faith shone most brightly. Arriving in Egypt, the aged patriarch was presented unto its mighty monarch. It is interesting to see how he conducted himself. Instead of cringing before the ruler of the greatest empire of the old world, we are told that "Jacob blessed Pharaoh" (Genesis 47:7). With becoming dignity Jacob conducted himself as a child of the King of kings (Hebrews 7:7), and carried himself as became an ambassador of the Most High.

Here in our text Jacob is presented as approaching the end of his life on earth. His eyes were dim, in his weakness he was leaning upon his staff, and he had difficulty in moving about. He was an old man, and withal a dying man.

Jacob had come to that hour in which all the past is seen in its true perspective. The writer takes what he did in that hour as demonstrating his faith, and unquestionable it is a remarkable story. In human feebleness, leaning upon the top of his staff, he worshipped. Do not overlook that fact.

I. The Story. Genesis 48:1-20.

Jacob was a man of restless and ceaseless activity, but he believed in God. In spite of his faith in God, Jacob was frequently attempting to help God by making his own clever arrangements. Faith desired an entry into the blessing of his father. Fear secured it by trickery. Before that, faith desired the birthright, which was his by divine arrangement. Fear secured it by meanness, taking advantage of a hungry brother. Faith desired the land, and fear sought to gain it by astuteness. There was a conflict between his faith and his fear; and his fear led him to do a number of foolish things. Oftentimes, we, too, try to help God. Five times God appeared to Jacob,

and in every case God came for correction, overtaking him, correcting his blunders, and setting his feet anew upon the pathway of obedience. Jacob's faith mastered him, but his fear that God might fail him made him foolish enough to try to help God.

Jacob's son Joseph had two sons, Manasseh the older and Ephraim the younger. When it was reported to Joseph that his father, Jacob, was sick, he took his two sons and went to see his aged and sick father. Now the eyes of Jacob were "dim for age, so that he could not see." When Joseph brought his two sons to his father, Jacob "brought them near unto him; and he kissed them, and embraced them." As Joseph brought them forward to present them to his father for blessing, he took Ephraim the younger in his right hand toward Jacob's left hand, and Manasseh the older in his left hand toward Jacob's right hand. The old man crossed his hands so that the right rested upon Ephraim, and the left upon Manasseh, and when Joseph protested the old man said, "I know what I am doing." Of course, he did not say it in those words, but that is the effect of what he said, and undoubtedly he did know. Even though he was the younger, Ephraim received the primary blessing over Manasseh the older.

II. The Significance.

Jacob's experience was one of faith.

1. By faith Jacob blessed his grandsons.

"And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn" (Genesis 48:14). Once more the younger, by the appointment of God was preferred before the elder, for the Lord distributes His favors as he pleases, saying, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" (Matthew 20:15). Unto the high sovereignty of God Jacob here submissively bowed.

"By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph." Their blessing was not collective, but a distinctive and discriminating one. He blessed each of his grandsons. The blessing which Jacob gave to each of Joseph's sons was not determined by sight or sentiment. The basis of sight was unreal. Joseph wanted Manasseh to have the best blessing for he was his firstborn. But his sentiment was wrong. It was based on natural birth and natural order and natural love. The basis of sight was unreal on Jacob's part for his eyes "were dim for age, so that he could not see." It was unreal on Joseph's part for though he could see naturally he could not see rightly.

The blessing Jacob gave his grandchildren was determined by faith. Jacob crossed his hands and guided them "wittingly" -- not by natural sight, but by faith. He let God, Who could see his hands, guide them when he could not see. The guiding of his hands and the direction of his blessing were both of the Lord.

2. By faith Jacob worshipped God.

"By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff." His faith looked to the Lord Who had blessed him, and to Whom

he was going soon. By faith he saw Him on Whom he believed and by faith he leaned upon his staff and bowed his head before Him Whom he worshipped.

III. The Sequel.

1. Jacob displeased man.

"And when Joseph saw that his father had his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him." Joseph wanted Manasseh, his firstborn, to have the best blessing, but faith does not play any favorites. How often sentiment has cursed children! How often favoritism has shut out blessing! Faith still displeases men. Hence come opposition and persecution to believers and to churches, to hearts and to homes.

2. Jacob triumphed over sight and sentiment.

The scheme of sight and the strategy of sentiment would hold up Jacob's hand and remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head and protest against the transfer of blessing. Sight and sentiment would cry out "Not so, my father; for this is my firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head." But faith is firm and refuses to yield to sight and sentiment. It has its "I know it" for man's foolish will.

3. Jacob promoted the providential purpose.

Jacob's blessing of faith made God's purpose primary and supreme and sight's blessing secondary. Joseph loved Manasseh best, but the purposes of God were interwoven with the blessing of Ephraim first.

4. Jacob's blessing the children blessed the world.

Jacob's blessing faith carried forward the promises of God. The world is richer because of Jacob's faith and his blessing of faith.

Jacob's feat of faith brings a needed message to this present faithless world. It tells us where faith functions and what it does. True faith does not stop short of Christ. Jacob's blessing of faith looked to "the Angel which redeemed me from all evil" to "bless the lads." True faith triumphs over human weakness and wrong and brings blessing. It corrects the wrong of sight and the weakness of sentiment. True faith accords with divine design and overcomes the world.

If this is faith -- in functioning and feat -- how much faith have you? God gives us the faith that functions as Jacob's faith did -- the faith that is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen -- the faith that overcomes the world. If you will exercise faith, God will honor it.