

JACOB AT BETHEL

Genesis 28:10-22

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.

"Oh what a tangled web we weave
When first we practice to deceive."

So, 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, in the northeast country. Ostensibly his journey was to find a wife, but in reality it was simply a flight from an enraged brother.

I. The Condition Of Jacob. Genesis 28:10-11.

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. Jacob realized that his deception had not been profitable to him. He had received the blessing, but he had to reap the misery that followed his deceit and injustice. Nothing is more certain than the fact that sowing determines reaping. 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.

II. The Compassion Upon Jacob. Genesis 28:12.

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. The ladder was a symbol of reconciliation and access to God and communication with Him. The messengers of mercy were ascending the ladder as if they were reporting Jacob's condition to God and requesting Him to supply his needs. They were descending the ladder as if they were bringing back from God the supply which he needed. Through this vision Jacob was reminded and convinced that God was caring for him, and that He would supply all of his needs.

III. The Covenant With Jacob. Genesis 28:13-15.

In his remarkable vision Jacob saw the Lord standing at the top of the ladder, and he listened to His gracious words of assurance to him. He realized that the Lord had not forgotten him, but that He was still caring for him. The Lord promised Jacob that he and his seed would possess the land: "The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed"; that his seed would be multiplied greatly: "And thy seed

shall be as the dust of the earth"; and that all the world would be blessed wonderfully through his seed: "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Jacob also heard God say, "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." These promises must have been exceedingly precious to Jacob. They were precious because they came from God and because they were meant to be helpful to Jacob and to all of God's children who might read or hear them. Let us note some of the things of importance which God promised in this verse!

1. His Presence.

Jacob was the inheritor of a great blessing from his fathers, for this sentence was spoken in connection with the following words, "I am the Lord God of Abraham, thy father, and the God of Isaac." It is an inexpressible privilege to be able to look back to father and grand-father, and perhaps farther still, and to say, "We come of a house which has served the Lord as far back as history can inform us." Descended from Christian parents, we have a greater honor than in being descended from princes. There is no heraldry like that of the children of God. Do not be satisfied unless you yourself obtain such mercy as God gave to your ancestors and hear the Lord saying, "I am with thee." This mercy was brought home to Jacob at a time when he greatly needed it. He had just left his father's house and felt so lonely and alone. He was coming into special trial and then it was that he received a fuller understanding of the privilege which God had in store for him.

God promised Jacob that He would be with him then and there and continuously thereafter; in every act, in every movement and in every step of the way before him. Jacob was well supported when he had the Lord present with him. At the time when he was about to leave Laban, Jacob said, "The God of my father hath been with me." Seemingly he was saying of his God, "The God of my father is the One Who gave me my wife and my children; it was He Who prospered me when others tried to rob me; the God of my father hath been with me notwithstanding all my shortcomings." I trust that you can bear the same witness. Even though you have not been all that you could wish in your Christian life, yet you can say, "The God of my father has been with me." When God is with any person, there is no need of fear or failure.

Meditate on those words, "I am with thee." They are too full for complete explanation. I defy anybody to measure their height, depth, length and breadth. That God should give to Jacob bread to eat and raiment to put on was much, but it was nothing to compare with his statement, "I am with thee." That God should send His angel with Jacob to protect him would have been much, but that was nothing compared with His statement, "I am with thee." This includes countless blessings, in fact, much more than we can conceive.

When God is with a man, he is guaranteed an infinite love. God does not forsake his people. He will go before His own. He will stand by His own. He will be behind His own. It is wonderful to have the consciousness of His presence. He will be true to every promise He has made to His servants. The living God is close to us. His hand touches our lives at every point. His statement, "I am with thee," means practical help. That is, whatever we undertake, God is with us in the undertaking; whatever we endure, God is with us in enduring. We can trust Him. We can depend upon His promises. We can stand on the promises of God. He will keep His promises to us.

"If God be for us, who can be against us?" We not only have His presence, but His sympathy also. He means, I am feeling with thee and suffering with thee. If there be

a load, I will bear it with thee; if there be work to do, I will work with thee. "I am with thee." Oh, the richness of this special blessing!

How precious this promise must have seemed to Jacob in that particular place, where he lay with the hedges for his curtains, the heavens for his canopy, the earth for his bed, stones for his pillow and God for his companion!

2. His Power.

"And will keep thee." Thus we have not only present blessings, but we also have the promise of His power and future blessings. There are two very observable facts which may be gathered from the study of the Bible and of our own hearts. One fact is that we are prone to distrust the promises of God, although we know Him to be unchangeable. The second fact is that God repeats His promises in order to inspire our confidence.

God is bound to perform whatever He has promised. The power of the Lord will save from sin, direct from every danger, protect in every peril, guide to His glory, seek for success, and lead to the top of the ladder in every attainment for His cause. His power is with us. He promises all the power that we will need to accomplish His purposes in life. His gracious power is sufficient to meet every demand and to satisfy every need that we will have on every occasion as we seek to serve in His kingdom. We can certainly depend on the power of the Lord.

3. His Protection.

"In all the places whither thou goest." We are going; no doubt about that; and going fast! But whither? Here uphill; there downhill; yonder on level lowland. Now in midnight gloom, and then in glory. Often among friends; occasionally among foes. Sometimes on solid rock; sometimes in slippery places.

Who then is with us? The God of our fathers is our God. He is ever with us as He was with them -- our companion in fellowship, our comrade in facing realities and our comforter in the valley of the shadow. In particular, He keeps us so that we are safe from all harm and secure in every storm. We are "kept by the power of God."

God has a plan for every life, and His purposes embrace every part of that plan. He desires to work out this plan in every life as He worked it out in the life of Jacob. He will do even more for the life in this day than He did for Jacob, because His revelation to man is fuller now, and His grace is abundant and sufficient through Christ and the Holy Spirit. "God is love," and love means care. This care is promised to all who will trust and obey Him.

It is wonderful to have the presence of the Lord, and even more wonderful to be assured of His protection. God is gracious to go before His own to prepare the way; to be at their side to keep away any harm and danger; to be behind His own to prevent any harm from overtaking them; to be above His own to keep calamity from falling on them; to be beneath His own to uphold in all hours of need. How all need the protection of the Lord from disease, dangers, destruction and death! He will protect His own.

Walking in the presence of God, using the power of God, trusting God for His protection and providential care, and being assured that He will work out His plan in our lives, we can well afford to trust the Lord and depend on every promise He has made.

IV. The Conduct Of Jacob. Genesis 28:16-22.

Awaking the next morning, and realizing the significance of his vision, and knowing that he had experienced an encounter with God, Jacob immediately acknowledged the presence

of the Lord, saying, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." Having thought that he was alone, Jacob was astonished that the Lord had been there. He learned from this experience that God is not restricted to any one place. The realization of the presence of God was a soul-stirring experience for which he was not fully prepared. Filled with fear, Jacob exclaimed, "How dreadful is this place!" Why was he afraid? His fear was 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 presence 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. Likewise, there are places which are precious to us because God dealt with us in such remarkable ways that our lives have never been the same.

At Bethel Jacob worshipped God, dedicated his life to Him, made solemn vows to walk with God and to serve Him faithfully as long as he lived, and with an appropriate spirit of genuine gratitude acknowledged God's claims on his life and pledged one tenth of his income to God for use in His service.