

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

Genesis 28:10-22; 35:1-3.

Perhaps God has allowed us to look a little more closely at the lives of some of the Old Testament saints because He knew that there would be so many others in the world like them. This is especially true of Jacob, and surely God would have us to understand that if He could forgive the sins of Jacob and do for him all that eventually He did do, that some of us should not despair because we have failed, and are somewhat disappointed in our Christian experience, and may perhaps be sitting here now with the fragments of shattered ideals strewn about our feet. If there are those of us here who have been unfaithful and have gotten away from God, I want us to see the way in which God deals with his erring children.

Jacob has been called the worst and the best man of the Old Testament. That interests us, for we all know a worst within us, and we all hope that there is a better and a best. He is one of the least difficult characters to understand--partly because we know so much about him, his youth, manhood, old age, and even his dreams, and partly because he is a man of like passions with us. In Jacob, the good and the bad follow each other in close succession.

Jacob was a man of striking contrasts and startling extremes. He took an unfair advantage of his hungry brother, Esau, in a moment of extremity and defrauded him of his birthright. With the aid of his mother, Jacob deceived his father and obtained the coveted blessing. Nothing could have been more crafty and despicable than the way in which Jacob took advantage of the fierce hunger of his brother, bargaining with him to let him eat of the pottage if Esau would give him the birthright. His angry brother determined that he would murder Jacob at the first opportunity. So, to remain at home was no longer safe for him. Quick counsel with his mother started him upon swift feet toward the habitation of his uncle, Laban, in the Northeast country. His journey was ostensibly 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.

As Jacob left home, fleeing from the wrath of a brother whom he had wronged, his heart was heavy because of his sin which made it necessary for him to leave his family and home. The first day's flight was nerve-wracking. 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 to a place of weariness and fear. Fearing the results of the past and dreading the future, he threw himself upon the ground and placed his head upon a stone. His mother's hand was not laid upon his aching brow, and no friendly voice came to him in the dark. Lonely and afraid, he realized that his deception had not been profitable to him. Although he had been the recipient of the blessing, he had to reap the misery that followed his deceit and injustice. Nothing is any more certain than the fact that sowing determines reaping. Sin always comes home, and when it does misery and sorrow accompany it. Sin always causes separations of one kind or another.

### 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 Jacob God visited the lonely spot. From this incident he learned that a stone pillow with God near is far better than a downy one with God far away. As he dreamed Jacob 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 the angels ascending and descending this ladder. That picture doubtless remained with him the rest of his life. To him it was a wonderful manifestation of the grace of God. The vision of God above the ladder taught Jacob that He is the Ruler of all. The ladder revealed to Jacob the nearness of heaven, as well as the open pathway between God and man. God had connected heaven and earth for Jacob's present benefit.

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

In his remarkable vision Jacob saw the Lord standing at the head of the ladder and he heard him speaking gracious words of assurance to him, "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac." But God had not forgotten Jacob. He still loved him and cared for him. He promised him that he and his seed would possess the land-- "the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed." He promised him that his seed would be numbered greatly--"And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south." He promised him that all the world would be blessed wonderfully through his seed--"And in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

God assured Jacob of His presence--"I am with thee;" His protection--"I will keep thee;" His providence--"I will bring thee again into this land;" and His promise--"I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

### IV. Awaking out of sleep the next morning, and realizing the significance of his vision, Jacob immediately accepted the presence of the Lord, saying, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." He was astonished that the Lord had been there. He had thought that he was alone. Filled with fear, he exclaimed, "How dreadful is this place!" Why was he afraid? It was because of a sense of guilt. He had been deceitful and unbrotherly, and it had at last 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 the reverential awe which is always awakened when one realizes his own sinfulness in the presence of the holiness of God. This recognition of the presence of God on the part of Jacob caused him to turn to God in worship. Filled with reverence, Jacob took the stone pillow upon which his head had rested, erected it as a memorial to his wonderful experience with God during the night, sanctified it by pouring oil upon it, and then gave the place a new name. He changed the name of the place from Luz to Bethel which means "The House of God," or the place in which God had met him in tender mercy and loving kindness. His wonderful experience with God had made it a sacred place to Him. It was there that he had become fully conscious of God's presence, protection, love and grace. There and then he worshipped and dedicated his life to God, and made his solemn vows to walk with God and to serve him as long as he lived.

Instead of accepting the promise of God at its face value, and completely relying upon God to make good His Word, Jacob proposed to bargain with Him. God had spoken to him, saying, "I am with thee," but Jacob said, "If God will be with me," implying that if God would keep His word, he would comply with God's wishes. He agreed that in return for God's keeping His Word to him, he would return one-tenth of whatever the Lord gave him.

At Bethel Jacob worshipped God, dedicated his life to Him, made solemn vows to walk with Him and to serve Him faithfully as long as He lived, and pledged a definite part of his income to God.

Jacob proceeded on to the house of Laban, where he became involved in the game of money-making. He returned to his old life of dishonesty and scrambling for the things of the world, and in his unfaithfulness he allowed his household to sink into idolatry. When he was in his deepest distress because of the idolatry of his family and wickedness of his children, God spoke to him, saying, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there." That was good advice to Jacob and he was glad to go.

God's command, "Arise, go up to Bethel," was: --

1. A sad reminder.

"God's call, "Arise, go up to Bethel," brought back to Jacob a flood of memories. Those memories stirred his heart. He realized that he had made a terrible blunder. He thought of the immeasurable contrast between what he was and what he might have been had he remained faithful. This command was God's reminder to Jacob to get up out of his failure and sin, and to go back and start over again.

2. A solemn rebuke.

Jacob's life was under the shadow of a great grief and anxiety, and there was a veiled rebuke for failing to keep his vows. God had promised him rich rewards if only he would be faithful to Him. And Jacob had promised, but he did not do what he promised that he would do. Instead, he went his way, and forgot his vows. And God knew that Jacob had brought his sorrows upon himself.

When Jacob got back to Bethel he felt the old protection, the old pillar, the old princeliness, the old promise, and the old prayer-life. The Bethel life is the life of peace, purity, and power. It is the place where the victorious life is lived.

"Back to God, back to God,  
Tho' tempted and tossed and hurled;  
Back to the Book that tells of Christ  
The only hope of the world."