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Substance of Sermon preached by our Pastor
on Thursday Evening, October 9, 1975. Mr. J. W. Sparking-Tyler
at The Dickler

Lesson. John 16.

And Jacob was left alone. Genesis 32. 24.

Two thoughts immediately arise in my spirit. One is, let us bless God that this word has been written with His finger in His precious Book, because undoubtedly, in varying degrees, - not all to the same depth; but all who fear God are brought to this spiritual experience. I suppose one might term it a physical and mental experience too. It is obviously a compound: he was left alone spiritually, physically, mentally; his whole person.

So I will say as I begin, it is not so much in the very early days of the Lord's dear people, though God is a sovereign in this because we have the account of Joseph at seventeen: though he had the devotion and affection of his beloved father, in so far as his own family were concerned he walked, after he had recited the revelations of God to him twice over in dreams, a completely isolated pathway. Not only was he in a solitary path so that no one could enter into the exercise that was deeply rooted in his spirit, but he also walked a solitary path in this sense: wherever he was, whatever he said he was a target for Satan, so in a certain sense they did not leave him alone, yet he was acutely alone. They discharged their arrows. We referred to the experience as generally known by older Christians getting close to the Kingdom, and those who have received deliverance. What a paradox it is when one has received the pardon of sin, - and though I know it is not absolutely right, I have often wished I had gone when my sins were forgiven and the broad, bright sunshine of heaven irradiated my soul. The mystery is, you do not come into deeper paths before you are delivered. You prove the language to be correct;

"When his pardon is signed and his peace is procured,

From that moment his conflict begins." (309)

You would never think it for those who have been in the antechamber of the Banqueting House and had a taste of heaven on earth, when all is peace, joy and love; no doubts, no servile or craven fear, no temptation, no distress, no fiery arrows. You would never think unless you had the Book of God and the experience and testimony of the Lord Himself and of all His saints, that when they left the Banqueting House as to the enjoyment of it after the soul has been indulged and supremely happy, that he should go

out to a great fight of afflictions more or less to the end of his days. "From that moment his conflict begins." That is why I said it is generally the older Christian comes into a path such as we have here before us in the life of Jacob. It may well be that some come much into it in their teens,- a highly concentrated experience of loneliness, arrows, and archers: Joseph did. There is a bright outlook and expectation in the Bible. Joseph had thirteen years to wait, and then he was exalted to an important position in the kingdom. As you make comparisons you realise something of the principle worked out in your life. I bless God therefore that He has written this with His finger in the inspired volume. It is a remarkable consideration and characteristic of the eternal truth of God that whatever people come into it is in this blessed Book. Sometimes I have felt to be in an impasse; a dark trying path, and I have taken up the Book of God and said, the answer must be in this Book; the complete answer. When the Lord gives it to you you are delivered. He will find you by His own Word, and your case if you fear Him, is in His Book: you will never come where it is not. Have you taken up the Holy Bible in the past few days, and said; "Lord, find it for me. Speak: let me hear and see my case and need in Thy Book."? That is why I bless God that this is written in His Book. "And Jacob was left alone." There will be times,- not only occasionally, just for an hour or for five days,- it may be much your path for year after year to be alone. That is why we shall sing in the last Hymn;

"Companions if we find,
 Alas! How soon they're gone!
 For tis decreed that most must pass
 The darkest paths alone." (308)

Before I go on, are you in a position to bless God that this word is in His Book? If the word were not in, whatever would you do? "And Jacob was left alone." The second point is, we have read in the Lesson the words of our blessed Redeemer Himself. It sounds very strange to you to hear what the Lord said to His disciples before His Passion; "Behold, the hour cometh yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered." It is a strange word, - 'scattered'. What happens if a community or a family is scattered all over the place, as seed is? "Ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone." Do you see? It is the same word. "And Jacob was left alone." and Christ said; "and shall leave me alone," What! the loving, faithful disciples who were pledged in covenant to be so devoted and faithful to their Lord that they would never go away from Him, but would go to prison and to death? Scattered: that is human nature. "and shall leave me alone." Did you hear? Your spiritual experience must be fellowship with Christ: you will never get anything else. Look how He continues; "and yet

I am not alone, because the Father is with me." Do you see the glory and beauty?

The subject falls open on this point. It is obviously the purpose and decree of God that His own children tread a path where they are left alone. When they are left alone they come more abundantly into the same experience: "and yet I am not alone." Why? "because the Father is with me, my Lord, Friend, and Saviour." You have got to walk it to know it. To have it theoretically is not good, but you will tread it. Most people of God think at times that they have many friends. The day comes when you find you have few, and even true friends leave you; not permanently, but through various causes. Let me reiterate before I go further: the pulpit is probably the loneliest place on earth. No one knows unless they enter a pulpit with a divine commission. There are no props: there is only One who can come there,- the Lord Himself. It is a heavenly place if we can say; "and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." The Lord said; "The hour...is now come, that ye shall be scattered." Why were they? They were all cowards: they ran away. That is the flesh. It is a very beautiful, sad summary in the Hymn;

"Soon as the Chief to battle led,
That moment every soldier fled." (153)

My friends, this includes all of us: we are not any better. Bless God! they were not permanently scattered. We find a little ^{group} near the cross, and at the sepulchre, and the Lord appearing to them as He rose from the tomb. And there was the gathering at Jerusalem in the evening, "being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst." How wonderful that He could say to those poor, timorous men; "Peace be unto you." And He breathed on them and said; "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." There are times when His people are scattered, but it is not permanent.

There is one other consideration. We have also seen from two evangelists how the prophecy of Christ's was fulfilled. Matthew and Mark tell us when Christ was apprehended and He presented His body 'a living sacrifice'; "Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled." They all ran away. I do not know where people get to if they think they can hold on to a scrap of self-righteousness when they realise what they are and how the disciples behaved to Christ. This is in your nature, and can you cling to self-righteousness? If you are saved it is by grace alone. He was not alone, because the Father was with Him. The dear Lord, oh poor, suffering Redeemer dear heavenly Friend! He went further and deeper. He came to the place where He cried to His Father; "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" If you want a comment on this it is fathomless: it is beyond me. It was

because He was made the Sin-Bearer: all the sins of the Church were laid on Him, and "He poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." In the crucial hour He cried out; "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" There was soon a cry of triumph; "It is finished."

"And Jacob was left alone." I hope what I have said has been a foundation work: there is no other. I have suggested to you that loneliness was an episode, a spiritual experience, and it covered the whole constitution of the man; body, soul, spirit. He was left alone in body, soul, spirit. What does it sound like? We shall be there when we die, and I have felt it to be a great favour to walk this path in life so it will not be so strange to me when I die. If you know what it is to walk this in life it will not seem so strange when you come to die.

The second thing to say is, it was Jacob's own choice to be alone. I believe it was his own choice under the influence of the Spirit. Without doubt there was the guiding power and influence of the Holy Ghost in his soul, and it guided him in the path of wisdom to seek to be left alone. He had put over the brook his wives and families and so on, and he was left alone. It was his own choice by the Holy Ghost. So I appeal to you: in your emergencies have you not the same influence on your spirit when you feel it is desirable that you should be alone with God? The matter is so solemn and important, and in a certain sense with you, victory is hanging in doubtful scale: it is either finding God and prevailing with Him, or you must sink. So it was desirable because of the solemnity and importance that he should be alone with God. I appeal to those who are wise, and deeply taught and led; is there not the same weight and influence on your spirit to be alone with God? This is clearly no word reflecting on the union and communion of the Lord's people together, or between you who are close, - husband and wife or bosom friends, but there are times when you feel you must be alone with God. This does not detract from love, union and affection, but you must be alone with your God. What did Jesus do? In the gospels we read, although He dearly loved His disciples and could pray with them, He chose the midnight air of the mountain top and the desert place. He withdrew Himself to be alone with His Father. We may see here too, the harmony of the whole work of the Spirit. He was leading Jacob in the same blessed way that his Saviour would tread, and He will lead you if you are His, in the same way as your Master trod. "And Jacob was left alone." This is very needful. Some people do not realise that is absolutely necessary for ministers to be left alone. We need privacy, and deep concentration and contemplation. Some through lack of wisdom will talk till the last moment before he goes into the pulpit. If you are going to die you will feel the same, - to be alone with God. How needful it is to be left alone so all the powers of your soul are activated by the Holy Spirit and employed to the maximum in seeking and

finding and prevailing with God. Do not misunderstand me, but if there is no getting away from creatures they tend to distract the mind: you cannot concentrate to the maximum. Am I speaking the truth? There are sad aspects and blissful aspects too. Take a minister in the vestry, with no Text; he cannot find God, or he cannot see into the Text. In the vestry there is such need to find God. You who sit in the pews, are you like that?

So there are two aspects of being left alone. It will be a matter of choice sometimes, to agonise before God, and pour out your heart before the Lord, and to obtain something from Him. I know in a special way what it is to go and sit before the Lord and to find Him and receive a blessing. There are reasons why the people of God are left alone, because the Lord has purposed it, and because they should know more of Him, His faithfulness glory, beauty, fidelity; that He will never leave you nor forsake you, and so you should not lean on earthly props. Perhaps you have been in great need, and you thought if you could tap various sources on earth you might obtain relief and help. You proposed your dilemma, and it is like a brick wall; no interest; no help, and you are ashamed and you resolve not to seek help from man: not to go to your brother's house. Abide at the Throne of Grace.

And there is another reason. Even if people have good intentions and are gracious, they have never gone into the depths you are in, so they cannot come near you. There is this I have walked in life. There are seasons when Satan is so active, and you find yourself isolated, and it comes close. You are in the family and you are isolated, and even your own flesh and blood completely misunderstand your case, and you are alone. This is wonderful: I have stood, walked, slept in the city of London and been terribly isolated but I had my God; and the same in Sussex. Look at the wonder of it! The Lord taught Jacob to seek to be alone, and Christ came and wrestled with him. In wrestling each seeks to trip and down the other. The Lord wrestled with him, and he must have the blessing. So the bright beauty and glory of the subject is; "And Jacob was left alone." Do you say this is dismal? It is not. You have got the end of the Lord before you. His purpose is, "and he blessed him there." This is where He will bless you. Amen.