

La D 389 Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at Ebenezer, Clapham on  
Wednesday evening August 7th 1935

Text: "And He blessed him there". Genesis 32 v.29

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This remarkable chapter of Scripture is a very familiar one with us, it brings before our minds, the case of a man who was perhaps in deeper trouble than any of us have ever been in, and in circumstances peculiar, unique, and which have never, exactly, been experienced by any other person. In the words I have read as a text, there seem to be three things implied. First, as it has relation to Jacob, his trouble, then his resulting prayer, and thirdly, the victory of his faith. By the Lord's help I will endeavour to examine each of these points this evening.

This chapter opens with the return of Jacob to his own native country. He had for some number of years been in the employ of his uncle, Laban, and not having received the treatment there that was due to him, he resolved, encouraged by God's gracious direction, to return to his own land. The previous history of Jacob delineated in the Scriptures is one of deep interest in regard to the circumstances that attended his leaving his parents; his deceit, his barefaced lie to his father, his duplicity and double dealing; his hasty flight, in view of the anger and threats of his brother to take his life; and his vision and the remarkable appearance, of God to him at Bethel; the promise given to him there; his subsequent journey; and all that befel him; his sojourn with Laban, the taking to wife the two daughters of Laban, and now his return. God had dealt very graciously with him in providence, although we have to recall the fact that he had to reap what he had sown. He had deceived his aged and blind father, and he was deceived. As we sow we reap, and though God in His great mercy pardons the sins of His people, and there never is, or will be, a curse, a penal curse, meted out to them, yet He corrects them for their sins. He chastens them, and by these dealings brings them into a closer and deeper knowledge of Himself, and instructs them, and disciplines them, and establishes them, in His Word and truth.

So Jacob returns; his mind goes forward, he thinks of Esau, he reflects upon his past actions and he wonders what his reception may be. Therefore, under his anxiety of mind, he proceeds to make preparations, whereby, if his brother should still retain the awful anger that he previously manifested to him, he might appease his wrath. In the first place he sends messengers to Esau, and proposes a gift, and endeavours to do all that is in his power to appease his anger and to pacify him. The messengers go with their message, they return with an alarming report.

Esau, say they to Jacob, is himself coming to meet thee, and four hundred men with him. Poor Jacob! A guilty conscience, an army of men, and glittering swords, his own position comparatively helpless and defenceless. His wives, his children, his possessions, all in a moment seemed to be at stake. He was plunged immediately into the deepest distress. What can he do? Turn back? Take his flight? Try and get away from Esau? Go back by the way he came? No! Mercifully for Jacob he knew God, and consequently knew where to go in his trouble. He prays. Now, in the face of imminent trouble, he reminds God of what He had said to Him. "Thou didst say, (this was not presumption) Thou didst say, I will surely do thee good, and bring thee again to thy land, and will bless thee." What about it now? Here comes, so to speak, a sharp death upon that promise, a sharp trial upon such a word given, which had undoubtedly been a solace to his mind for many years, yet now he is faced with inevitable destruction.

Jacob now evidences a true spirit of humility before God. "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies Thou hast shown unto thy servant, and yet Thou hast blessed me, Thou didst give me a promise: and he reminds Him of that promise. A very fitting thing to do, when a child of God is in trouble, not because the Lord has forgotten His promise. He never forgets. Yet at the same time says to His Church, "Put Me in remembrance." This is an act of faith. "Thou didst say I will surely do thee good." I wonder if any of us have been in a strait like that. We have had a promise which has lived in our hearts: at times it may have been a help, at times it may have caused pain. Then comes a circumstance, and the promise seems as though it must just be blotted out and swept away, all hope of a fulfilment of it doomed. But Jacob never lost his hold on God. "Thou didst say, I will do thee good", and, moreover, "I will surely do thee good". He is not careless or indifferent with regard to his family and cattle. He takes proper precautions and measures for the safety of at least a part of them. Therefore he divides them into sections. One part, says he, may go forward, and if Esau smite the advance party, possibly the other, perceiving the danger, may escape.

Then we find Jacob alone with God. He has to leave his possessions, his wives, and all that naturally he held dear. They passed over the brook Jabbok, and Jacob is left alone. What is he doing now? Just weighing things over, and considering what else he can do? No! Having parted, so to speak with the treasures of this life, he falls to wrestling prayer with God. Jacob was left alone. A very striking sentence that. There was no created creature with him to comfort him. He was just alone, and yet not alone. This brings us to the second point -- his prayer-- his

wrestling. It was not just an easy form of prayer with Jacob. No! There wrestled with him a Man until the breaking of the day. I would like to observe one or two points. First, a Man wrestled with Jacob. Who was that Man? An Angel? Yes! An Angel. A created Angel? No! I believe not, though some assume it may have been; but I believe we have every reason to conclude that it was the Angel of the Covenant, yea, no less a Person than the Son of God himself. For Jacob later asserts that he had seen God face to face and his life was preserved. There wrestled a Man with him: the Son of God in human form, not in human nature. He never assumed human nature until He became incarnate, and was born of the Virgin Mary, but he did on a number of occasions, assume bodily form, and appear to men upon earth, and speak to them. He did to Abraham upon the Plains of Mamre. He did to Manoah and his wife. He appeared before Nebuchadnezzar with the three Hebrews in the furnace, and Nebuchadnezzar knew it. He saw a fourth and "the fourth is like unto the Son of God," He appeared to Mary: He appeared to Jacob here. He could have crushed him in a moment if He would, yet what allowance, what grace; He permitted Himself to be prevailed upon by Jacob, Yes! he wrestled with Him until the breaking of the day. Very possibly there was a corporal, a physical wrestling; but undoubtedly there was a spiritual wrestling, although it would seem that literally, Jacob took hold of the Man and the Man of Jacob, and face to face they wrestled, and, as it were, strove for the mastery. Yet Jacob prevailed. God allowed Himself, if I might express it so, to be overcome by a man. He could, of course, defeat Jacob, but He Himself condescended for the manifestation and evidence of the power of Jacob's faith, to be held by him. "Let Me go", He said, "for the day breaketh," Let Me go, but Jacob said, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." He held fast: He held fast, so to speak, to omnipotence there, wrestled with Him and prevailed. Yet to show him that He had power, He touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, and Jacob became a lame man. How true that word is, The lame taketh the prey. God will make us feel our own weakness, even if he allows us to gain a victory, and there will be to us this teaching in it, that the only way by which we gain a victory, is by the gracious permission and allowance of Christ, who permits Himself, as it were to be overcome. Yes! "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

The next point is this, Jacob wrestled in the night. It was in the night season when that bitter conflict took place between Jacob and the Man there wrestling with him, and it continued until the breaking of the day, and so did Jacob's struggle. The blessing did not come to Jacob until the sun began to rise. How true that is in the experience of some of the

Lord's people. The deliverance comes when Christ rises in the display of His mighty love and grace, and turns their captivity and defeats their enemies. He wrestled in the night. Have any of you had a like experience? A night of trouble, a night of affliction, a night of darkness, a night of bitter soul conflict, a night of fierce temptation by the devil, a night when the face of God has been hidden from you, the reality of religion tried by the suggestions of unbelief, the disposition to cast it all aside? The whole of the night there wrestled with him a Man until the day began to dawn. What a night it is, and yet for the most part it has to be the night of trouble. It is the night often of bitter soul trouble, when the poor creature wrestles by faith with God for deliverance and he claims that deliverance too, when the day breaketh. Jacob wrestles in the night. Have you had a night? A night, perhaps, in the form of some painful circumstance, some bodily affliction, some peculiar trial, some oppression, something which has brought a cloud over your heart, and over your spirit? You say, I have had many a night of trouble. Have you ever wrestled with God in it? Have you ever found and proved the power of prayer in a night of trial? It may be that some have to answer like this:- I have been in trouble and unable to pray in it. Well, you are not the only one that has been in such a case. It is a sore case, but I venture to say this, that you have had to pray before you came out of that trouble. The deliverance is not given without the squeezing out of your heart of many a sigh and many a groan. Possibly, too, you have been praying all the time, when you have been confessing your inability to do it. Jacob wrestled with God until the day began to break. What a scene! Man and God, as it were, wrestling together: and yet there is something very beautiful. Jacob had some real business to do with God that night. I should feel disposed to aver that while Jacob was wrestling in a physical way, his very soul was alive in confession of his own sins, for he had some great ones. His whole soul was alive in supplication. We read in the 12th of Hosea that "he made supplication", and so he strove and struggled until the Lord said to him, "Let Me go." Then things must have appeared darker than ever. It must have come over Jacob's mind like this- If He goes before I obtain the blessing I am doomed. He was in despair and so he strove -- he was allowed to do it -- he must have a blessing. It was not an indifferent matter with him, it was life or death: and so he pressed his case. The Angel said, What is thy name? Jacob, a supplanter. But He said to him, Thy name shall no more be Jacob, but Israel. Here comes the blessing, at least one part of it, "For as a prince hast thou wrestled with God and hast prevailed." "And He blessed him there",

in the same place where he has possibly spent some bitter hours in conflict both in soul and body. "And He blessed him there". He got what he wanted. God did not say, After a time I will bless you, but in the very spot, in the depth of his trouble, in the time of his extremity, He said, I will bless thee.

"He blessed him there". What an amazing mercy it is for a guilty creature --- and Jacob was one --- to receive a blessing from God. If he had what he deserved he would have had a severe, a bitter reproof for what he had done, but how wonderful his faith is here. He held fast and would not let Him go. It is not often that a poor sinner can use such language as that, but if the trial is sharp enough, if the sword pierces deep enough, and faith at the same time is powerful, we can say it. It is possible to come to such a pitch as this, Lord unless I receive a blessing now I must die.

"Lord, I cannot let Thee go,  
Till a blessing Thou bestow."

It is well worthy of notice then, what I might term his holy importunity; he persisted. "Let Me go for the day breaketh." I cannot let Thee go. He still holds his guest. His thigh is touched to show him his weakness, yet I believe that whatever he may have suffered physically, from his thigh being put out of joint, he still retained his hold, until he got the blessing he wanted. "And He blessed him there." This is perhaps, a very brief relation of the case of this man of God, and the great point of instruction in it is this, the remarkable triumph of faith in the deepest extremity. "He blessed him there."

Now for a few minutes I would like to bring some application of this to our own cases. Could we, any of us, in any degree, follow Jacob? I know we could not in the same circumstances, but have we not, some of us, had our night of trial? I had a night of trouble once, but I could not say I had anything like the faith that Jacob had. To me it seemed that everything was just coming to an awful crash. Jacob prevailed. You have your night of sorrow, of affliction, of need, but God is in that trouble. Has He not blessed you there? If we reflect, some of us, upon our past experience, we should have to say we have entered just a little, in religion, into the trouble and the deliverance. There can be no deliverance without previous trouble, and the deeper, the sharper, the trial, the greater and more glorious the victory. He blessed him there. What does that mean? It means that He conferred a favour upon him. I should feel disposed to believe that Jacob's soul and mind had perfect rest when that blessing was given to him. He felt no fear of Esau. Jacob called the name

of that place Peniel, for he said, I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved. In our little way perhaps, we could say something like that. You could go to a spot perhaps, when in bitter soul agony, you wrestled with God, and it was as though you were in His immediate presence, just shut up with Him in a life and death struggle. Your faith prevailed and you came off victorious, and you could say, I saw as it were the face of God. We may see the face of God in a conspicuous deliverance, whether that deliverance is spiritual or temporal. If God comes in a remarkable way makes bare His power, and delivers one of His children in trouble, whatever the nature of that trouble, he can say, I have seen the face of God, the countenance of God.

Religion is profoundly mysterious, and yet at the same time it consists in a poor weak sinner doing solemn business with God, the Creator of the heaven and the earth, approaching Him, pleading before Him, and obtaining blessings from Him. When God blesses a sinner, He confers something upon him, He gives him something. We may bless God. "Bless the Lord, oh! my soul," but not in the same way as God blesses us. We can confer nothing upon God; He is infinite. Yet at the same time, we may honour Him, bless Him, adore, exalt, and worship Him, give thanks to His holy Name, speak well of Him; but we can never add anything to Him, or make Him richer thereby. When God comes to a sinner with his poverty, his need, his sin, his consequent guilt, and his trouble, and blesses him, He does something for him, He does something in him. It is a real thing done. He blesses him, He bestows a favour upon him. What condescending grace! Has God ever blessed you or me? Could we say we have ever received anything in the way of mercy from God? What does He bless His people with? O! great things. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ". Though they have nothing in themselves but sin, misery, weakness, and death, yet He comes and blesses them with life, eternal life, undeserved, unmerited pardon, a full, free, justification. He blesses them with all that God has in the gospel to give. Is He not worth honouring? If I be a Father, where is mine honour? He says, to them that honour Me, I will honour. Is He not worthy? He blessed him there. But how does He bless us? He blesses us in the first place upon the grounds of the merits of His Son. No other way. No blessings, spiritual or temporal, can reach our souls but by the blood of Jesus.

"Every grace and every favour,  
Comes to us through Jesus' blood."

This is how it comes: this is the ground, the blessed source, the channel through which it flows. It is this Jesus, brethren, who was exposed to the wrath of His Father, and who, when upon Calvary, freely and voluntarily shed His own heart's blood, and suffered more than we, with our limitations, can conceive, to open the door of mercy and close the door of wrath for sinners saved by grace. When we get a glimpse of that glorious Person, the Son of Man, the Surety of His people, the Saviour of sinners lost, groaning, bleeding, and dying, expiring, and saying "It is finished," then we can see how it is possible for a sinner to be blessed by God. It can never be any other way, and yet as it has reference to ourselves, we may say blessings come by wrestling prayer. Yes! If God has something in store for you, He will do two things before you get it. He will make you properly feel your need of it, (He will never make the blessings of covenant grace cheap to a person) and He will in the second place very possibly, cause that you shall have many a groan for it. He is a sovereign. We cannot set a time for God as to when He shall do a thing. There is to be a need; it will be a deep one. There is to be wrestling, and it will be real wrestling, and as we have been singing,

"Wrestling prayer can wonders do,  
Bring relief in deepest straits,"

Are you in a strait now? Take the counsel given here, the example of Jacob: leave all beside and come to God. You will come off right in the issue. You say but I must go and see about my enemies and my foes. If you try upon that ground, you will be like the children of Israel when they went in their own strength and against the commandment of God, and they suffered defeat. The way and place to gain a victory, is in secret prayer, and as a poor creature really gets an answer to prayer, a blessing in his soul, some deliverance in providence, he has the seal of heaven in his soul. Yes, he has a covenant made with him that will never be broken. "He blessed him there." He may have come to some of us perhaps, and blessed us in various places, in our homes, in our rooms upon our beds, in our offices, workshops, wherever it may be, some could say, He blessed me there. Can you go to a spot and take up this language and say, He blessed me there? Can you go to a deliverance in your life, and say, He blessed me there? Have you a victory in your life's experience, when you saw the devil a beaten foe, and faith victorious by the power of God? "He blessed him there".

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