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DEVONSHIRE ROAD PULPIT,
GREENWICH, S.E.

MY FATHER'S GOD MY GOD.

A SERMON
DELIVERED BY THE PASTOR,
JOSEPH JARVIS.

"And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." GEN. xlviii. 15, 16.

THE scene presented by our text is the deathbed of the patriarch Jacob. Eleven of his sons appear as yet to be absent, but his beloved Joseph, together with his two grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, are there. The patriarch enquires, "Who are these?" and Joseph replies, "They are my sons whom God hath given me in this place." Jacob hearing this, immediately kissed them and embraced them, and the blessed Remembrancer bringing at that instant to his mind his trials in Canaan, and particularly that which concerned the loss of Joseph, he exclaimed, "I had not thought to see thy face; and lo, God hath shewed me thy seed." Joseph then led his children to their grandfather, bringing Ephraim to Jacob's left hand, and Manasseh to his right hand, "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." Now when Joseph saw that his father gave the chief blessing to Ephraim, it displeased him, and he drew near and held up his father's hand to remove it from the head of Ephraim to that of Manasseh, saying, "Not so, my father, for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head." But his father refused, and said, "I know it, my son, I know it; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations." And he blessed them that day, saying, "In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and Manasseh; and he set Ephraim before Manasseh." This cross-handed blessing, my brethren, you will observe was by Divine appointment, for Jacob guided his hands "*wittingly*," or knowingly, he having received commandment thus to bless, and for this reason, therefore, none could reverse it. How true a figure does this incident afford us of the way in which the God of Jacob still deals with the spiritual seed of Abraham. How very often our choicest blessings come to us by cross-handed providences and painfully surprising dispensations! Our God has decreed that we should frequently pass through a "horror of great darkness" into His "marvellous light," through sorrow into joy, through pain to pleasure, through humility to honour, through bondage to liberty, and through the night of weeping to the rich enjoyment of the glorious "Dayspring from on high;" yet we are so blind to the ways of heavenly wisdom, that like Joseph we are often displeased and saddened by the very things which are working our highest good:—

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"Not so, my Father, oft we say,
This pain, this grief remove ;
Too dull to fathom Wisdom's way,
Or think 'tis sent in love."

But now listen to the patriarchal pronouncement of the Divine blessing upon Joseph and his sons as found in our text: "And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Issac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

I. We have first of all to consider, in connection with our text, A COMFORTING CLAIM. This claim was made by the dying patriarch Jacob, first in relation to his godly progenitors, Abraham and Isaac, and secondly, with respect to himself; and in it he virtuously and virtually makes the assertion, "The God of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, is my God." What a heaven-bestowed privilege had this dear man of God! and what a wondrous, equal privilege have we who may adopt his language as our own! I believe there are a goodly number of such favoured persons present, myself included, for I claim to be the child of godly progenitors. My grandmother was a hearer of the late Isaac Beeman's, of Cranbrook, and she sat on the pulpit stairs in his chapel when the renowned William Huntington preached his celebrated sermon (which was afterwards published) from the text, "For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard, and when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard." (Matt. xx. 1, 2.) My father once informed me that the preacher, after the service was concluded, remarked to Mr. Beeman, "That woman who sat on the pulpit stairs has agreed for the penny a day." I have no reason to believe that this eminent servant of Christ had any personal acquaintance with my grandmother, but I have no doubt that he read the evidence of godliness in her countenance, which in many cases is by no means a difficult task. You will remember that good Bunyan's testimony concerning dear old Mr. Honesty was that, "One could true godliness read in his face." My grandfather—I now refer to my mother's father—feared the Lord above many; he was a good minister of Jesus Christ, and for about 30 years served the Lord as pastor of the church at Flimwell, in Sussex. He preceded the late pastor, Mr. James Pert.

My own dear father and mother were gracious people, and like Obadiah the prophet, feared the Lord from their youth, and well do I remember many of their struggles and conflicts, and also their tears and prayers, and more than all, their immovable and unquestioning faith. I well remember, too, their blessed end. Ah! my brethren, with gratitude I reflect upon the indisputable fact that they lived the life of faith and prayer, and that their last end was that of the righteous. They were, both of them, "strong in faith, giving glory to God," yet with regard to the one point of their personal interest in the grace and love of Christ, neither of them had all the assurance which they craved for any protracted season during their pilgrimage, but this was granted to both of them in their last days. My beloved father, not long before his departure for glory, said to me with much feeling, "My boy, I have been examining the foundation, and there are no loose stones," and then with much composure he proceeded to give directions concerning his funeral service, forbidding me to extol the

creature, but charging me to seek such a subject for his funeral sermon which, through the power of the Holy Ghost, might be blessed to the conversion of souls dead in trespasses and in sins. When the appointed hour of his dissolution came, my dear father entered the heavenly harbour triumphantly, waving his hand in token of victory through the blood of the Lamb.

My beloved mother's end was alike blessed. She sang at various times many sweet hymns, and one or two anthems, and on one occasion said with rapture, "I am standing on the Rock after more than fifty years of weary waiting and watching!" and in her expiring moments her dear countenance was so irradiated with heavenly glory that we who stood around her bed were reminded of the peculiar and sweet glories of the setting sun when the elements sleep and all nature is serene. Ah! my beloved friends, it is indeed a great privilege to be able to exclaim with the dying patriarch, "That God, before whom my fathers did walk, has fed me all my life long, and that same great Angel of the covenant has redeemed me from all evil; my father's God is my God, He will be my Guide even over death."

I would have you particularly to observe, my brethren, that holy Scripture is by no means silent with respect to the great privilege bestowed upon us in the gift of godly progenitors. The inspired Psalmist appears, at least on two occasions, to claim the gift of a God-fearing mother, and more than this, remembering in one of his petitions that the Lord's "mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation," he makes his relationship to one of the Lord's handmaids a minor plea at the throne of grace, crying, "O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give Thy strength unto Thy servant, and save the son of Thine handmaid. Shew me a token for good, that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed, because Thou, Lord, hast holpen me and comforted me." (Ps. lxxxvi. 16, 17.) In Psalm cxvi. also he makes the same comforting claim, crying out with much holy vehemence, "O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant, and the son of Thine handmaid: Thou hast loosed my bonds." The Apostle Peter likewise, in his Pentecostal sermon, addressing the three thousand of his Jewish brethren who had, through the word spoken, been "pricked in their heart," did not overlook the great privilege alluded to, for he cried, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." What sweet encouragement this precious text holds forth to those weary and disheartened parents whose children are still in the "bond of iniquity," notwithstanding their admonitions and prayers. The Lord save the children of His people!

But once more I will refer you to the sacred page for instruction and comfort in connection with this important subject. Turn now to the second epistle of St. Paul to Timothy, and you may read in the third verse of the first chapter a very touching reference to Timothy's mother and grandmother as persons who served the Lord in their day and generation, and beside this you will observe that Paul includes himself among those who serve God from their forefathers. Listen to the Apostle's words; he says, "I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have

remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, *which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice*; and I am persuaded that in thee also." Do not draw from these scriptures the false deduction that grace is hereditary, for most certainly it is not, for blessed David had an Absalom and an Adonijah. Holy Samuel's sons "walked not in his ways," and even Abraham, the father of the faithful, had an Ishmael. These sad examples which are given in the Scriptures all declare against hereditary grace, besides the many of our own day; yet we cannot—and we wish not—to close our eyes to the fact that the posterity of the righteous are frequently found walking in the steps of their godly sires, for in this important matter, as in many others, our Lord has not said, either to Jacob or his seed, "Seek ye Me in vain."

I will now make a final reference to the allusions of holy Scripture on this encouraging subject, and this last allusion you will, I am sure, see to be more pertinent and pathetic than any of those before mentioned. It is to be found in one of the most notable of the Messianic psalms; you will therefore listen to it as the very language of the holy Messiah Himself. This wonderful prayer was offered in the days of His flesh, when He made supplication with strong crying and tears, and was heard in that He feared. Listen to the holy but agonised pleadings of Him who was "adored by angels and obeyed," yet for the "suffering of death" was made lower than they. He cries, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? Why art Thou so far from helping Me, and from the words of My roaring? O My God, I cry in the day-time, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. OUR FATHERS trusted in Thee. They trusted in Thee and Thou didst deliver them. They cried unto Thee and were delivered. They trusted in Thee and were not confounded." Then after pleading the weakness of His humanity, and His absolute trust in His Divine Father from the earliest hours of infancy, the adorable "Son of man" pleads that the God of the fathers who delivered them would also appear to succour Him in His dire need, crying, "Be not far from Me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help;" and again, "Be not Thou far from Me, O Lord; O My strength, haste Thee to help Me." Thus having before us the example of the great Head of the Church Himself, and that also of many of His choicest members, let us who have been favoured with godly progenitors plead with the Lord as the God of our fathers, and O that all of us who are parents may receive the promise once given to Abraham: "I will establish My covenant between Me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee."

"O God of Bethel, by whose hand
Thy people still are fed,
Who through this weary pilgrimage
Hast all our fathers led.

Our cries and tears we now present
Before Thy throne of grace.
God of the fathers, be the God
Of their succeeding race!"

O ye who are the favoured descendants of a godly ancestry, be thankful for your privileges, remember your responsibilities, and seek to walk humbly and graciously before the God of your fathers; and beside this, I charge you each, in the language of Holy Writ, "Thine own

Friend and thy father's Friend forsake not, neither go to thy brother's house in the day of thy adversity," but commit thy way to this heavenly Friend, and "He shall give thee the desires of thine heart." As for you who have been called from ungodly associations, and from families which call not on the name of the Lord, think not your privileges less than theirs whose fathers have walked in the ways of the Lord, for, although these last-named persons have been made the subjects of certain peculiar advantages, the grace of which you are the subjects is most sovereign and distinguishing. Why should you be taken while others are left? The answer is found only in the "good will of Him who dwelt in the bush." Yes, my dear separated brethren, "it is our Father's *good pleasure* to give you the kingdom, therefore sit at the feet of your glorious Redeemer in holy astonishment and love, exclaiming, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight!"

We will now notice the second part of the comforting claim of our text, and this, you will remember, relates to Jacob himself. He has already spoken of God as the God of his fathers, and now he claims for himself an interest in his father's God, saying, "The God which fed *me* all my life long unto this day, The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads," &c. I take it that the patriarch here first of all recognises the *providential* mercies of his God, and, my dear friends, we shall sin exceedingly if we fail to trace all our earthly comforts to the bounty of heaven. "Thanks to the Lord for meaner things, but they are not my God," should be often our heartfelt exclamation, but I fear that the blessings which pertain to this life often occupy too exalted a place in our affections, and it may be that Jacob failed somewhat in this particular; at least it appears so from the nature of his first vow at Bethel, for awaking from his sleep, in which he had been blessed with that wonderful vision of the ladder which united earth and heaven, he exclaimed, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me *bread to eat and raiment to put on*, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God." But whether the patriarch did or did not think somewhat too much of the blessings of this life, it is quite certain that he gave glory to God by seeking these mercies from Him as their proper source. This is as it should be, and there are many of God's dear children who, through their extreme poverty, have never been allowed to forget this truth, for their bread has been given them day by day only, even as the manna was given to the Israelites in the wilderness; indeed, some of the poorest of the flock have often been in such straits as to have nowhere but heaven to look to, even for the next meal. This was the position of Elijah at the brook Cherith, yet the Lord fulfilled His word, and commanded the ravens to take him "bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening." The widow of Zarephath was in similar circumstances when the prophet asked her for a little cake, for she had but a single handful of meal, and a little oil in a cruse, out of which she said she proposed to make a cake for herself and her son, and then to die. Yet how marvellously, nay miraculously, the Lord sustained her! You will remember His word by the prophet was, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth." How truly did one say

that "When the Lord's people have need, His goodness will find out a way." I remember a somewhat remarkable incident in my own life which confirms this statement, and for the sake of the young people present I will give it. The story relates to the time of my boyhood, when, being sent on a long journey in the country, I became, when far from any source of supply, exhausted for lack of something to eat, and found myself quite unable to proceed much further with my journey, but as I crept along I felt that God was able to send me the sorely-needed supply of food, either by or without means. In this confidence I closed my eyes and prayed, and the moment that I opened them I saw abundance of provision at my feet. You may imagine with what thankfulness and eagerness I partook of this heaven-sent meal, "asking no questions for conscience sake." For years I do not remember to have reflected upon the probable means used by the Lord to meet my distress, but I have since thought that the food may have been inadvertently dropped by a labourer on the way to his work; if so, I trust that the consequence of his loss did not result in an experience similar to mine; nay I am sure it did not, since it was the Lord's way of meeting my necessity. Ah, my friends, I felt then, and I sometimes feel now, what a mercy it is that the needful things of this life may be asked for and obtained of our good and gracious Lord, and may we never forget to sing the worthy praises of the God of Jacob, who has "fed us all our life long," but on the other hand, let us never forget that all earthly blessings perish with the using, and therefore, since this is the case, may God grant to each of us the grace to "labour for that bread which endureth unto everlasting life," even the "true Bread" which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. "Lord, evermore give us this Bread, or we must everlastingly perish with soul hunger."

II. Let us now in the second place consider REDEMPTION BY THE GREAT ANGEL OF THE COVENANT, for Jacob refers to Him in the text, and by Him claims to have been redeemed from all evil. It is evident that the LORD, or Jehovah of the 28th chapter of this book, is here referred to as "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil," and it is just as evident that *the man* who wrestled with Jacob, as recorded in the 32nd chapter, is by the prophet Hosea spoken of both as "God" and "*the Angel*," for he says concerning Jacob at Peniel, "By his strength he had power with God; yea, he had power over the *Angel* and prevailed;" and beside this, the patriarch Jacob distinctly recognised God Himself in the man that wrestled with him, for, after he had prevailed with God and obtained the blessing, "he called the name of the place Peniel," that is, the face of God, "for," said he, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Again, observe that He who is called "the Angel" in our text (apparently with reference to, or at least including among other signal favours, the Bethel visitation), is in another instance referred to by the patriarch under the glorious title of "God Almighty." This reference of Jacob to Bethel, and the God who spake with him there, was made at the very beginning of his sickness, and was almost a dying reflection of the patriarch's, for we read that, "One told Joseph, Behold, thy father is sick; and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And one told Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself and sat upon the bed. And Jacob said unto Joseph, God ALMIGHTY appeared unto me at Luz, in the land of Canaan, and blessed me."

You will now admit that I have proved that the redemption by the Angel spoken of in the text is Divine redemption, for I have shewn Him to be Divine who wrought it, yea, this is He in whom the Psalmist rejoices, and in his joy exclaims, "He sent redemption unto His people; He hath commanded His covenant for ever. Holy and Reverend is His name." But from what evils did this glorious Angel of Jehovah's presence redeem His servant Jacob? He redeemed him from the evil of his sinful and deceitful behaviour at home, and from its terrible consequences; He redeemed him from the perils of his long and dangerous journey from his home to the house of Laban; He redeemed him from all the evils consequent upon Laban's duplicity and unkindness. This great covenant Angel redeemed him from the hand of his incensed brother Esau, who marched against him with 400 men; He redeemed him from the famine in Canaan, and from all the evil and sorrow which befel him in connection with his long separation from his beloved Joseph; He redeemed him from the hand of the Amorite against whom he warred with his "sword and with his bow." But by a redemption infinitely greater than this did this adorable Angel of Jehovah's presence deliver his child Jacob, for He redeemed him from the evil of his own heart, from the evil of sin, from the evil of sin's defilement, from the evil of its dominion, from the evil of the curse of the law due to it, from the power of the "evil one," the devil, and from the evil of hell's damnation; and do not forget, brethren, that this redemption was a redemption through blood. Was not Jacob one of the elders and patriarchs who "obtained a good report through faith?" If, then, Jacob had true faith (and we know that he did possess this great blessing), that faith apprehended Christ, the glorious Shiloh of whom he spake, and who is the proper object of faith. No man ever received, or ever will receive, redemption otherwise than through Christ's most precious blood. All the saints sooner or later join in the joyful exclamation of the Apostle who, when expatiating upon the glorious grace of the Saviour, cried, "In whom we have redemption *through His blood*, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." May we all know the boundless salvation and glory of this stupendous redemption!

III. We come now to our third point, which is, THE PATRIARCHAL BLESSING OF THE LADS. Listen once more to the entire text: "And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, *bless the lads*; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." The patriarch wished that his grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh might walk before God as Abraham and Isaac did, and that the same wonderful blessing pronounced by the Lord upon them might descend upon these lads; nay, since Jacob was divinely inspired, the Lord poured upon them that blessing thus pronounced by His servant. The words of this blessing alluded to by Jacob are those addressed to Abraham when he was in Ur of the Chaldees: "I will bless thee and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee and thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." In this precious benediction there was not only natural

but spiritual blessings, for Christ and all the glorious privileges of His gospel are herein contained, as the Apostle proves, saying, "He saith not, And to *seeds*, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

But I wish now by the help of the blessed Spirit to interpret the latter part of our text, "And let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac." First of all Jacob desired that his name should be named on them that the reproach of Egypt and that of an Egyptian mother might be removed, and that there might be also a public recognition of their true relationship to Israel. But there is a deep which couches beneath all this. Passing by Jacob as a supplanter, remember that while the patriarch bore this name he became a suppliant, a wrestler, and a weeper. What a mercy in this gracious sense to have Jacob's name named upon us! May you lads and lasses become true suppliants at the throne of grace, earnest wrestlers with God in prayer, and sincere weepers over your sins and after the Lord Jesus and His salvation. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

"Lord, let us weep for nought but sin, And then I would—oh that I might,—
And after none but Thee; A constant weeper be."

Again, this name signifies, "One who takes his brother by the heel." Jacob was younger than his brother Esau, and God revealed to the mother that the elder should serve the younger, and thus it is in the spiritual life; the old man of sin cannot reign over the new man of grace, but frequently when the flesh would go astray the spirit of grace lays hold of the heel of the man of sin and prevents the mischief; for the fear of the Lord is a fence against evil. O that the house of Saul in us might become weaker and weaker, and the house of David wax stronger and stronger. But further, the name of Jacob signifies also, "One that follows after." I will interpret this in a good sense only, and then it becomes strikingly indicative of the character of the soul that seeks after the Lord; and this seeking one is lovingly addressed and encouraged by the Lord in the prophecy of Isaiah. The Lord's words are, "Hearken unto Me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock from whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged." In this figurative language the good Spirit of God encourages those dear souls who follow after righteousness, and long to attain to it by faith, to contrast their present *living* state with their spiritual death of the past, and from this to infer that "He which hath begun a good work in them will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ." Therefore be of good cheer, ye that seek the Lord, for the Divine promise is, "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord." But we must not forget that at the time the patriarch desired that his name might be named on the lads that he bore, the God-given title of Israel, for as a prince he had power with God and had prevailed; and even thus shall it be with all true seekers after God: they shall be numbered with His princes and conquerors who have "overcome by the blood of the Lamb." Israel also, by the command of the Lord, named on the lads the name of his father Abraham. The great spiritual blessing wrapped up in this name is that of being blessed with faith in faithful Abraham. May none of us come short of it. . . . Amen.

These Sermons are published on the 15th of each month, and can be obtained from the PASTOR, J. JARVIS, "Galeed," 69, Fordel Road, Catford, S.E., or FARNCOMBE & SON, 30 Imperial Buildings, Ludgate Circus, E.C.