

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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JACOB'S MODEL PRAYER.

## A Sermon

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“And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.”—Genesis xxxii. 9—12.

You must have noticed, dear friends, how very frequently God makes the life of a man to be the reflection of his character. There is an echo, in his outward experience, to the inward character of the man.

Look at the life of Abraham. He trusted God in a very eminent degree; shall I be incorrect if I say that God also eminently trusted him? The Lord spake with Abraham as a man speaketh with his friend; and when he was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, he said, “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?” And as Abraham had trusted God in so notable a manner, the Lord entrusted his seed with the oracles of God, and with the outward forms of religious worship, so that it was through the seed of Abraham that the truth was handed on, from generation to generation, until the days of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then, next, in contrast to the life of Abraham, take the case of Jacob. He begins life by cheating his brother; and, however that cheating may have been overruled so as to fulfil the purposes of God, it was altogether unjustifiable. Now, as he had begun with Esau in that fashion, so he had it returned into his own bosom. When he was with Laban, he was cheated again and again,—cheated even in the wife who was given or sold to him. He was a great bargainer, shrewd, crafty, not over scrupulous,—the typical father of the Jews; yet you know how he was continually being overreached by Laban, who could also bargain on his own account.

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What a bargaining life it was all through, and what a life of sorrow, although he was still favoured of God. His outward experience was the echo of his inward character. As he had done to others, so was it done to him, and in him was fulfilled our Lord's declaration, which had not then been uttered, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

Look also at Moses, practically renouncing the throne of Egypt by refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, because he esteemed the reproach of Christ to be greater riches than all the treasures in Egypt; yet what did he afterwards become? Was he not king in Jeshurun, with a strange and marvellous power over the hosts of the Lord, and with a greater kingdom under him, according to the judgment of all who are able to weigh things aright, than he could ever have had if he had become the ruler of Egypt, and the son of Pharaoh's daughter?

I might give you other illustrations of this fact; but I want, rather, to attract your attention to the better side of Jacob's character as we have it revealed in the prayer which I have selected for our meditation on this occasion.

The chapter, from which our text is taken, informs us as to the circumstances of Jacob's case at the time that he offered this prayer. He had just escaped from his trouble with Laban when he received the inexpressible honour of being met by "the angels of God." But, lest he should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations which they made to him, a second trouble followed closely upon the heels of the first. He was soon to meet his brother Esau; and then, the great sin of his earlier years would be brought home to him. He had deceived his old father Isaac, and had gained the birthright blessing by utterly unjustifiable subtlety; and he might reasonably expect that he was about to reap the due reward of his evil deeds.

With true Oriental craft, and also with a considerable amount of common sense, he made various plans for appeasing the wrath of his brother; and then, when he had done what he thought to be wise, he betook himself to prayer. Brethren, let us learn, from Jacob's experience, to expect troubles, especially if we have so acted as to bring trouble upon ourselves; but let us also learn, from Jacob's action, that, while planning is right enough when kept within its proper bounds, prayer is much more important. We may easily go to excess in our planning; we may depend so much upon an arm of flesh, and upon our own wisdom and prudence, and have such confidence in our own scheming that it may, after all, turn out to be utter folly. The staff, on which we lean, may turn out to be, at best, but a broken reed; perhaps even a spear which shall pierce and wound us. "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man;" or to have confidence in ourselves; for, even if we had all the wisdom that it is possible for man to attain, it would be but created wisdom; whereas, if we go at once to the Lord our God, we shall go to infinite wisdom, and we may expect to be guided aright through all the difficulties of the way.

Prayer, my brethren, must be our first resource; or if it is also

the last, let it be the first as well. Let us not merely go to God's door because we have tried everybody else, and failed. Let us not go to the fountain simply because the cisterns are exhausted; but let us go to our God first and foremost; and let us say, "Even if earth's cisterns did contain water, we would not forsake our God for them; and if all the forces of our fellow-creatures were as real and powerful as they profess to be, we would still lean upon the arm that bears up the whole universe,—the unseen arm of the faithful Creator."

I selected this subject for our meditations, on this occasion, because it appears to me to give us *a sort of model of what prayer should be*. We shall view it first in that light; and when we have so done, I shall have a little to say about *Jacob's last plea*, for it is most suggestive; and then I shall close with a word or two upon *the answer to this model prayer of the patriarch*.

I. First, then, concerning JACOB'S MODEL PRAYER, which is one of the earliest that is recorded in Holy Scripture; at least, in such detail.

I commend it for your imitation, my dear friends, first, because of *the plainness of its matter*. Jacob does not come before God with a long roundabout story, telling in general terms the fact that he was in some sort of trouble, out of which he wished to be divinely helped; but he distinctly mentions the perilous circumstances in which he found himself. He says, "O God, . . . deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau." Of course, God knew that the name of Jacob's brother was Esau; yet Jacob thought it was necessary to mention his brother's name in order that his prayer should be definite and clear. So he pleaded, "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children." He was probably then alluding to his dearly-beloved Rachel and her son Joseph, though he may also have referred to the other mothers in the company, for he was a tender father, and cared for his children, and he mentioned them as being very near his heart, and specially needing divine protection. So you see that Jacob is very clear as to what he asks of God; and I urge you, my brethren, to imitate him in this respect.

When we pray, we sometimes use very roundabout expressions; we do not come straight to the point; we seem to imagine that a kind of religious etiquette forbids us from speaking plainly at the throne of grace. I am persuaded that this notion is altogether wrong; and instead of God approving this mode of speaking to him in prayer, he would much rather have us speak to him as a child speaks to his earthly father,—respectfully, reverently, remembering that he is in heaven, and we are on earth, yet simply and plainly, for our Heavenly Father needs no garnishing of our speech; and the poor tawdry flowers of eloquence, with which some of our brethren at times adorn their prayers, must be displeasing to God rather than acceptable to him. Especially must you unconverted ones imitate Jacob in this matter of plainness of speech; when you pray, never mind about the mode of your expression, but come to

the main point at once. Tell the Lord that you have grievously offended him; and mention your sins to him in private, by name. If your great sin has been drunkenness, call it by that name; if it has been uncleanness, call it by that name. Do not endeavour to dissemble before the Lord, or to cloak your sin before the all-seeing Jehovah. You need not reach down a prayer-book to see how the bishops would have you pray, nor borrow somebody's Morning Devotions to see how a certain eminent divine prayed; but go straight to God, and say, "O Lord, thou knowest what I want! I am a poor guilty sinner, and I cannot express myself in such a way as to please my fellow-creatures; but thou knowest what I am, and what I need. Wilt thou graciously give me the pardon of my sin, O thou who alone canst forgive the guilty? Wilt thou receive me to thy bosom, thou blessed Saviour of the lost?" Come to the point with God, dear friends; be explicit with him; let it be seen that you are not praying for the mere sake of performing a certain religious ceremony, but that you have real business to transact with the Most High. You know what your request is, and you do not intend to leave the mercy-seat until your request is granted.

So I commend Jacob's prayer to you because of the plainness of its speech.

Next, it is to be commended for *the humility of its spirit*. Notice especially these words of the patriarch, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands." If you even hint that there is any worthiness in yourself, the power of your prayer is at once destroyed; but if you plead your unworthiness, you will then be standing where the publican stood when he cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" and you know how "he went down to his house justified rather than the" Pharisee, who said that he fasted twice in the week, gave tithes of all he possessed, and was not like other men, especially that publican! In that way he destroyed any power that his prayer might otherwise have possessed. His self-conceit tore the chariot wheels from his prayer, so that it dragged heavily, and soon could not move even an inch. On the other hand, a deep sense of sin, a full consciousness of utter undesert, will enable you, like Jacob, to wrestle with the great Angel of the covenant, and to prevail over him. Possibly, you have not succeeded with God because you have not sunk low enough before him. You unconverted ones especially, if you put your mouths in the very dust, that will be the best attitude for you to assume. If you still have some relics of strength, you will not receive divine strength. If there are some remnants of the pristine idea of human merit tolerated in your heart, the robe of Christ's righteousness will not be wrapped around you. Ask the Lord to strip you of every rag of self-righteousness, to enable you to trust in Jesus alone, and to have no confidence in the flesh, either in the feelings which you experience or in the works which you do. Your time of uplifting will follow close upon your time of falling down flat upon your face. The dawn of day succeeds the darkest hour of the night, so ask

God to bring you down to that dark hour in which the night covers every hope that is born of human confidence, for then will the Lord appear to you in his brightness. So, imitate the prayer of Jacob in its humility of spirit.

The third point in which I would have you copy Jacob's model prayer is in the *arguments to be used*. The whole prayer is highly argumentative. If some of the prayers I have heard at prayer-meetings,—though I must say that the fault is less in this place than in most others with which I have become acquainted,—if some of the prayers at certain prayer-meetings were less doctrinal, less experimental, and more argumentative with God, they would be more like true prayer should be, for true prayer is just pleading with the Most High, spreading our case before him, and then pressing our suit with all the arguments we can muster.

In this short prayer of the patriarch, no less than four arguments are used. The first is the argument from the covenant: "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac." God had entered into covenant relationship with Abraham, and made solemn promises to him and to his seed, so Jacob prays, "O Lord, thou hast pledged thyself to be the God of the seed of Abraham, whose grandson I am, and of the seed of Isaac, whose son I am,—now, therefore, by thy faithfulness to thy covenant promise, help me in this dark hour of my life!" Beloved friends, this is the kind of plea that we can use with the Lord: "O God, hast thou not made a covenant with the Lord Jesus by which thou hast promised that thou wilt save all them that trust in him? Hast thou not said, 'I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people'? Then, Lord, though guilty, I trust to the merits of thy dear Son, and I ask to be absolved by virtue of his great atoning sacrifice. Behold, as the earthen vessel hangs upon the nail, so hang I upon him, and upon him alone. Now, by the covenant of thy grace, which is ordered in all things and sure, I beseech thee to manifest thy love to me." If you use such gracious pleading as that with the Lord, you will surely prevail with him. And I urge you also, children of God, to do the same, for the everlasting covenant is a mighty plea with God,—

"In every dark distressful hour,  
When sin and Satan join their power."

Then we pass on to the next use which Jacob makes of the promise which God had given him: "Thou saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee." If you and I know that we are walking in the path of duty, if we are where the Lord has bidden us go, we can always claim the divine promise. The Lord is bound to protect his servants when they are in the path of obedience to his command. If you follow your own counsel, you must manage to take care of yourselves; but if you go where the Bible and the clear indications of divine providence guide you, you may always reckon that the Master who sent you will protect his obedient servants, let the dangers of the way be whatever they may. If God should command you to go to the

utmost verge of this green earth, to rivers unknown to song, or if he should bid you travel through distant deserts, as Mungo Park journeyed through the midst of Africa, yet he could preserve your life there as well as here in England; and being there, sent by him, you may rest assured that you shall hear the sound of your Master's feet behind you, or have other unmistakable evidences of his presence with you.

And, sinner, this is a good plea for you to use. You can say, "Lord, thou didst tell me to believe in Jesus Christ, thy Son; then, wilt thou not accept me, for his sake, for I have done what thou didst bid me do? Thou hast said, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble;' Lord, this is a day of trouble with me, and I do call upon thee; so wilt thou not answer me?" If you argue with the Lord in such a style as this, you will find that this kind of pleading is potent with him who is omnipotent.

Then, further, Jacob argued with God from his past history. He said that he was not worthy of the least of God's mercies, yet he had received many of them. Though he went over the river Jordan, when he left his home, a sad and solitary man, with nothing but his walking-staff in his hand, yet he had come back with wives and children, and so great a number of servants, and cattle, and camels, and goats, and sheep, and asses that he had become like two bands. "Now, Lord," says he, "after all thy past mercies to me, I beseech thee, do not leave me now. Hast thou blessed thy servant up to this moment, and canst thou leave him now?" I cannot tell you how often I have been comforted by the truth implied in John Newton's words,—

"Determined to save, he watch'd o'er my path  
When, Satan's blind slave, I sported with death:  
And can he have taught me to trust in his name,  
And thus far have brought me to put me to shame?"

"His love in time past forbids me to think  
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink,  
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review,  
Confirms his good pleasure to help me quite through."

So Jacob prayed, in effect, "Lord, thou hast often been my Helper in the past; so now deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau." You, my unconverted friend, may even adopt this form of pleading, for you can say, "Lord, thou hast spared my life many a time when I have provoked thee. Let thy longsuffering, which now leads me to repentance, also move thee to forgive my sin. I remember what thou didst on Calvary for sinners in ages long past. Didst thou give thy well-beloved and only-begotten Son to die for sinners, and wilt thou not now accept every trembling sinner who seeks thy favour?" This also shall prove to be the kind of pleading that will cause the gates of God's grace to open.

The fourth argument that Jacob used was perhaps the best of all: "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good," and so on. Ah, that was the master-stroke; and, in like manner, if you would succeed

at the mercy-seat, you must bring down the hammer of the promise upon the head of the nail of prayer, and then clinch it, as Jacob did, by saying to the Lord, "Thou saidst" so-and-so, and so-and-so. David once said to God in prayer, "Do as thou hast said." When a man has promised you something that you really need, you take him by the button-hole, and you say to him, "Now, you promised to give me that;" and if he is an honest man, you can hold him by his own word; and shall the God of truth ever fail to perform his promise? No, that is one of the things that God cannot do; he cannot lie, and he cannot run back from his promise, nor does he want to do so. O Christian, if you would get anything from God, find a promise of it in his Word, and then thou mayest count the thing as good as received. When a man of means gives you his cheque, you count it just as good as hard cash; and God's promises are even better than cheques or bank notes. We have only to take them, and plead them before him, and we may rest assured that he will honour them.

II. Thus I have tried to place before you the points in which Jacob's prayer is worthy of both commendation and imitation; and now I want to say something concerning HIS LAST PLEA, which seems to me to be very suggestive: "Thou saidst."

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, I need not say more to you upon this matter, for you know the value of the promises of God, and you know how to use them. But to those who are not converted, I may perhaps speak a few words suggested by Jacob's last plea: "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good." Sinner, lay hold, as fast as thou canst, of the promise of God, and then plead it with him. To this end, I would say to every unconverted one here who desires to obtain the priceless blessing of salvation,—Study the Word of God very diligently, and always read it with the view of finding a promise that may suit your special case; and when you read it, study it with the firm conviction that it is God's Word, and that, in each promise, God is as truly speaking to you as though he had sent an angel to apply that promise personally to you. Take a text which you find to be applicable to yourself, and say, "This is what the Lord says to me as certainly as though he now spoke it in my ear."

Next, I beseech you to remember that God's Word is absolutely true. Fix that fact in your memory, and then say to yourself that the promise, being true, must be fulfilled. Next to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great object of faith is the promise of God; and if we were more familiar with his promises, we should more speedily get out of that Slough of Despond in which so many of us flounder so long. Bunyan says that "there are, by the direction of the Lawgiver, certain good and substantial steps, placed even through the very midst of this Slough; . . . but these steps are hardly seen; or if they be, men, through the dizziness of their heads, step besides, and then they are bemired to purpose, notwithstanding the steps be there." Look out for these steps of promise, my friend. There is, in the Bible, a promise just exactly suited to your case, so mind that you find it. Did you never

send for a locksmith to open a drawer because you had lost the key, and could not open it? He comes with a great bunch of rusty keys,—very like God's promises which you have allowed to get rusty through not using them,—and first he tries one key, and then another, and another, till, at last, he gets the right one, and the treasures in your drawers are spread open before you. It is just so with the treasures of God's mercy. There is one special promise in Scripture which will fit the wards of the lock of your experience; and you must try promise after promise till, at last, you get the right one, and then you can say to the Lord, as Jacob did, "Thou saidst." That is the main matter, what God has said. Never mind what I say; that does not signify an atom except so far as I say what God says. Never mind what anybody else has said; but let your one concern be to know what God says.

Good Mr. William Jay, of Bath, writing upon this passage, "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good," makes four observations which I commend to both saints and sinners. The first is, *God has the ability to do you good.* Whatever good it is that you need, God can give it to you. Pardon of sin, help in trouble, comfort in distress, whatever it is that you really need, God has the ability to give it to you, and so to do you good. In the second place, *God has the inclination to do you good.* You need not speak to him as if he were unwilling to bless you; it is according to his nature to be gracious. Love is one of his chief attributes, and his loving-kindness and tender mercies greatly abound. He as much delights to show kindness to the needy as a generous man delights to relieve the wants of the poor. In the next place, *God is under an engagement to do you good.* "Thou saidst, Surely I will do thee good." God has given a promise to seeking sinners, that he will be found of them; to repentant sinners, that he will pardon them; to believing sinners, that they shall find eternal life. And then, the fourth thing is, *God has already done good to you.* This fact ought to strengthen your faith. The Lord has the ability, and the inclination, and he is under engagement to do you good, and he has already begun to do it. I may say to you, my hearers, that the Lord has done you some good in bringing you here to listen to the gospel, and in making that gospel so sweet and so generous a gospel as it is,—a gospel for those who labour, and are heavy laden, and who can find no rest anywhere else,—a gospel for the very chief of sinners, as Paul wrote to Timothy, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." I put into your hands this plea of Jacob, "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good." Go and plead it, and the Lord do unto you according to your faith!

III. My last words—which must be very few,—concern THE ANSWER WHICH JACOB'S PRAYER RECEIVED.

His prayer was answered, but *it was not answered in the way he expected it would be.* When he had done praying, he found that all his plans had been knocked on the head; so you need not wonder if you find the same thing happen to you when you have

done praying. Do not be astonished, my dear hearers, if, when you have gone to God in prayer, you should seem to feel worse than you did before. There is a young friend,—I daresay he is here now,—who told me that he came to hear me for many months, that he became outwardly reformed, and was, as he thought, going on well, till there came, one Lord's-day morning, a sermon\* about the corruption of the human heart which knocked all to pieces his pretty castle in the air, upset all his hopes, and utterly destroyed his self-confidence. I am very glad it did, for his hopes and trust were all false; and, afterwards, by God's grace, he began to build upon a far firmer foundation. Sometimes, when you have been praying for salvation, God answers you by destroying all your hopes. You asked him to save you, and you thought he would do it in a way that would make you happy; but, instead of that, he plucked up all your fine plants by the roots, and turned your pretty garden into a desert, because he knew that the flowers you were growing were all poisonous, and must be cleared away before he could plant there those which would be the plants of his right hand planting.

*When God answered Jacob, he met him, not as his Friend, but as his wrestling Opponent.* Jacob had a fierce duel, which lasted all night long, by Jabbok's brook; and if God really appears to you, I should not be surprised if he comes at first like an enemy; and if you should have to say to him as Job did, "Thou huntest me as a fierce lion." God's choicest mercies often come to us under the guise of adversities. God sends his love-letters to us in black-edged envelopes, and sometimes we are afraid to open them. If we would but do so, we should soon know the lovingkindness of the Lord. Jacob was to have an answer to his prayer; but, before the answer came, he had to wrestle; nay, worse than that, before Jacob was fully delivered, he had to be made to limp, and all his life afterwards he went halting upon his thigh. You, poor sinner, may be made to feel your sinfulness so much that you will be driven almost to despair; and you, believer, will have to fight with Satan, possibly as long as you are in this body.

Although Jacob's own plans were put on one side, and God met him as though he were his enemy, and the poor patriarch went on limping when the sun rose over Penuel, yet, *for all that, he did get his prayer answered.* His brother "Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." So, beloved, trust ye in the Lord, and wait patiently for him, and your enemies shall become your friends, your doubts shall end in joy, your tribulations shall melt away into the glory, and you shall prove that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Brethren, the pith of the whole matter is this, "Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." As for you who know him not, I pray you to trust in the sacrifice of his dear Son, Jesus Christ. As the doves hide themselves in the

\* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 732, "The Heart—a Den of Evil."

clefts of the rock, hide yourselves in the wounds of Jesus by trusting in his atoning sacrifice. And as for you, the saints of the Lord, return unto your rest, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with you; therefore, "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him," remembering that "they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint."

May the Lord graciously give all of us his blessing and benediction, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

## Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

### GENESIS XXXII.

Jacob had just come out of a great trouble. God's gracious interposition had delivered him out of the hand of the angry Laban,—Laban the churl, who cared for Jacob only for what he could get out of him.

Verses 1, 2. *And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.*

The angels of God are always round about his people. It was well for Jacob to be reminded of that fact, for he was about to pass into another trouble. John Bunyan truly says,—

"A Christian man is seldom long at ease;  
When one trouble's gone another doth him seize."

Certainly it was so with Jacob; for, after he had escaped from Laban, he knew that he had to meet his brother Esau, whom he had so greatly wronged so many years before. Then it was that "the angels of God met him." Go on your way in peace and safety, beloved believer, for God's hosts are all around you. You do not go unattended at any single moment of your life. Better than squadrons of horse and regiments of foot are the ministering spirits who are "sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation."

3—5. *And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: and I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.*

This was a wise and proper action on the part of Jacob, for he had grossly wronged his brother, and it was right for him to make advances toward a reconciliation. He prayed to God for help, but he also used such means as he could,—the means that ought always to be used when any of us realize that we have done an injury to others. We should even be willing to humiliate ourselves in order to make peace.

I think that, when Christians differ from one another, there should be a holy emulation between them as to which shall be the first to give way, and which will give way the more to the other. How many quarrels might soon be ended if there were this spirit of conciliation among all professing Christians. I have heard of one, who had offended a brother-Christian during the day; possibly, the brother-Christian had offended him quite as much. But the first one saw that the sun was going down, so he turned to seek his friend, that he might say to him, "Friend So-and-so, I was wrong in being angry to-day." Half-way between their two houses, they met, and each of them said, "I was just coming to say that I was