

Jacob's Model Prayer

Gen 32:1-12

Ge 32:1 And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. 2 And when Jacob saw them, he said, This *is* God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

3 And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom. 4 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: 5 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.

6 And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him.

7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that *was* with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; 8 And said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape.

9 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: 10 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. 11 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. 12 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.

Introduction:

1. The Background

- a. God told Jacob that it was time to head home
- b. For 20 yrs he had worked for Laban
- c. Angels showed up to encourage Jacob
- d. Jacob's Fear

1. Jacob feared for his life
2. He feared that Esau was coming to carry out the threat that he had made many years before
3. He sent messengers to meet Esau his brother
4. The messengers were to butter up Esau so that when Jacob met Esau he would not be angry

- e. The messengers returned to Jacob and told him that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men.

1. That didn't sound good - 400 men
2. Jacob decided that he better divide everything up into two groups so that if Esau attacked one group, then maybe the other group could get away

- f. And then Jacob prayed

2. Jacob's prayer is one of the great prayers of the OT yet it was prayed by a man whose faith was very weak

- a. Jacob was on his way back to Canaan
- b. He stole the blessing from his brother Esau and Jacob had to leave home quickly
- c. He ended up spending 20 years working for his uncle Laban
- d. He came to Laban with a walking stick in his hand and the clothes on his back
- e. When Jacob left Laban to head home he was a wealthy man with 11 sons and a daughter and large flocks and herds

3. Every statement in this prayer indicated that Jacob had a profound knowledge of God's ways and God's character, and yet he was praying in desperation and not in confidence.

I. THE GOD SOUGHT IN THE PRAYER - VS 9

9 And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac....

A. *Jacob Turned to Jehovah*

1. Jacob did not seek help from any of the idols that Rachel stole from Laban - he went to the true God in prayer
2. He approached God in reverence
3. Jacob approached God in a covenant sense - Abraham, Isaac
Gen 12:1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: 2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: 3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.
 - a) *That covenant was affirmed to Isaac and to Jacob*
 - b) *It was on the basis of that covenant that Jacob asked God for the help that he desperately needed*
4. Jacob was afraid and his heart was in distress
 - a) *He had to face the one person that he would rather not face*
 - b) *He had to face the one who he cheated 20 yrs earlier*
5. God's people today approach the throne of grace through Jesus Christ on the basis of the new covenant that He made through His own blood - Heb 8:6-13; 12:22-24
6. Jacob went to the right One, addressed Him in the right manner, and showed confidence in Him by seeking His help

7. Often we turn to everyone and everything but God
8. Disappointment comes when we do not seek God in prayer

B. God is Our Refuge and Strength - Ps 46:1

1 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

1. Jacob was not disappointed in seeking God's help for "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."
2. A refuge is a place to go for protection
3. To look around is to be distressed - to look within is to be depressed - to look up is to be blessed
4. Sometimes it is difficult to trust the Lord because we don't want to yield control of our lives to God. Having control gives us a sense of security
5. During World War II the part of the British Isles where John Phillips lived contained great steel works and shipyards. They were subjected to constant bombing. The air-raid siren would sound three times a night, the anti-aircraft guns would thunder, the bombs would come screaming down. He remembered his first air raid. His father hurried the four children downstairs and put them under the kitchen table! It was not a very secure shelter, but he hoped it would be some protection if the walls and roof caved in. Things became worse, however, and after one or two close calls his father decided that they should have a proper shelter. He dug a hole in the backyard, lined it with corrugated iron and covered it with a thick iron roof. Then he piled all the dirt from the hole on top of the roof for added protection, installed some bunk beds, some emergency rations, some buckets of water and they had a bomb shelter. It was "our refuge and strength," secure for anything except a direct hit.

The God Sought in This Prayer...

II. THE GUARANTEE CITED IN THE PRAYER - VS 9

9b ...the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee:

A. "Return to Thy Country"

1. God commanded Jacob to leave Padan Aram and return to his own country - Gen 31:13
2. Jacob was happy to leave the control of Laban
3. God's commandment always involves God's enablement
4. Jacob prayed the promises at the beginning of this prayer and at the end in vs 12

12 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.

5. We stand on firm ground when we plead God's promises in prayer
6. The will of God will never lead us where the power of God can't protect and provide for us

B. "I Will Deal Well With Thee"

1. This does not mean that everything will always be hunky-dorey
2. It does mean that at the end of the day all things will work together for good for those who love God and are the called according to His purposes
3. God has dealt well with me

C. Jacob Pleaded the Promises of God

1. "God, you promised to deal well with me..."
 - a) "Now I need You to keep that promise"
 - b) "I am about to meet Esau and I need you to keep Your promise to deal well with me."
2. We stand on firm ground in prayer when we can plead the promises in our requests

3. We need to become well acquainted with the promises if we are going to pray properly
4. Too many requests are pleaded on merit and other reasons but not upon divine promises
5. In the early days of our country a weary traveler came to the banks of the Mississippi River for the first time. There was no bridge. It was early winter, and the surface of the mighty stream was covered with ice. Could he dare cross over? Would the uncertain ice be able to bear his weight? Night was falling, and it was urgent that he reach the other side. Finally, after much hesitation and with many fears, he began to creep cautiously across the surface of the ice on his hands and knees. He thought that he might distribute his weight as much as possible and keep the ice from breaking beneath him. About halfway over he heard the sound of singing behind him. Out of the dusk there came a man, driving a horse—drawn load of coal across the ice and singing merrily as he went his way. Here he was—on his hands and knees, trembling lest the ice be not strong enough to bear him up! And there, as if whisked away by the winter's wind, went the man, his horses, his sleigh, and his load of coal, upheld by the same ice on which he was creeping!

Like this weary traveler, some of us have learned only to creep upon the promises of God. Cautiously, timidly, tremblingly we venture forth upon His promises, as though the lightness of our step might make His promises more secure. As though we could contribute even in the slightest to the strength of His assurances! He has promised to be with us. Let us believe that promise! He has promised to uphold us. Let us believe Him when He says so. He has promised to grant us victory over all our spiritual enemies. Let us trust His truthfulness. Above all, He has promised to grant us full and free forgiveness of all

our sins because of Jesus Christ, our Savior. And He has promised to come and take us to His heavenly home. Let us take Him at His word. We are not to creep upon these promises as though they were too fragile to uphold us. We are to stand upon them—confident that God is as good as His word and that He will do what He has pledged.

The Guarantee Cited in this Prayer....

III. THE GRACE HONORED IN THE PRAYER - VS 10

10a I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant...

A. Jacob was Not Worthy

1. This is one of Jacob's greatest statements
 - a) *He took a humble position here - this is not false humility*
 - b) *This was not exaggeration or hyperbole - it was the simple truth*
2. This statement gives great honor to the grace of God for it says that Jacob recognized that all his blessings are a result of God's grace
3. Jacob had not received what he deserved, instead he had been blessed by God

B. Self-Esteem is Big In Our Day

1. I am all for building up the self-esteem of children
 - a) *Encourage them*
 - b) *Pat them on the back when they do well*
 - c) *When a child brings home a paper with a good grade, put it on the fridge for all to see*
 - d) *Brag on the child when he does the right thing*
 - e) *Every child should have something that he is good at*
2. But when we stand before God we need humility, not self-esteem
 - a) *We have nothing that we can give to God*
 - b) *Our own righteousness is like filthy rags*

c) *Dump the self-esteem and come before God with humility*

c. You and I Are Not Worthy

1. You and I can say, along with Jacob, “I am not worthy of all the mercy and of all the truth...”
 - a) *We deserve God’s judgment and wrath*
 - b) *We deserve hell*
 - c) *But God in His grace makes us worthy through the blood of Christ*
2. There is no right to mercy - no one is entitled to mercy
 - a) *God does not owe us mercy*
 - b) *No one is worthy of God’s mercies*
3. Instead of getting what we deserve, God, in His grace, has given us what we don’t deserve
 - a) *God’s daily mercies*
 - b) *Forgiveness of all our sins*
 - c) *A home in heaven*
4. Salvation is by grace - Eph 2:8-9
8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is the gift of God:* 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.
5. Salvation comes by mercy, not by merit
Tit 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;
6. The best that you and I can do is not enough - Isa 64:6
6 But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags.....

The Grace Honored in This Prayer....

IV. THE GRATITUDE EXPRESSED IN THE PRAYER - VS 10B

10b ...for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.

A. Jacob Looked Back Twenty Years

1. Jacob lifted his heart in gratitude and praise to God for the great blessings from God
2. He acknowledged the great working of God in his life thus far
3. When Jacob arrived at Laban's home all he had was a pilgrim staff
4. From a staff to two bands showed how God had marvelously blessed Jacob so that he was returning as a wealthy man
5. Jacob was wise to include thanksgiving in his prayer

B. God Was the Source of Jacob's Blessings

1. It was not Jacob's genius that made him rich
2. If he had any genius it was from God
3. We need to recognize the source of our blessings
4. Many brag about what they have done
5. Any ability or wisdom that you have is from God - man has no reason to brag

C. Include Thanksgiving in Your Prayers

1. Think back to the early days when you were newly married and where you are now - the 3rd floor apartment
2. We are unworthy of divine favor
3. When we are praying for help we need to acknowledge the help that we have already received
4. God has been good to us

The Gratitude Expressed in the Prayer....

v. THE GUARDING REQUESTED IN THE PRAYER - VS 11

11 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. 12 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.

A. Jacob Took His Fears to God

1. This request came last - sometimes we put our requests first
 - a) *“Esau is coming with 400 men”*
 - b) *“I’m afraid of what he might do”*
 - c) *“He may kill my wives and children.”*
2. Jacob asked God to guard him and his family from Esau’s sword
3. It was a wise request and it was an answered request
4. Eventually Jacob’s sons will multiply and become the nation of Israel
5. Through Israel God would bring blessing to the world
 - a) *Jesus would come from the tribe of Judah and die for the sins of all who will be saved*
 - b) *Paul would come from the tribe of Benjamin and he would take the gospel to the Gentiles*

B. Jacob’s Prayer Answered - Gen 33:1-9

1 And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids. 2 And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost. 3 And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. 4 And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept. 5 And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, Who *are* those with thee? And he said, The children which God hath graciously given thy servant. 6 Then the handmaidens came near, they and their children, and they bowed

themselves. 7 And Leah also with her children came near, and bowed themselves: and after came Joseph near and Rachel, and they bowed themselves. 8 And he said, What *meanest* thou by all this drove which I met? And he said, *These are* to find grace in the sight of my lord. 9 And Esau said, I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself.

c. Believer, Take Your Fears to God

1. When you take your fears to God it is not a sign of weakness, but wisdom
2. Jacob had plenty of faults, but praying to God here is not one of them

Conclusion:

1. Pray humbly pleading the grace of God
2. Pray with gratitude remembering God's goodness to you
3. Take your fears and problems to the Lord reminding Him of His promises from His Word.
4. I have never forgotten a story I heard many years ago about Dr. George W. Truett. It is said that he would devote his Saturdays to prayer and preparation for the Lord's Day. Rarely did he take any appointments or answer the phone. One Saturday the phone began to ring. Truett at first ignored it but it kept ringing. He sensed that something might be wrong. Finally he picked up the phone and a voice on the other end asked, "Is this the radio preacher?" Truett replied that he was on the radio. The voice said: "Then meet me out in front of your house in ten minutes." Before Truett could respond the person on the other end hung up the phone.

Truett could tell by the tone of the voice on the phone that something was wrong so he decided that he would walk out front and wait for the caller. In a few minutes a car came speeding around the corner. It had almost come to a stop when a hand reached out and literally pulled Dr.

Truett into the car. At first, somewhat alarmed, Dr. Truett looked over at the driver and saw a man who looked like he hadn't shaved in several days. There were bags under his eyes and his clothes looked like they had been slept in." "What is going on here," Dr. Truett asked.

The man replied, "Preacher, you don't know me but I have heard you on the radio. I have a little 7-year old girl in the hospital and she is in bad shape." Then the man said, "Preacher, my little girl doesn't need a daddy anymore. She doesn't need a mommy anymore. She doesn't need a doctor anymore. My little girl needs someone who can get a hold of God in prayer."

The man took Dr. Truett to the hospital. When he walked in he saw a little girl lying on the bed. She looked like death had already staked her as his claim. She was laboring at her breathing. Sitting there beside the bed was a mother with a hopeless and desperate look on her face. "You have to pray for her, preacher. You have to pray for her," desperately cried the father.

Dr. Truett walked over to the bed and stood there looking down at that little girl laboring for each breath, with each looking as if it were her last. He thought, "How do I pray? This mom and dad is expecting me to do some miracle here. What should I pray?" He knelt down and took the little girl by the hand and then prayed a simple prayer, "Dear Lord, I believe we could sweep some souls into the kingdom if You were to touch this little girl."

Instead of leaving, Dr. Truett sat down in a chair in the corner and waited as the hours passed by. Every few minutes a doctor would come in and check on her and then walk out with that same hopeless look on his face. As the evening passed on, suddenly, the little girl's laborious breathing subsided. The doctor was called and he listened to her breathing through his stethoscope. He raised his head as if to say something and then

listened again. He then looked up and said, “I can’t explain it, but the crisis is over. She is going to make it.”

No sooner did the doctor speak those words when the dad, like a bullet out of a gun, rushed over to Dr. Truett and said, “Please preacher, tell me how I can know the God who just saved my little girl.” On his knees in that hospital room, that dad was saved. When Dr. Truett finished praying with him, he looked up and there stood a mother with tears streaming down her face. She said, “Preacher, I too need to know the God that has saved my little girl.” Kneeling there beside a weeping husband, she was saved.

Dr. Truett left the room and walked down the hall to get a drink of water. As he bent over to get a drink, a shadow fell over him. He turned and saw a doctor standing there, his lips quivering. He said to Truett, “Sir, I am a man of medicine and science, but what I have seen today is a miracle. I can’t deny what I have seen. Please, tell me how I can know the God that has done this miracle.” Standing there that doctor became another soul swept into the kingdom.