

THE HAND OF GOD IN THE LIFE OF JACOB
Genesis 32:9-12

Intro: I hope all of you have the habit of reading the biographies of men and women God has used in the past. Christian biographies can be the most rewarding reading that you can do. And I am not talking about books written about people who are still alive. Nor am I talking about every biography. Some are so light and superficial that they are a waste of time to read. But I am talking about the biographies of people like Hudson Taylor, George Mueller, Philip and Matthew Henry, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Charles Spurgeon, Amy Carmichael, Martyn Luther, John Calvin, and many, many others that fall into that category. If you are not reading these books, you are missing a great blessing--in fact, many, many blessings!

But there is another kind of biographies that surpass even those. And they are the biographies that you find in the Word of God. Actually, we do not have the complete story of anyone in the Bible--not even of our Lord Jesus Christ. Much is written about Abraham. Much is written about Moses, and about David. In the NT we have four books devoted to the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have much about Peter, much about John, much about Paul. But not a complete biography about any of them. Nevertheless, what we have, given by the Holy Spirit, is really priceless in its value.

I want to talk to you tonight about an OT Bible character about whom we know more than about many others who are mentioned in Scripture. But still we do not have his complete story. Yet we have enough for it to be well-worth our time in considering what the Lord has been pleased to give us.

I have taken as my subject, THE HAND OF GOD IN THE LIFE OF JACOB. That would be an excellent subject for the biography of any child of God. Our stories are the stories of the hand of God in our lives. That is true of all of us. But when we see how the Lord worked in the life of Jacob, we can get some help in understanding things that the Lord does in our lives. That is one reason those stories are there--so we will understand more about God's ways with us. We are all different from Jacob, and he was not exactly like any of us, yet we can learn as we see the hand of God in his life. And if we do not recognize God's hand, then we probably will profit very little from what is going on with us.

Let us begin by thinking a little about the life of Jacob up to this 32nd chapter of Genesis.

I. JACOB'S EARLY LIFE.

Genesis 25 tells about his birth--a twin--his older brother was Esau--his parents were Isaac and Rebekah--and they had been told before the twins were born that the blessing of God would be upon Jacob. He was in the line from Abraham down to Christ!

But there were problems in his life, and problems in the lives of his parents.

It was really a divided home:

- 1) Isaac preferred Esau.
- 2) Rebekah preferred Jacob.

The day came when Isaac decided to confirm the blessing of the firstborn upon Esau--a blessing which actually belonged to Jacob, according to what the Lord had made known to Rebekah before Esau and Jacob were born. This plan alarmed Rebekah because she knew that Jacob should have that blessing, so she devised a plan as to how she and Jacob could deceive Isaac whose eyes were bad.

Their plan carried through, but the result was that Esau was so mad, when he found out what his mother and Jacob had done, that he vowed he would kill Jacob just as soon as Isaac was dead. He hated Jacob for what Jacob had done.

The result was that Rebekah sent Jacob away, for what she thought would be just a few days, but he was gone for 20 years! During that time Rebekah evidently died. Jacob married two wives and two concubines, and he had 11 sons and 1 daughter.

After 20 years he decided to go back home. On the way a 12th son was born to him, and one of his wives, Rachel, died.

As we pick up his story in Genesis 32, Jacob was on his way home, and he was soon to face Esau, his brother, and he had been dreading that for 20 years because the last he had heard of Esau was that Esau wanted to kill him.

Jacob had sent messengers before him to meet Esau and the messengers informed him that Esau was coming with 400 men! That meant only one thing to Jacob: Esau was still of the same mind, and he was coming to kill him and his family. Jacob could not avoid meeting Esau, and so he took all of the precautions he could to protect his family, AND THEN HE DID THE ONLY THING THAT HE COULD DO: HE PRAYED!

II. THE PROVIDENCE OF A SOVEREIGN GOD.

It is God who directs the very footsteps of His children, even when they may not ask Him to do it, or be conscious of what He is doing.

The perfection of the saints is not just a NT truth; it is an OT truth as well. And Jacob needed the perfecting hand of God in His life. Jacob was like we are. There were many times in his life when he seemed to be able to handle things for himself. He did it in getting the blessing from Esau. He did it with his uncle Laban. And yet we are going to see as we consider his prayer that his time away from home had taught him some very important lessons about the hand of God in his life.

But the thing that we need to see as we come to Genesis 32:9 that it was God who eventually brought him to a situation over which he had no control--and he knew it! So he realized that the Lord was his only hope.

What a wonderful time in the life of any child of God when we come to the realization that we are in a position where, if the Lord does not help us, we have no one else to whom we can turn! That is when we really learn to pray, and then pray!

And so let us now consider . . .

III. JACOB'S PRAYER.

See it in Gen. 32:9-12.

One important part of the biography of any child of God is what it teaches about prayer--how that person learned to pray, what he said when he prayed, and whether or not God answered his prayers.

The different parts of Jacob's prayer are easy to pick out. What he knew about prayer before this, we do not know. God spoke to him at Bethel, but we do not have the record of anything that he said to God. But we have a prayer recorded here, and we want to consider it together.

There are seven distinct parts to this prayer which I want to call to your attention.

A. How he began--with God (v. 9a).

What rich comfort there was for him in reflecting upon God, and the names which God had chosen for Himself. This was not something God used to be, but He was this right now. What He had been to Abraham, and what He had been to Isaac, He was right then, and would be to

Jacob. And little did Jacob know at this time that his name would be linked with God's along with his father and his grandfather.

Let us always start our prayers with God.

B. He reminded the Lord of his Word (v. 9b).

I have been talking about some of the old-timers tonight, those who have gone before us in this life of faith. One thing that I have learned from them, and it is borne out by the Word, is that we are to turn the Word of God into prayer. If you pray Scripture, you know that you are praying according to the will of God. And if you pray according to the will of God, you know that God will hear you. Cf. 1 John 5:14, 15.

Why was Jacob there? For only one reason: the Lord had told him to go back home.

Now let me go from this to another point which is to be seen here, and it is a very important part of prayer.

C. The obedience of Jacob.

The Lord had told Jacob to go, and he went! He was approaching God as one who was obedient to the Lord. He had not always obeyed the Lord, but he was in this instance--and this gave him power in his praying.

Do you remember what the Apostle John wrote in 1 John 3:22? Listen to it.

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him,
because we keep his commandments,
and do those things that are pleasing
in his sight.

You know, we often want the Lord to do what pleases us, but we are not doing the things that are pleasing to Him. Can you say, in effect, what Jacob said in his prayer? Is the object of your life to please the Lord in all things?

We do not know very much about prayer if we have not seen the relationship between obedience and prayer, answered prayer.

D. Jacob humbled himself before the Lord (v. 10).

Look at what he said. (Read.)

To say that he was "not worthy" means that he felt small and insignificant in comparison with the great

blessings the Lord had poured out on his life. If you weighed the blessings, and then weighed Jacob, there was a great imbalance. God had blessed him far more than he deserved. In fact he said that he did not deserve the smallest blessing God had given to him. What would this mean about the greater blessings? It meant that he didn't deserve any of them!

"Truth" here probably means faithfulness. God had been good, merciful, faithful, generous--and Jacob had not deserved any of it!

What do you say about yourself in prayer? Or an even better test--how do you feel about yourself? Do you feel that God owes you a lot of things that you haven't gotten? Do you feel that you have gotten a rotten deal from the Lord? Remember that pride and prayer do not go together. We need to humble ourselves before God, not only when we pray, but we need to live that way.

But there is more.

E. His petition (v. 11).

Do you see how much entered into Jacob's prayer before he got around to mentioning the thing that was bothering him, and caused him to come to the Lord at this time. How shame we ought to be that we often begin with our requests, and never have anything but requests in our prayers.

The Lord wants us to bring our requests, but there is much more to prayer than just bringing our petitions to the Lord. How much better our request will sound even to us when it comes on down in our prayer like it did in Jacob's prayer.

Cf. Phil. 4:6, 7.

F. God's promise (v. 12).

Jacob's reference to the command of the Lord came in the first part of his prayer; the promise is reserved to the last. This is the way it ought to be. Is it with your prayers, and with mine?

It seems quite clear from the Scriptures that the Lord loves for us to remind Him of His Word--not that He has forgotten it, but He like to know that we have kept His promises in mind.

How great are God's promises! You will never find any promises like the promises of God. And He never makes a promise but what He intends to keep it, and is able to keep it! Remember that.

The promises of God show that the Lord's love for us, and His purposes for us, are too great for Him to leave us at the mercy of the Esaus that may be in our lives.

Concl: Have you learned anything tonight? How do your prayers compare with Jacob's? Why not begin tonight to put into practice some of the lessons that we have learned from Jacob's prayer.

One thing is certain: the hand of God can be seen in our lives if we have any spiritual perception at all, and one of the things that He is always doing is to order our circumstances so that we will need to come to Him, and will delight in coming to Him, and will rather go to Him than to try to rely on ourselves or on anyone else instead of Him.

Can we sing that hymn from our hearts which says,
Oh, the pure delight of a single hour
That before Thy throne I spend,
When I kneel in prayer, and with Thee, my God,
I commune as friend with Friend.