

## **Jacob Alone With God.**

Genesis 32: 24-32.

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In tracing the history of Jacob, and in contemplating his natural character, we are again and again reminded of the grace expressed in those words, "*Jacob have I loved.*" The question why God should love such a one, can only receive for an answer the boundless and sovereign grace of Him who sets His love upon objects possessing nothing of worth in themselves, and "who calls things that be not as though they were, that no flesh should glory in His presence." Jacob's natural character was most unamiable; his name indeed was at once the expression of what he was — "*a supplanter.*" He commenced his course in the development of this, his disposition, and until thoroughly crushed, as in these verses, he pursued a course of the merest bargain-making. On leaving his father's house, he makes a bargain with God. "If God," says he, "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; and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house, and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee" (Gen. 28: 20-22). Here we find him making a bargain with God Himself, the full evidence of what his real character was. Then again, mark him during the period of his sojourn with Laban; see there, what plans, what deep-laid schemes to promote his own ends. How plainly it is seen that *self* was the grand object before his mind, in all that he put his hand to. So it is in the course of this thirty-second chapter. He is deeply engaged in plans to turn away the dreaded wrath of his more manly, though badly treated, brother Esau.

But there is one circumstance with regard to Jacob in this chapter which deserves attention. He is seen labouring under the painful effects of a bad conscience, with regard to his brother; he knew that he had acted towards him in a way calculated to call out his anger and revenge, and he is therefore ill at ease at the prospect of meeting him. But God had a controversy with Jacob. He had to lead him through a course of education that was to teach him that "all flesh is grass." Jacob thought only of appeasing Esau by a present. True, he turns aside, in this chapter, to offer up confession and prayer, yet notwithstanding, it is manifest that his heart was engaged about his *own* arrangements for appeasing Esau, more than anything else. But God was looking at him in all this, and preparing a salutary course of discipline for him, in order to teach him what was in his heart. For this purpose was "*Jacob left alone.*" All his company, arranged according to his own plan, had passed on, and he himself was awaiting this much dreaded interview with no small degree of anxiety. There is peculiar force in the words, "*Jacob was left alone.*" Thus is it with all who have been trained in the school of God; they have been brought into the stillness and solitude of the Divine presence, there to view themselves and their ways, where alone they can be rightly viewed. Had Jacob continued amid the bleating of the sheep, and the lowing of the oxen, he could not by any means have enjoyed the same calm and sober view of himself and his past course, as he was led to in the secret of the presence of God. "*Jacob was left alone.*" Oh! there is no part of a man's history so important as when he is thus led into the solitude of the Divine presence; it is there he understands things which were before dark and inexplicable. There he can judge of men and things in their proper light; there, too, he can judge of self, and see its proper nothingness and vileness.

In Psalm 78 we find a soul looking abroad upon the world and reasoning upon what he saw there, — reasoning to such an extent, that he was almost tempted to say it was vain to serve the Lord at all.

In Psalm 77 we find a soul looking *inward*, and reasoning upon what he saw *within*, — reasoning to such an extent as to question the continuance of God's grace. What was the remedy in both cases? "*The sanctuary.*" I went into the sanctuary of God; and then understood. So it was with Jacob; his "sanctuary" was the lonely spot, where God wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.

The careful reader will find that this passage, when taken as it stands, affords no foundation for the popular idea, namely, that it furnishes an instance of Jacob's power in prayer. That no such idea is set forth will at once appear from the expression, "*There wrestled a man with him;*" it is not said that *he* wrestled with the man, which would give an entirely different aspect to the scene. I believe that, so far from its proving Jacob's power in prayer, it rather proves the tenacity with which he grasped the flesh, and the things thereof. So firmly indeed did he hold fast his "confidence in the flesh," that all night long the struggle continued. "The supplanter" held out, nor did he yield until the very seat of his strength was touched, and he was made to feel indeed that "all flesh is grass."

Such is the obvious teaching of this very important Scripture. Instead of Jacob's patience and perseverance in prayer, we have God's patience in dealing with one who needed to have his "*old man*" crushed to the very dust, ere God could make anything of him. This momentous scene gives us the grand turning point in the life of this extraordinary man. We are here reminded of Saul's conversion; Jacob, with the hollow of his thigh touched, like Saul, prostrate in the dust, between Jerusalem and Damascus. We observe, on the one hand, the broken fragments of "a supplanter," and the elements of God's mighty "Prince;" on the other hand, the fragments of a persecutor and injurious one, and the elements of God's mighty apostle.

And we may ask, What means the expression, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me"? What, but the utterance of one that had made the wondrous discovery that he was "without strength"? Jacob was let into the secret of *human weakness*, and therefore felt that it must be *Divine strength* or nothing. He thinks no more of his goodly plans and arrangements, his presents to appease my lord Esau. No; he stands withered and trembling before *the One* who had humbled him, and cries, "I will not let *Thee* go except Thou bless me." Surely, this is the gate of heaven! Jacob had, as it were, arrived at the end of *flesh*; it is no longer "*me*" but "*Thee*." He clings to Christ as the poor shipwrecked mariner clings to the rock. All self-confidence is gone, all expectations from self and the world blasted, every chain of self-devised security dissolved like a morning cloud before the beams of the sun. All his bargains availed him nothing at all. How miserable must everything that ever he did have seemed to him; yea, even his offer to give a tenth to God, when thus laid in the dust of self-abasement and conscious weakness! The mighty wrestler says, "Let me go, for the day breaketh." What a striking expression, "Let me go." He was determined to make manifest the condition of Jacob's soul. If Jacob had without delay let go his grasp, he would have proved that his heart was still wrapped up in his worldly plans and schemes; but, on the contrary, when he cries out, "I will not let Thee go," he declares that God alone was the spring of all his soul's joy and strength: he, in effect, says, "Whom have I in heaven but *Thee*? and there is none upon earth I desire beside *Thee*;" or, with the twelve, in the sixth chapter of John: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Blessed experience! So is it with the poor convicted soul; he may have been trusting in his own righteousness, as Jacob was in his goodly, well-devised plans; he may have been building upon his moral life; but, oh! when once the arrow of conviction has pierced him, has laid open his very soul, and told him *all* that ever he did, he trusts in self *no longer*; but exclaims with Job, "Now mine eye hath seen *Thee*; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." "I will not let *Thee* go except Thou bless me." Such will ever be the happy effect of a thorough acquaintance with our own hearts. Jacob now gets his name changed: he must not be any longer known as "the supplanter," but as "*a prince*,"

having *power* with God through the very knowledge of his *weakness*; for, "when I am *weak*, then am I *strong*." We are never so strong as when we feel ourselves weak, even as "water spilt upon the ground, that cannot be gathered up again;" and, on the contrary, we are never so weak as when we fancy ourselves strong. Peter never displayed more lamentable weakness than when he fancied he had uncommon strength: had he felt somewhat of Jacob's happy condition when his sinew shrank, he would have thought, acted, and spoken differently.

We should not turn from this passage, without at least seeing distinctly what it was that gave Jacob "power with God and with man;" it was the full consciousness of his own nothingness. Who that hearkens for a moment to those precious words, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me," and beholds the humbled patriarch clinging closely to the One who had broken him down, can fail to see that Jacob's "power" consisted in his "*weakness*?" There is nothing here of Jacob's power in prayer. No: all we see is, first, Jacob's strength in the flesh, and God weakening him; then, his weakness in the flesh, and God strengthening him. This is indeed the great moral of the scene. Jacob was satisfied to go "*halting*" on his journey, seeing he had learnt the secret of true strength. He was able to move along, using the words afterwards uttered by St. Paul: "I will, therefore, gladly glory in my *infirmities*, that the *power of Christ* may rest upon me." Yes, "*my infirmities*" on the one hand, and "*the power of Christ*" on the other, will be found to constitute the sum total of the life of a Christian.

I would observe, that there seems to be a marked connection between the spirit of this instructive passage and that of Galatians 6: 16: "As many as walk according to *this rule*, peace be on them and mercy, and upon *the Israel of God*." What rule? "The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is God's rule. It is not "circumcision or uncircumcision, but a new creature." (*kaine ktisis*) This the rule which distinguishes the Israel of God; this the grand distinction between "the supplanters" and "the princes:" the former trust in *the flesh*, the latter "*in the cross*." The Israel of God have ever been identified with weakness in themselves, like Jacob halting along, having the sentence of death written in their flesh. Thus the apostle goes on to say: "From henceforth let no one trouble me; for *I bear in my body* the marks of the Lord Jesus." (*stigmata tou kuriou*) So did Jacob bear in his "body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Nor was he at all ashamed of them; because, while they were at once the marks of *Jacob's weakness*, they were also the marks of *Israel's strength*. Blessed strength! May we know more and more of it daily.

I would only observe, in conclusion, that Esau was not met by *Jacob*, but by *Israel*, and as a consequence, all was peace and sunshine — the difficulty vanishes, the danger disappears. God, who had crushed Jacob's "*old man*," exercised an influence on Esau's mind, else the consequences might have been terrible. How happy it is for us when we can thus meet difficulties at the other side of the cross. Jacob had been *alone* with God, and could therefore be *alone* with Esau.