

Jacob Prays

HN 28/03/04 pm

Read: Genesis 32, Matthew 6

Study: Genesis 32:1-12

Psalms: 102:1-3,11-12, 102:13-18, 27:1-4, 27:78

Are you concerned about what lies ahead of you in life – worried about tomorrow? We often fear the unknown. What if this or that happens – how will I manage? Sometimes we are fearful of some person. We worry what they may think about us or what they might do to us. If so you will be able to identify with Jacob and learn from his experience.

Having just escaped the clutches of Laban, Jacob was now looking into the jaws of his brother Esau. His future was very uncertain. He was on his way home, looking forward to being back with his mother and father – but there was still that unknown factor – Esau. Would he still be breathing out murderous threats or would time have calmed his spirit.

It had been 20 years since Jacob fled Esau's threats. Surely he had got over things you might think – but not necessarily. Sadly some people can hang onto bitterness and anger all their lives and even pass it on to their children. Would Esau be such a person.

As Jacob is about to enter the land of his fathers his thoughts are focused upon Esau. In this context we see:

The Visitation of the Angels of God

Angels, messengers of God, met Jacob on the way. This was not the first time he had seen angels – the previous time was in the dream at Bethel. Abraham had also been visited by angels – they went on to warn Lot who was living in Sodom. Jesus was visited by an angel in Gethsemane – *an angel appeared to him from heaven strengthening Him* (Luke 22:43).

These angels were probably for the strengthening of Jacob. There were a number of them, but they say nothing. Rather Jacob comments – *This is God's camp*. And he called the place *Mahanaim* meaning double/two camps.

What are the two camps you ask? We have just had the two camps of Laban and Jacob separating at the witness heap. We see ahead to the camps of Jacob and Esau. And here in this passage Jacob divides his own group into two camps – was this in response to this vision?

But Jacob said *this is God's camp*. What did he mean? Probably he saw a host of angels protecting him as he went on his way. Camps on either side of him, or Gods camp and his camp. God was strengthening him.

Message of Conciliation

Somehow Jacob knew that Esau now lived in the land of Seir, south of the Dead Sea. Seir means 'shaggy'. It was also called the land of Edom after Esau. Jacob sent messengers ahead to meet Esau. He told them to be diplomatic and humble before Esau. Jacob knew the Lord was with him and had blessed him so he could be humble before men.

He referred to Esau as his 'master' and himself as 'servant'. The messengers were to tell Esau that he had been with Laban all these years. Moreover, he was no longer destitute but had ample possessions. He was more or less seeking Esau's permission to enter the land, acknowledging his temporal rule – even though Jacob had the birthright blessing.

Did they actually meet Esau? They *came to* him we read but they bring no message back to Jacob. It seems they

saw him coming with 400 men and fled. The only message they bring to Jacob is what they saw. Great fear came upon Jacob. He was distressed. He quickly prepared for the worst.

Was Esau coming with evil intent at this stage? Was Jacob jumping to conclusions, thinking only of the worst possible outcome? We are prone to think the worst are we not. But if that brings us to the Lord in prayer as we see with Jacob then well and good. Sometimes the Lord does bring us to times of uncertainty, times when we fear what tomorrow will bring – that we might trust him more.

Too many in our society have a false sense of security. They think that financial security or job security is everything. They think that with these they can control their future. But how often do we hear the cry – how could this happen to me or life is unfair – when trouble afflicts them. Still many continue in this deception of the devil – everything will be alright.

Jacob knew his future was uncertain so he came to the Lord in prayer.

Prayer

Jacob took some immediate steps to protect his people and possessions, but then turned to the Lord in prayer. Esau was coming with 400 men. What did Jacob have? Oxen, donkeys, flocks and servants! Who would help him. Who would come to his aid.

Wonderfully we find Jacob in prayer for the first time in his life – and indeed we have here the most extensive prayer so far in the OT. It is a prayer that we can learn from. It is a prayer that in many respects is reflected in the prayer the Lord taught his disciples.

Reverence

Jacob addresses God with reverence and awe. He addresses God clearly and precisely. He calls God by name YHWH – Lord. He identifies Him as the God of his fathers. There is no ambiguity here – no polytheism, no pantheism.

I was reading the other day of a Christian leader who prayed in some ecumenical meeting. He closed his prayer with the words 'in the name of the great leader'. He probably prayed to the great spirit. This is what we find in some places – deliberate ambiguity.

Jacob spoke to the Lord as his personal God, the God of his fathers. And he spoke to him as the Almighty God. *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.* Jesus told us to pray to God as our Father – *Abba Father*. He also spoke of him as the transcendent God- the God who is in heaven. Hallowed or holy be the name of God. We come before the Lord who is king – king over the heavens and the earth.

Remember when you pray that you are praying to the Almighty God of creation, of salvation and of judgment. How wonderful that we can come before him as our personal God – to come before the Lord. We come through our mediator Jesus Christ.

Recall

Recall the promises of God. Jacob remembered the promise given by God just a few weeks before (v. 9) and also a promise given 20 years before (v. 12). Calvin refers to these as the two pillars of this prayer. They certainly do give Jacob confidence and a 'holy boldness' (Calvin) as he comes before the Lord.

In 31:3 the Lord called upon Jacob to return to the land of his fathers and promised *I will be with you*. Jacob recalled this promise as he came before the Lord in prayer. At the end of his prayer he recalled an earlier promise, one given at Bethel. The Lord promised to treat him well and give him many descendants.

As he prayed the Lord brought these promises to his memory. They gave him confidence in prayer and the assurance he desperately needed. See how prayer and study of God's word go together. Praying on the run, while walking or driving is not sufficient – not just because you can't close your eyes!. The word of God is the foundation to effective prayer. For in his Word God reveals himself, his nature and his promises.

In Psalm 27 we saw David in prayer. He had gone to the house of the Lord to behold, the beauty of the Lord and to inquire of Him there. He knew the Lord and his will. *Those who come to God must believe that he exists and rewards those who diligently seek him* (Hebrews 11).

Moses also prayed on the basis of Gods revealed will. He pleaded with the Lord on the basis of this same promise made at Bethel (Exodus 32). He pleaded for God not to destroy His people after they sinned by making the golden calf. Nehemiah and Daniel prayed in the same manner.

Do we need to be more aware of God promises that we might pray with more boldness?

Repent

Jacob did not come boasting his merits. He did not come claiming his rights. No – he came humbly before the Lord. He said *I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies* you have shown me. He speaks of the grace and truth which the Lord has shown to him. Jacob came repenting of his sin as he examined his own life, his own heart, in the light of God word to him.

Jesus taught us to pray *forgive us our sins*. We must acknowledge our sin and confess our sin when we come before the Lord, for sin separates us from God. We must come humbly recognizing our unworthiness to stand before him. We must plead forgiveness in the name of Jesus Christ. His merits alone we can plead not ours.

Request

Deliver me I pray from the hand of my brother. This was Jacob's sincere and earnest request. Jacob feared for himself and his family as Esau approached. He was knocking at the knees we might say. And someone has said, when your knees knock kneel on them.

Jacob knelt before the Lord humbly, yet confident that the Lord would hear Him because he knew the Lord and His promises. His prayer was not simply 'Lord deliver me from Esau'. His request was founded upon the promises of God.

Deliver us from evil / evil one Jesus told us to pray. We may not be facing an Esau at present, but we do face the enemy of our souls, Satan himself and death. How we need to watch and pray that we do not fall into temptation. We cannot fight alone. We must call upon the Lord as Jacob did. What a wonderful privilege it is to be able to come before the Lord in times of need.

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