

Lessons from Jacob's Prayer (Genesis 32:9-12)

By A. W. Pink

There is not a little in the prayer of Jacob which is worthy of close attention, the more so as it was a prevailing prayer, and that it is the *first* recorded real prayer in the Bible.

"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 showed 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 32:9-12.)

First, the God to whom he prayed. He approached God not merely as God the Creator, but as "the God of his father Abraham and the God of his father Isaac." It was God in *Covenant relationship*. This was laying hold of the Divine faithfulness; it was the prayer of faith. It means much to approach God thus; to appeal to Him on the ground of a sure and established relationship. *We come before God not as the God of our forefathers, but as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore our "God and Father."* It is as we plead *this* relationship He is pleased to bless us.

Second, Jacob *cast himself on the sure Word of Jehovah*, pleading before Him His promise. He humbly reminded the Lord how He had said, "Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee." Here again we do well to learn from Jacob. The Scriptures contain many promises given to believers in general, and it is our individual privilege to plead them before God in particular, the more so when, like our patriarch, we encounter difficulties and opposition in the way wherein He has directed us to walk. Jacob pleaded a definite promise; so must we. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 we read, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Come to the Throne of Grace at the beginning of each day, reverently and believably remind the Lord of this declaration of His, and then say with one of old, "Do as Thou hast said" (2 Samuel 7:25). Again, we read in Philippians 4:19, "My God shall supply all your need." Tell the Lord of this in the hour of emergency, and say, "Lord, do as Thou hast said."

Third, Jacob *fully acknowledged his own utter lack of desert [worthiness]*. He confessed that the Lord was in no wise *his* debtor. He took a lowly place before the Most High. He owned that "*he was not worthy of the least* of all God's mercies." Mark this well, dear reader, for very little teaching is heard in these days that leads to self-abasement. It has become a rarity to hear a saint of God confessing his unworthiness. There is so much said about living on a high plane of spirituality, so much Laodicean boasting, that many are afraid to acknowledge before other believers that *they* are "not worthy of the least of God's mercies." One sometimes wonders if this is the chief reason why so few of us have any real power in prayer today. Certain it is that we must get down into the dust before God if we would receive His blessing. We must come before Him as empty-handed supplicants, if He is to fill us. We must own our ill deserts, and be ready to receive from Him on the ground of grace *alone* if we are to have our prayers answered.

Finally, notice *the motive* which actuated Jacob in presenting the petition he did. That for which he made request was expressed as follows: "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." At first glance, it would appear that our patriarch was moved by nothing higher than the natural affections of the human heart. It would seem that this was the petition of a kind husband and a tender father. But as we re-read this request of Jacob in the light of the closing words of his prayer, we shall discover he was prompted by a far worthier and higher motive. He at once added, "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." In this conclusion to the prayer, we may see not only a further pleading of God's promise, but an eye to *God's glory*. Jehovah had promised to make Jacob's seed as the sand of the sea, but if his wife and children were slain how then could God's promise be fulfilled! Now it is natural, and by no means wrong, for us to be deeply concerned over the salvation of our loved ones; but our chief concern must center itself not in the well being of those who are united to us by the ties of blood or intimate friendship, but for *the glory of God*. "*Whatsoever ye do* (in prayer, as in everything else) *do all to the glory of God*" — to this everything else must be subordinated. Here, then, is a searching test: Why am I so anxious to see certain ones saved? — Simply because they are near and dear to me? Or that God may be glorified and Christ magnified in their salvation? May Divine grace purge us of selfishness and purify our *motives* in prayer. And may God use these few words and cause both writer and reader to cry, with ever increasing fervor, "Lord, teach us to pray."