

Bethel
Genesis 27-28

Introduction

Jacob had stolen Esau's birthright, and in today's passage he steals Esau's blessing by deceiving their blind father. This time Esau realized what he had been robbed of, and Jacob had to flee for his life. It was when he was on the run, that God met him at Bethel.

Discord in a home

We get quite a shocking picture of the home where Jacob grew up. It is all the more shocking when we know that this was the family chosen by God to be a blessing to the world and from whom the Messiah would come. Jealousy, plots, counter-plots, threats of murder, escape from danger, with everyone involved – mother, father and both sons.

First of all, father Isaac had plotted. He knew that God had purposed that his elder son would serve the younger son, and the younger son had already acquired the birthright. But Isaac foolishly tried to turn the clock back and thwart God's purposes and give his elder son his blessing. He found Esau to be a willing partner. Then mother Rebekah, listening behind the door, made a counter-plot to stop her husband's plan and make sure the younger son got the greater blessing. Then there was deceit in putting animals skins on neck and hands to deceive the blind father. And the outright lie of Jacob, when he told his father that he was Esau – not just once, but twice. Once the lies started, there was no going back, the thing escalated.

Eventually the deceit was found out, Esau was filled with disappointment, bitterness, and thoughts of murder. There was not much love and harmony in that home. You would not have wanted to be their next-door neighbours. The sins and mistakes of that episode were never really overcome. They dogged their footsteps for the rest of their days. Things were never the same again. Jacob did receive a taste of his own medicine later, when his uncle Laban deceived him into marrying the wrong sister.

There is not a home where some sort of shadow isn't cast. What is the source of problems? Where do things go wrong in homes, lives and relationships? Everything depends on who rules in the life. We see it when God has no place in a family, and His plans and purposes are of no account. Sadly, in some Christian homes, where the motto "Christ is the head of this house" is on the walls, the truth does not seem to be evident. It is only a reality when each individual in the home has Christ as the head in their lives.

All Christians need to be reminded that in their hearts there is a cross and a throne. When Christ is on the cross and self is on the throne, wanting his own way, drawing attention to himself, on the defensive, asserting self, difficulties are bound to arise. Only when Christ is on the throne and self is on the cross, does real Christian living begin. Make sure Christ is on the throne, Lord of your life, undisputed ruler. Say

“Yes” to Jesus everywhere, always, and regardless of the consequences – though it may entail loss of friendships, money, position, and involve radical changes in your plans.

D.L.Moody said, “I have more trouble with myself than with any other man.” This basic principle of Christian living – Christ on the throne and self on the cross – would transform many defeated Christian lives, unhappy Christian homes, and badly done Christian work. Who is on your throne?

Revelation of grace

So deceit was practiced, a death threat was issued, and Jacob had to run for his life. He set off to meet his uncle Laban in Haran. Rebekah never saw her favourite son again – that was the price she paid for her deceit. And Isaac, who lived for fifty more years, fades out of the picture. No more is recorded about him.

On going into exile, Jacob plans to find a wife – and he finds much much more. God drew near to him in grace, revealed Himself to him, and Jacob learnt lessons that lasted him for the rest of his life. How perfectly God chose His time. Jacob was lonely, it was probably his first time away from home, his life was threatened, his future unknown, it was night, and he had no shelter or pillow for rest. Then God speaks to him.

At Bethel Jacob had a vision of a ladder with angels of God ascending and descending. The ladder reminded him of the distance between him and God, yet the possibility of being in touch with God. (Picture of Christ as mediator between God and man). The ladder went from the presence of God right down to his deepest need. God made a gracious promise to Jacob. **I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you** (Genesis 28:25). God promised Jacob His company for the future, assumed full responsibility for him, promised to answer all his needs, and relieve him of all anxiety for the future. These things would no longer depend on his tired brain, failing strength or feeble resources. He was absolutely secure in the Lord’s hands.

The loneliest spot on earth or the most crowded place, God is there. **So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"** (Hebrews 13:6). The whole picture of Jacob at Bethel is a marvellous illustration of the grace of God - the undeserved mercy of God to a man, who had sinned, was on the run, with no thought of God, deserving nothing. With a great act of condescension, God drew near. Jacob discovered God’s sufficiency in one of life’s darkest hours. God overruled mistakes and sins, taught him deeper lessons, and he came under God’s knowledge and care. God led him onto a richer and fuller life, patiently bearing with Jacob’s stubbornness and folly.

This is a picture of the full and sufficient salvation that is ours in the Lord Jesus, and the work of the Holy Spirit in giving new birth and life. God overrules our mistakes and follies of the past, gathers up troubles, and weaves them into the pattern for our lives. Learn to thank Him when He has dealt with you as He did with Jacob. Recall a time when the outlook is grim, you were on your own, your lonely life was shattered,

things were wrong with relationships with others, and you had come to an end of yourself. All earthly props had been knocked away, and you discovered that all you needed was to be found in Him, in His love and sufficiency. And remember how, since you came to know Him, how patiently He has borne with your stupidity, pig-headedness, and self-will.

How all these experiences beckon us to follow on to know the Lord, escape from ourselves and cares, to be at leisure and quiet with Him. Be still and know He is God. We do not know how much of life is left, but for the rest of our time on earth, see that the most important thing is to yield selves to Him, wait on Him, be filled from His fullness, taught and led by Him. Seek Him with all your heart. Ask Him to take you up into His purposes, and live in the centre of His will. Ever remember that ladder of access from your deepest need into the presence of God, that immediate and free connection from earth to heaven through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because of grace, **all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God** (1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

Consecration of a life

As a result of this spectacular manifestation of God, Jacob made a vital discovery. He realized God is everywhere. So far he had thought of God as in his father's tents. Now he knew God is everywhere - on the bleak moorland at Bethel in the heart of Palestine, as well as in more familiar scenes. His spiritual eyes were open now. How blind he had been before. **"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."** (Genesis 28:16,17).

If only we realized that this is true wherever we are. Materialism and secularism of our age influences us and blinds our eyes. If we were full of God and spiritually sensitive we would feel that every spot is sacred and every moment is hallowed. In every incident we should see a ladder stretching up to heaven. What a difference it would make in our lives if we were conscious of God's presence in all that happens to us and in every place we find ourselves. When in a lonely room in pain, in that irksome and annoying situation, when bearing a bitter cross, when in the world and mixing with people far from God - God is there, and has been there all the time if only we had realized it. We can be in touch with Him there, just as much as when we are in church or in our own home.

No wonder Jacob was gripped with godly fear. It does not mean he was terrorized, but had a deep reverence in his spirit, and was anxious to do nothing that would grieve his Lord. A fear which distrusts self and clings to Christ. The whole incident constrained him to give himself back to God. He got up early, and the stone he had used as a pillow he now set up as a pillar, poured oil on it, and called the place "Bethel" - "The house of God". **Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the Lord will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth."** (Genesis 28:20-22).

Here was Jacob's response to God's grace and all the promised blessings. He consecrated himself to God. From this moment onwards, he was God's. He had God, and God had him. He belonged entirely to God. He no longer lived to himself but to God.

When a man makes this decision and commitment, when he ceases to live for himself and is 100% given to God, he discovers God's power and God's peace. All he gives to the Lord, the Lord takes and cleanses and uses. Then having given all he is, Jacob gave all he had. His property belonged to the Lord, so of all God had given him, he promised to give back a tenth. He was a generous and systematic giver. This is a good pattern for us all to follow. We know from elsewhere that Jacob was not the loser because of his giving. When we cease to rob God of our tithes and offerings, He pours us out a blessing so that we do not have room enough to receive it.

Conclusion

We see God's power to shape and change a man. God makes Himself known, reveals His grace, and keeps and protects His people. But we have to be in the Lord's hands to know this blessing, without reservations, and totally, and forever.