

Jacobs Prayer of Faith

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 April 2008

Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn just for a little to the chapter we read in Genesis, chapter 32, and reading at verse 26.

Then he said, Let me go, for the day is broken. But Jacob said, and it's these words in particular, I will not let you go unless you bless me. I will not let you go unless you bless me.

And there's no doubt whatever that here we have a very small prayer, but a truly wonderful prayer. And I hope there is a prayer that every person in here prays.

And I hope you pray it with the urgency and with the fervor and with the faith that Jacob prayed it with. Because there's no doubting whatever that Jacob's whole heart was in that prayer.

It's a short prayer. And let us remember that that is the important thing about prayer. It's the heart. It's not the length. It's not the quality of the words. It's the heart.

[1 : 09] And that's what Jacob had in abundance. He had heart. And he prayed in faith. Now, as we know, there were many crises in Jacob's life, many pivotal moments, many turning points.

And this certainly was one of them. It was a momentous moment in Jacob's experience. And really an experience where Jacob was never quite the same afterwards. It was one of these life-changing moments.

Now, we'll look at a little of the background, but I'm not going to spend too long. And I'm not going to look at this particular section because I've looked at that before. I really want to home in on these particular words of this particular prayer.

But obviously a wee bit about the background, one we're all familiar with. And we remember how Jacob had to run from home after stealing, so to speak, his brother's, the special blessing, you could say, from under his brother's nose.

And he had to run from home. And it was very difficult for Jacob because when he left home, he left home with nothing. In fact, when he's speaking to the Lord in this very chapter, he is reminding the Lord of how he left home with nothing.

[2 : 22] He's coming back. He's crossing the Jordan here, crossing this brook Jabbok. And he's reminding the Lord. He said, the last time I crossed this, I had nothing but the stick that I had, the staff.

I went out empty. I had nothing because he was on the run. He's coming back now, a very wealthy, very prosperous man. And he is acknowledging, and that's a great thing to do.

We should always acknowledge when God helps us and God provides. And that's what happened in Jacob's experience. There were times it was difficult. There were times, remember how his uncle Laban kept doing him and kept diddling him out of what was his.

But in the end, God prospered him and he came back a very wealthy man. But when Jacob ran away, he had nothing. And I'm sure we all remember that night where he lay down the very first night when he was on the run.

A lonely, home-loving boy, a young man. And there how he had that wonderful dream where he saw the ladder from heaven and the angels ascending and descending and the Lord at the top of the ladder.

[3 : 28] And remember how the Lord gave him that great promise that the Lord would be with. It must have been music to Jacob's ears where the Lord said, I'll be with you wherever you go. Isn't that wonderful?

And he said, I'll bring you back again to this land. Can you imagine the thrill in the heart of Jacob at that moment?

Here he is, he's running away, doesn't know whether he'll ever get back home again. He's got nothing. But the Lord is saying, look, I'm with you. I'm in a covenant relationship with you. And that

covenant relationship means that I will never leave you.

I will never forsake you. I'll be with you wherever you go. And I'm going to take you back home again. Well, many years had passed. And here we are, Jacob, and he's on his way home.

And what a comfort to Jacob when you think of that particular night when the Lord spoke to him. And the Lord fulfilled to him, to the very last letter, that promise. You know, I could just say for one moment to young people here, if you are being brought up under Christian influence or brought up with Christian influence in the home, thank the Lord for it.

[4 : 41] There might be one or two of you in here today who, for differing reasons, resent it. And you wish that it wasn't like that. And you're saying to yourself, I wish that I could do what I wanted.

I wish I could go where I wanted. I wish that I didn't have to have a time of prayer in the home. I wish that I didn't have to come to church.

My friend, never, ever, ever think like that. Thank the Lord. And I assure you that in later years, if you are spared, you will thank the Lord for every Christian influence that has been brought into your life.

Nothing of greater value or greater significance or greater importance can be brought into your young life. And there's no doubt but that Jacob had that, and the Lord gave him this great promise. Now, as we said, many years had passed, and God had blessed Jacob in many ways, and Jacob is returning home. And, of course, the great fear in Jacob's heart was, although many years had gone by, how would his brother react?

[5 : 52] Because the last time he had seen his brother, his brother was threatening to kill him. That's why he had to run away. And he wondered, I wonder how my brother, my twin brother, Ezo, is.

Is he still planning to kill me? Is he still bearing these grudges after what I did? So Jacob didn't know what was happening.

But, of course, the problem was that Jacob, this fear greatly intensifies when word comes to him that his brother, Ezo, who must have had word that Jacob was returning, comes to meet him with 400 men.

And Jacob thought to himself, that's an army. And there's just, here I am with my family and my servants. What can I do against that? And you can see Jacob's real fear.

Here he is at the borders of the promise that the Lord has given him. And you know how like, how like life that is.

[6 : 55] You know, when the Lord gives us his word, and when we have God's word and God's promise, it will be often, not always, but often challenged. And particularly when the promise is about to be fulfilled.

That was going to, Jacob was at the very border of receiving the promise, where God had said to Jacob, I will take you back home. And here he is, as it were, on the very doorstep of his land.

He's, as it were, ready to cross over back into that land that God said he would take him back to. And here it seems this very life is being threatened. And the intensity of the struggle.

My dear friends, that happens so often in our experiences, as Satan will try and wage war against us. And of course, Jacob reacts like this, and it drives him to prayer.

And, you know, we can actually say, I wonder how often, how often would we actually fall before the Lord in intense prayer, were it not for the troubles that come into our lives.

[8 : 05] I'm not just talking about the prayer in general, but that urgent prayer, that fervent prayer, that prayer where you are going to do business with the Lord, that kind of prayer that we find Jacob involved in, how often would we engage in that type of prayer, were it not for the troubles, the sorrows, the pains, the difficulties that come into our life.

And I believe that's one of the reasons why the Lord allows these things into our life, in order to bring us to himself. Because far too often, we don't go.

And it's not just the pressures of life and the demands of time. But there is a heart of unbelief. There is within us, despite grace, there is still a rebellious nature that somehow is not in a hurry to go to God.

Might be a wee word here and a wee word there. But where we spend time with God, how often would we go to devote time to be alone with the Lord in real prayer, were it not, that we're driven there by our troubles and by our problems.

Because we've got to remember that the Lord has saved us. If you're here today as a believer, the Lord has saved you. Not simply that you will live a different way of life. He has brought you to himself in order that you will become more like him in this world.

[9 : 41] That is his great purpose, to conform you to the image of his Son. That's what God is doing. He is conforming you more and more to Christ, to the image of Christ, as a mediator, as your Savior.

And that is his purpose, in order to reflect Christ in this world, in order that your life will glorify God. That's what he's about.

That's what God is working in your life. That is what he is doing. And so we find here, Jacob is going to the Lord in this crisis.

And Jacob is reminding the Lord of all that he has told him and all that he has promised him. And you know, there's a wonderful honesty about Jacob's prayer. Jacob is sharing with the Lord his hopes and his fears.

And that's what we should do as well. That's what God wants us to do, to be honest with him. Tell him about our disappointments. Tell him about our anxieties and our fears.

[10 : 44] Tell him about the things that we don't understand. The things that have gone crisscross and all mixed up in our life. Tell him how we feel about, even about himself.

If you're here today as a believer and you're struggling, tell him. Do you know the worst thing that you can do if you're a believer is not to talk to the Lord in this way. To as it were, just say, oh well, I've drifted a bit, there's no point in going to the Lord just now.

No. That's the worst thing you can do. Go and tell him, Lord, I'm drifting, I'm struggling. I remember a day when I was a lot closer, but Lord, I've drifted off.

Tell him that. It's so important that the lines of communication are open. And the Lord will deal with us if we are open and honest with him. That's what we find with Jacob, the Lord, that he's so open, he's honest, he's pouring out his heart to the Lord.

Then we find in verse 24 how Jacob has sent all his family, his servants, everybody's on ahead and there's just himself. And we find that this spot by the river becomes a place of an epic struggle.

[11 : 59] And this, of course, has a profound effect upon the rest of Jacob's life. And so I said, I'm not going to spend time looking at this, but just to say that there was this man who wrestled with Jacob right throughout the night.

And we believe that this, this was the angel of the covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ, a theophany where Christ has taken on the appearance of a man.

Now, as Jacob wrestled throughout the night with the Lord, I do not believe that he was simply praying about his fears regarding Esau.

I believe that this was where the Lord is dealing with Jacob, where he is subduing Jacob, where he is working powerfully and mightily in Jacob's life because there are a lot of things that needed ironing out in Jacob's life.

I believe it was one of these momentous times where Jacob's life, these last number of years, were all leading up to this particular point. Jacob was a believer before this. I am fully persuaded of that.

[13 : 03] Don't doubt it for one moment. But this is a momentous time and the Lord is at work. And Jacob, there is a picture here of Jacob resisting and Jacob wrestling and Jacob fighting against.

And my friend, that is what we do as well. There is no need looking there at Jacob and saying, oh Jacob, what on earth? Why don't you just submit? Well, why don't you?

Why don't I? Just submit to the Lord. Far too often we don't. We may today be Christians and we've given our life to the Lord, but have we given all our life?

Are there not little corners here and little corners there in our life and we say, hey, oh no, I want to be in control of this. I don't want to give up everything. I still want to be able to have a bit of control of my life.

If I give up everything, you see, there's a fear in our lives where we don't want to part with everything. That is within the heart of the believer.

[14 : 15] And if you're honest with yourself here today, I believe you can identify with this. There's still little corners, little parts.

And you're having, with your hand on your heart, that you have to say, Lord, I still haven't given myself holly to you. And I believe this is what the Lord is doing.

He's right. He's dealing with Jacob at this particular time. And Jacob is fighting against. And of course, it's a momentous struggle. Struggling is difficult. Wrestling is difficult.

It's exhausting. If you were wrestling with somebody, there's not only the force and momentum and power of your own movement, but that of the opponent. It's one of the most exhausting things.

So Jacob goes on until the break of day. And then the Lord, as we were, just puts out his hand and touches the hollow of his thigh, touches his thigh, his hip bone.

[15:20] And it goes out of joint. He puts Jacob just at that, just at touch. You see, the Lord could have done that right away. That's not the Lord. The Lord doesn't work like that. You know, sometimes we think when a person is converted that it's as if the Lord takes everything and just straight away you're made perfect.

Just in a moment. Just like that. Polished. The full glowing diamond. That's not the way it works. It's a day by day, year by year progression.

The Lord is working a little bit here and a little bit there. And that's what he's doing with Jacob. Of course he could have brought Jacob into instant submission, but that's not the way.

But then, when the Lord puts his hand out against Jacob, that's it. In a moment. He's disabled. And my dear friend, I hope all of us here are under the mighty hand of God.

Don't resist the Lord. If you're here today without the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, don't resist him. Because the Lord is speaking to you in the gospel. He calls to you in his word.

[16:33] Don't resist. Don't put up the barriers. Don't reject. Don't put your fingers as it were in your spiritual ears and close your ears to the appeal of the gospel.

rather ask that the Lord will become your Lord, your God, your Savior, so that he will, you will find that life that we were speaking about last week.

But then, we find that Jacob, he turns to the Lord and he says to him, I will not let you go until you bless me.

I will not let you go until you bless me. And it's here we see this, what we may term, the determination of faith in Jacob. That he is not going to let the Lord go until he will bless him.

Do you have that? Is that the way you speak to the Lord? Do you have that determination of faith?

Or do you go to the Lord and ask the Lord to bless or to do something and then you just, as it were, go instantly away from the Lord and forget about it?

[17:42] Now, Jacob, there's this incredible faith. And this is a kind of pleading that the Lord will listen to.

You remember, I suppose, in a sense, it's like, remember those on the road to Emmaus? and as Jesus walked with them, their heart began to burn and they were saying to themselves, oh, this is wonderful.

As Jesus opened up the scripture and as he taught them, their hearts burned and then eventually they reached the house they were going to. They reached their destination.

And it tells us Jesus made us if he would have gone further. but it tells us they said to him, abide with us and the word that is used, they constrained him to come in.

Now, this actual word constrain, the dictionary defines to press or to urge forcibly. It's to compel.

[18:45] So when you think of these disciples, what they were actually doing, if we were to visualize it, this is what I believe happened. Jesus made us as if he was going to carry on. They pleaded with him to come in and you can almost see them putting their hand on his arm and say, look, you've got to come with us.

They weren't going to take no for an answer. It was a forcible plea. They constrained him. They compelled him to come in and he went in with them.

Even although he was going to us as if he was going to go further. And my dear friends, that is the type of prayer that we have here. This is the kind of prayer.

Jacob, again, you have the idea as if he's still holding on and he's saying, I'm not going to let you go. It's the same idea as these disciples as it were holding on to Christ saying, you are going to come in with us.

We are not taking no for an answer. And here we have Jacob. It's the same idea. Holding on. I will not let you go until you bless me.

[19:56] My dear friends, is that the kind of prayer we have? Is that the kind of heart we have? Is that the kind of faith that we have? Because you see, faith is vital in our prayer.

Far too often we're plagued by unbelief. Remember when we were looking in James. Remember that verse, James, James chapter one. Let him ask in faith with no doubting. For he who doubts is like the wave of the sea driven and tossed by wind. Let not that man think that he will receive anything from the Lord. You see, when we come in faith, we have a true and a proper estimate of who God is.

That's what faith is. A true and a proper estimate of who God is. We are fully persuaded of the greatness, the majesty, the authority, the power, the glory, the dominion of God.

We know that all things are possible with him. You remember when Jesus worked amongst, when he walked this world, and so often when he healed people, he often asked a question.

[21 : 11] Remember with the blind men, Jesus, when he was healing these blind men, he said to them, do you believe that I am able to do this? They asked for healing.

He asked that before he healed them, he said, do you believe that I am able to do this? They said, yes, Lord. And Jesus said, it tells it, and then he touched their eyes and he says, according to your faith, be it unto you.

You see the importance of what Jesus is doing? He's establishing, first of all, do they actually believe that he's able to do this? God and as we come to the Lord in prayer, do we have that kind of faith?

Do we believe that he is able to? Well, that's the kind of prayer and faith that Jacob had. That's the kind of faith and prayer that you and I need.

Do we have that? As we come to the Lord and as we cry to the Lord, are we crying that the Lord will bless ourselves? Lord, I'm not going to let you go until you bless me.

[22 : 23] Do we pray like this for our home, for our family, for our church, for our community? Is this the urgent prayerful prayer of faith that is every day coming from us?

Oh, well, let us pray great prayers of faith. Because, you know, the Lord loves his people to come to him with great faith, with great expectation.

And I hope and pray that this will be the way that we will live our lives, that we will not let the Lord go until he blesses us. Because, you know, the Lord has given such wonderful promises in his word.

And far too often, God's people live in poverty. It's like you would find it strange if you were seeing people, some of the rich, supposing you saw Bill Gates' family living destitute in poverty.

And you'd be saying, how come? There's a father and he's a billionaire. How come they're dressing in rags and they've got no food? Or they're just barely eating anything.

[23 : 34] You'd say, there's something wrong there. And you know, sometimes God's people are like that. They have a heavenly father who has everything. All the resources belong to him.

And some of God's people go around with very little food. And they seem to be hungry. They seem to be starving. And they seem to be preferring to eat, as the prodigal said, of the husks that the swine did eat, rather than eating from the riches of the father's table.

Well, you and I need to go and we need to pray and we need to be seeking the Lord that he will abundantly fill us. And he will do in us and for us, far and beyond anything that we could ask or think.

That is what his word says. Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we pray then that we may have this faith, a faith that will not take no for an answer, a faith that lays hold upon the Lord.

We thank thee that thou art the God who art encouraging us to come with boldness to a throne of grace. Far too often unbelief hinders us.

[24 : 42] Far too often our rebellious heart draws us aside. Far too often our own sinful heart erects a barrier between ourselves and the Lord.

O we pray that we may come prayerfully, that we may come humbly, that we may come confessing, but that we may come believingly.

O Lord, bless us, we pray, with all spiritual blessings. Encourage us in the faith. Take us all home safely, we pray, and do us good. And forgive us all our sin.

In Jesus' name we ask all. Amen.