

And Jacob was Left Alone

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to turn once again to book of Genesis chapter 32 and reading it verse 22.

The same night he arose and took his two wives and two female servants and his eleven children and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream and everything else that he had.

And Jacob was left alone. Especially those words in verse 24, and Jacob was left alone.

Well, we find here Jacob alone and wondering what on earth he is going to do.

What he's going to do about this brother Esau, who he'd insulted and defrauded and cheated all these 20 years ago.

[1 : 15] As you know, Esau and Jacob were twins, the sons of Isaac. But they were very, very different people. Esau was an outdoor person.

Esau was a hunter and very much in favor with his father, who wanted his children, no doubt, to grow up like himself and to be a provider.

But Jacob was very much more of a tender nature. And his mother favored him. And so there was this division in the family, the father preferring Esau and the mother preferring Jacob.

Now, Rebecca was told at the time the twins were born, that the elder would serve the younger.

And so when she overheard Isaac making plans to confer a blessing upon Esau, she thought she would circumvent his plans and bring her own plans into being.

[2 : 27] Thinking she was doing God's will by subterfuge and trickery against her own husband. And so she worked out a plan whereby Jacob would have to disguise himself.

He would have to make himself appear to his father like Esau. And so he dressed in Esau's clothes. He was having to put hairy materials upon his arms so that his blind father would think that this was Esau and bless him.

And that's exactly what happened. Jacob obtained the blessing. And Jacob took what was rightfully his brother's and caused his brother to become so incensed that he was determined if he was going to kill him after his father's death.

Now, obviously, he had no idea how long his father was going to live. In fact, his father lived for another 40 or 50 years after this incident. But that was his plan.

And when Rebecca heard of the plan, she thought that she would send her son away. And she sent her son away thinking that it would only be for a few years.

[3 : 48] And when Esau's anger had calmed down, that she would send again and get her son back from Laban's house.

But that, in fact, never happened. And as far as we know, Rebecca never saw her beloved Jacob. Ever again. And perhaps that's a providence that God passed upon Rebecca for a subterfuge, a trickery in trying to work out God's plan for him.

Now, in Haran, as you know, Jacob took Laban's two daughters as wives.

And there he prospered. And we're told in the reading that he prospered. And he had oxen and flocks and cattle. And the time came for him to return to the land of Canaan.

So Jacob leaves Laban with his wives and his children and his flocks and his possessions and prepares to make his way home.

[4 : 55] But there's one big problem. And the problem is Esau. He remembers what he's done to Esau. He imagines what Esau must still be feeling towards him.

And he begins to worry. He becomes worried about all that he has, his wives and children and flocks and possessions.

And schema that he is, he makes plans. He divides his flocks. He divides his wives and children. He makes groups of them.

Sends them away across the river. And then he is left alone. Jacob at this stage is no different to what he was when he left Canaan to go to Laban's house in Paddan Aram.

He's still the same man who has ideas of devising his own schemes and working out things to his own benefit. You saw that or you would remember that in the story of Laban and all the plans that Laban made to defraud Jacob and how Jacob made plans to escape that trickery and bring himself into prosperity in spite of what Laban was doing to him.

[6 : 16] But from this point on, in God's providence, there is a turning point in Jacob's life.

From this point on, he becomes a man of God or the way we would put it, Jacob is converted. Now there's great discussion as to when Jacob is converted.

But as we go through this passage, we'll see that there is a very real persuasion that this is the moment of his conversion and not at any time before.

The story shows us what it is to have a true experience of God. It shows us what the Christian gospel really is and what the Christian gospel does for us in our relationship with God.

Many of us in our Christian lives are very concerned with the world that is outside and how we can perhaps have a better quality of life if the world was brought into the church and if the world was converted.

[7 : 43] We seem to have more of an interest in what the world is doing, the world which has no interest in the church. We have more interest in what the world is doing than we seem to have in ourselves and in our own relationship with God.

As this story shows us, to believe in God is not enough. To pray to God when we are in trouble is not enough.

To have a mere passing interest in the gospel is not enough. The question is, are we like Jacob before Peniel or after Peniel?

And hopefully this narrative will help us to discover that for ourselves. But how are we going to know?

Is the faith we have saving or is it just a passing natural faith? Now the first thing the gospel does in the life of a believer is to separate us.

[9 : 07] In the narrative we find that Jacob was left alone. The gospel is always personal. And God in his providence and in his way of salvation always separates us out from the various things in our lives so that we are alone, we have nothing else to fall back on.

We are not saved as families or communities or congregations. We are saved individually. And what this narrative does is show us exactly that. But everything in life works against that possibility.

We get caught up in our work and surrounded by those whom we work with and their interests and their difficulties. We get caught up in our families and all the plans and desires we have in our families and the communities in which we live.

We get caught up with the plans and hopes for our children, for our home. Now in this story, God separates Jacob from everything else.

Separates him so that he is entirely on his own. And sometimes when God begins a saving work in us, he isolates us.

[10 : 27] Bring us to a situation where there is nothing can interrupt us or invade our thoughts or invade our privacy. We might be married, have children, a career, perhaps even a craft or building a house.

And we never stop to ask ourselves, what's all this about? Why are we here? Why are we here? Are we even, as Ecclesiastes, wants to remind us of, we're just as the brute beasts.

We rise up in the morning to go to work, to earn the money, to buy the food, to strengthen our bodies, and sleep, and get up the next morning.

And so it goes on. That's what the cattle and the sheep in the fields do. They do exactly that. They go to sleep, they feed all day, and they go to sleep.

Same thing applies to us, except we have to buy the sustenance of our bodies. And sometimes it just becomes a roundabout of doing these things day after day, time after time, without thoughts of the spiritual side of our natures.

[11 : 51] And then God's providence takes over. An illness. An illness. A doctor's appointment. A stay in hospital.

And suddenly we're alone. And suddenly we're alone. Now many of you, perhaps you will know that that's exactly what happened to Thomas Chalmers, one of the founding fathers of the Free Church.

He was a parish minister in Kilmany in Fife. The life was very good for him. He was a professor in the University of St. Andrews.

He was a professor of mathematics and professor of astronomy. And he thought that one day a week was quite enough for the work of the ministry. And he would spend the rest of his time engaged in his other pursuits.

And then suddenly he's laid aside. He becomes very ill. And he thinks he's on his deathbed. And while he's there, he gets time to consider.

[13 : 02] And to work out in the way that he's always worked out problems of mathematics or astronomy or the great problems of life. And suddenly he finds himself thinking about the brevity of time.

And the vastness of eternity. That's the same for all of us. Young or old, the brevity of time. You heard it mentioned this morning.

It doesn't matter how young or old we are. The brevity of time. And the vastness of eternity. God sometimes speaks to us through difficulties.

Loss of employment. Financial difficulties. Broken friendships. Cutting us off from the things which are causing us to forget God.

And to live lives independently of him. But we are born alone. We'll die alone. And we'll be judged alone.

[14 : 12] Very often preaching seems to major and to be more concerned about the world's political situation.

Or the international situation which surrounds the world today. Or the social and economic situation which we find ourselves perhaps as a nation.

And every prospect seems to say it's all bad, bad, bad. But the world has made enormous progress over the last 200 years.

Progress in medicine. Progress in education. Progress in sanitation. Progress in the length of life. So instead of living as people did perhaps 100 years ago until they were an average age of 35 or 40.

Today the age is something like 75 or 80. And so the world continues to make progress. It's not all bad and bad, bad. The Christian gospel has worked wonders.

[15 : 30] The enlightenment is the word that was used this morning. The enlightenment has dispelled the darkness that was in the minds of the people. They lived for nothing but to live as brute beasts.

They were kept under subjection. The churches of the Middle Ages kept the people in ignorance as to what the gospel was. And so that's why it was the dark ages. There was no light of the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

But the enlightenment is when the gospel light begins to shine. And everything takes off. Whether it's medicine or industry or commerce.

It all progresses and multiplies and magnifies. And so Paul writes, I want to know nothing amongst you but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Because we're here today, we're gone tomorrow, and we're judged the day after. And so we see also here, first of all, that the gospel is something that isolates us, that separates us from the situations in which we immerse ourselves, and God wants us for himself.

[16 : 55] And so he brings us a situation where he confronts us. But the gospel is also designed to bring us into a personal relationship with God.

Christianity is not a matter of morality. It's not a list of taboos, of do's and do nots.

But Christianity is a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not about a point of view that he might have about war, or education, or social justice.

Its essence is to bring us into a new and living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. That and nothing more. See, the church has nothing to say to the world, but to tell them about Christ.

That is our emphasis, that is our task into which we've been born. Not to engage with them in their own social activities.

[18 : 06] Not to try and win them over, as we heard again this morning. To try and, in some way, to make the world or the church more attractive to the world, and to win them in that way. But to preach to them the unsearchable riches of Christ.

You know, before Peniel, Jacob had been like so many of us. God was someone who could bless him. That's usually our own focus of prayers.

Lord, you would bless us. Or perhaps he was some great power that Jacob could turn to in a time of need. But when the crisis was over, he could get on with his life just as he always had.

But all that changed on the night Jacob met with God. God was no longer a mere figment of his imagination.

God was no longer remote. God was no longer far away. He was real. Someone Jacob spoke to.

[19 : 22] Someone Jacob heard speaking to him. And someone he had to deal with. Before Peniel and for ourselves also before we converted.

God is remote and impersonal. But no longer.

Remember, Jacob speaks with him. Jacob wrestles with him. And Jacob is very much aware of him. I wonder when we pray, are we aware that we are praying to someone?

That we are not praying into some void. We are not praying to something we have imagined or something that has just been told about.

And we have done it out of habit. But are we really aware that God is out there? That he is also very near to us.

[20 : 31] If we are Christians, he indulges us. We are vessels of the Holy Spirit. God in Christ is a real, living, holy person.

We are told in the scriptures that God is not a God of the dead, but a God of the living. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When the Lord Jesus Christ was here on earth, he often communed with them again. We heard this morning the Lord would often go away. After he had done his miracles, after he had done the good works that he had come to do, he went away alone and he communed all night with his heavenly Father.

We were encouraged to have calluses on our knees, that we might pray God into action in our own day and generation.

Why did I read the first chapter of Job this evening? Well, I was reading it recently and it became very apparent. But there's a great parallel here between Jacob and Job.

[21 : 56] While Jacob continues to fret and to worry about his circumstances, Job leaves everything in the hands of his God.

When Job's sons and daughters were eating and drinking one day, a messenger comes and tells him, some Sadduceans came and took 500 oxen and 500 asses away and have slain your servants.

Job hadn't thought of some act of neglect, not worried about the things he had. The oxen were ploughing.

They were doing the work. The asses were there to carry the burdens of the work they did. So Job was engaged in the normal act of commerce that he was expected to be doing. And so Job had not lost his property through neglect, but the loss of them was no small calamity for him.

But there was not one word of complaint from Job. And then immediately another messenger comes and tells Job that the fire of God has fallen from heaven and consumed his 7,000 sheep and more of his servants.

[23 : 22] And this time the hand of calamity seems to come from God himself. The fire of heaven has consumed. But still Job doesn't complain.

And then Job's told the Chaldeans have come, have taken away 5,000 camels and killed more of his servants. Three groups of servants, all his livelihood, all his possessions stolen or destroyed.

And still he trusts in God and utters, not a word. Then we're told that his seven sons and three daughters are all killed by a great wind causing the house they were feasting in to be destroyed and killed them in that house.

That's the final calamity. We told Job, tore at his garments, he shaved his head and he worshipped.

And he said, naked, I came out of the womb and naked shall I return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.

[24 : 51] Blessed be the name of the Lord. No man in the whole of creation except the Son of Man in Gethsemane has risen to such a great degree of acceptance and resignation at the providence that has come across his path than Job himself.

Instead of cursing God as Satan boasted that Job would do, he blesses him. He blesses him with all his heart.

And so neither in his heart nor in his speech did he accuse God or sin against God. What a difference between Job and Jacob before Peniel.

Although then, thirdly, Jacob recognizes this as the most important thing in his life. We see initially that the gospel is something that brings us to a knowledge of God.

Something that separates us from the main stream of life. But Jacob was also brought to recognize that the most important thing in his life is something only the gospel can bring about in his experience.

[26 : 21] Here's Jacob pacing backwards and forwards full of worry. Full of foreboding. Full of anxiety as to what is going to happen.

He's thinking about Esau. He's thinking about his family. He's thinking about his possessions. Everything he'd worked for for all these many years, that's what was consuming him.

But as soon as this experience began, he forgets about everything. He forgets about Esau, his family, his possessions, his livestock, everything.

He forgets everything except this one person whom he suddenly brought face to face with. isn't that the same for every one of us who comes under the power of the Holy Spirit?

There have been so many interests, so many things we want to do, plans and ambitions that we want to achieve during life's journey.

[27 : 35] And yet, when the gospel comes into our experience, when the Lord makes us willing in a day of his power, everything else takes a back seat.

Jacob wrestled for this blessing. Hip out of joint or hip not out of joint, he was going to continue wrestling. The day was dawning.

Esau was coming. But what does it matter? What does it matter? He says, I will not let you go unless you bless me. I can lose everything, but I must have this.

I must have your blessing. What about ourselves? Must we have this blessing before everything else?

to know first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all of the things being added unto us.

[28 : 44] That's a challenge. That's the demand. That's the requirement. the man who is born again has come to see what matters is the destiny of our souls.

Nothing else matters in the context of life and death but the destiny of our soul. we were interested in other things.

We might have had great plans and ambitions for life and all we're going to achieve. But now there's one all-consuming passion. I need salvation.

I need forgiveness. I need redemption. I need reconciliation. I'll be prepared to cry as Job does.

I will not let you go until you bless me. I prepared to cry with Paul. I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

[30 : 00] I prepared to say that we will press toward the mark for the price of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

That's what Jacob came to feel. That's what every Christian comes to feel. And we have to ask ourselves again is this the biggest thing in our lives?

is this the all-consuming passion of our lives? Is this what we really want? Is God real to us? Is eternity real to us?

Is the risen Christ one whom we recognize as our Lord and our God? Just briefly and finally being born again always leads to a permanent change in people's lives.

after Peniel Jacob was never the same man again. He's lame upon his thigh his name was changed his nature is changed.

[31 : 20] The old Jacob is no more. He has a different life and now he's living a different life. For the Christian the old man is dead and people should see it and recognize it in ourselves as we live it.

As Paul says in Galatians I live yet not I but the life that I now live. I live by the faith of the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. We shall conclude our worship then singing to God's praise in Psalm 73. Psalm 73 on page 316.

Page 23 Nevertheless continually O Lord I am with thee who dost me hold by my right hand and still upholdest me.

We'll sing to the end of the psalm that's six stanzas to God's praise. Nevertheless continually O Lord I am with thee Thou dost me hold by my right hand and still upholdest me Thou with thy counsel while I live wilt be conduct and guide and to thy glory afterward receive me to abide whom have

[33 : 36] I in the heavens high but thee O Lord the Lord and in the earth whom I decide besides thee there is none my flesh and heart doth faint and pale but God doth pain me never for of my heart God is the strength and portion forever for lo they that are far from thee forever perish shall them that are who reign from thee go thou hast destroyed all but surely it is good for me that

I draw near to God in God I trust that all thy words I may declare abroad Lord we thank you for this opportunity to worship corporately with you we pray for the fellowship that follows and pray your blessing on all that's been prepared for that fellowship and now may grace mercy and peace name of the father the son and the holy spirit one god rest on you and abide in you now and always amen amen