

Penuel

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[0 : 00] And to focus our thoughts and let's guide them in understandably clear channels, we'll take us our text this morning, the words of verse 31.

As he passed over Peniel, the sun rose upon him, and he limped on his thigh.

We always have to leave the places where God meets with us and blesses us.

But although we have to leave the places, it is not necessary to leave the blessing. And we do not depart from the God who meets with us and blesses us.

This whole account of Jacob's encounter with God is a stunning memorial to the reality of divine human encounter.

[1 : 06] And divine human encounter is not just something that we trace back to conversion experience. The scripture makes it quite clear that regeneration and conversion is nothing less than encounter with God.

And it is God coming into human experience in a very real and powerful way. But the scripture equally makes it clear that conversion is just the introduction to a life of fellowship with God.

Truly, our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. And I personally believe that encounter with God is something which will be continuous and yet will have high peaks in it.

This experience of Jacob illustrates, I think, that for us, I do not regard this as his conversion experience. I find it difficult to believe that a man who had the experiences recounted in chapter 28 of this book was an unregenerate, unconverted man.

I remember every time I think of Jacob, the experience that he had at Bethel and the thing that God said to him as he left Bethel, Behold, I am with you and I will bring you back into this land for I will not leave you until I have done all that I have spoken unto you about.

[2 : 49] Genesis 28, 15 Jacob experienced God. He said this is a dreadful place. Surely this is the very house of God and the very gate of heaven.

And I think that despite the deficiencies and the twists of the pathway he walked in the next 20 years, I do believe that Jacob was a man of God through these years.

He wasn't a perfect man of God. There was only one of those. And this is a new experience of God's grace. And it's an experience that changes Jacob's life yet again.

And that deepens his spiritual experience of God. And he's never, I believe, ever quite the same Jacob after this. You ask me perhaps, does this man believe and preach second blessing experience?

And let me say immediately, yes, this man does believe and preach in the second blessing experience. And he believes then and he preaches the third and the fourth and the fifth and the second.

[3 : 58] And I don't know, I don't know which number you've had here, but I hope that you've had a blessing from God here as well. Now, it's easy for us to talk in a very light way of knowing God's blessing.

But I believe that to know God's blessing is a very solemnizing and a very serious thing. And I want to look with you at Jacob knowing God's blessing.

And particularly God's blessing through the medium of prayer. And I want to do it under three simple headings. There's a first of which, from our text, we'll just call this, here we have the place of a great blessing.

And as he passed over Penuel. Now, there's the place. And Jacob has given it a lovely name that traces back to his experience of God and God's blessing, which he knew uttered, Penuel.

Well, the face of God, he called Penuel for, he said, I have seen God face to face. And my life is preserved. Literally, almost, my soul has been redeemed.

[5 : 17] I have seen God and I have not been destroyed. In seeing God, I have known his redemption and his deliverance. In seeing him, I should have been destroyed.

But in seeing him, in this situation, his grace has preserved me and upheld me. And the face of God, perhaps tracing back to this, has become, for the people of God, all through the Old Testament revelation, it has become one of the great, precious, symbolic words of being in God's presence and knowing God's blessing.

Psalm 28, we get the psalmist talking of the face of God. When thou saidest unto me, seek my face, my heart said, Lord, thy face will I seek.

You get the psalmist in Psalm 31, verse 16, saying this, O God, look, let thy face shine upon me. Look upon me, but literally, let thy face shine and be bright upon me. You see? Now, let's go on and ask, what sort of place is it in the life of Jacob?

[6 : 44] What sort of place is it in your life and in mine that becomes or has been a place of blessing for us? And while the details will always differ for every one of us, and they will differ from the details of Jacob's experience, yet I believe that there are principles which stand out and which we can apply to ourselves unto the blessing of God as we seek it and long to know it.

And these principles are abiding because God himself is unchanging. He uses the name of Jacob in that very relationship when he covenants himself to be the unchanging God of his people.

I am the Lord. I am Jehovah. I change not. Therefore, ye sons of Jacob. And that's what we are. Ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

Now, I want to say basically just this, that there will be three things in a place of blessing for every one of us. And we will first of all, a place of blessing will be a place of prayer.

A place of prayer. I have seen God face to face. Jacob was left alone, and they wrestled a man with him.

[8 : 14] And we can isolate some things further from the context and let them shed light on the kind of experience prayer was for Jacob on this occasion.

And here's the first one. It was a place of solitude. Jacob was left alone. And yet Jacob was not alone. He was alone with God.

He was alone and there wrestled a man with him. And the man we believe was God, the angel of God himself.

Scripture elsewhere makes that quite clear, that Jacob wrestled with the angel. And he wept and made supplication. And he prevailed. And the angel is the angel of the covenant.

This is one of the theophanies, the pre-incarnation appearances of Christ that are recorded in the book of Genesis especially. John Calvin spoke of the theophanies in one place in a rather strange way.

[9 : 20] It's as though he said, the angel of the covenant, the son of God, were trying out human nature. Coming, not in human nature, but in the appearance and in the form of a man.

I don't know how the divine nature adapted itself to these kind of appearances. But we know that the Holy Spirit appeared visibly at the baptism of Jesus in the form of a dove.

And so the son before incarnation appeared in the form of a man. And here is the main world of Jacob.

The solitude. Jacob left alone. And I want to pause there and ask you and ask myself a very simple question. Is there a place of prayer in our Christian experience?

Is there a place where we turn aside from all the duties that God himself lays on us to seek his face?

[10 : 23] A place where daily God is there to meet with us in the angel of the covenant. Bring us into the secret of his blessings and let his peace permeate our minds and our hearts.

Jacob was left alone. This is one of the things that characterized the highlands of Scotland in a past day. It's man, it's godly man, we're man of prayer.

I can remember after my confession driving along our little country roads with my father and he would point in one instance to a quarry and he would say there is where old Donald Henderson used to have his place of meeting with God.

Quarry in the hillside. He would point to another place behind a house in a little hamlet of just three houses. And he would say there is where old John MacDonald had his place of prayer.

And these places were known in the whole communities as the places where these godly men were wont to go and meet with God. Now you don't have to go to a quarry and you don't have to go to a

rock on the mountainside.

[11 : 38] Your closet can be wherever it's convenient for you to meet with God. because any place you seek God in Christ is convenient for him.

A place of prayer. Seek ye my face. Now this has I think would have a very distinguishable and easily recognized meaning for the people to whom it was first written.

to be admitted to the face of a potentate a king or a ruler or a governor. To be admitted to his face was to be to speak of three things it was admission into his immediate presence.

To be allowed an interview an audience admission into his presence an audience with him who had power even the power of life of life and death over all his subjects.

This is how they spoke of it. They were being admitted to the face. And the implication was that they were admitted in favor and in peace.

[12 : 50] There was admission there was audience with him there was acknowledgement of the relationship and all these things are true in the place of prayer. They were true for Jacob that night as he was left alone with God.

And there is always I believe a place of prayer in the life of men who have been blessed. I don't need to go into the details you know them.

Let me just instance one or two men who I hope will be well known to you the Robert Murray McChain of Dundee. We tend to forget that Robert Murray McChain died before he attained this 30th birthday.

He had a ministry of just under six years and yet he left a mark upon the land in which God asked him to serve.

And his name is still fragrant not only among the saints of God in Scotland but wherever his name is known and wherever the Lord is loved. And the story is told of a young man going into McChain's church when God was blessing with revival and speaking to the church officer as he was known in Scotland the man who looked after the church the beadle he was being shown round the church by the beadle and he was taken into McChain's vestry and there was a chair there one of those old fashioned hard padded seats and when he was there he was talking about McChain to the church officer and he said to him I would like to know he said the secret of McChain's power with God and with his people and the old man took him and he said the old man upon me he said the young man he said if you kneel down here he said I'll show you the secret of McChain's power and he took him to McChain's chair and he laid him down he said put your elbows on the seat of the chair and the fellow put his elbows there and the old man moved him along the surface of the chair until they went into a little hole two little hollows he said when you pray hollows into your chair you'll have the same power as McChain heart

[15 : 04] Andrew Bonner Andrew Bonner the man who rode up McChain's life after his death they'd been very close friends brothers in the Lord Andrew Bonner when he went to Glasgow he had a big congregation do you know how he spent Monday he spent it going round the pews with the names of the families who sat in them sat down in every pew looked at the names and he brought them up before God in prayer he repented he says something he repented of the sermons he had preached to them the day before and asked God to give him more power in the sermons he would preach to them the next Lord's Day we know how he felt don't we Sunday nights tonight we want to give up the ministry John Peyton in a little cottage in the borders of Scotland they called it a button bend it only had two rooms someone once speaking to John Peyton of his father or asking

John Peyton about the power and the influence of God in his life asked him what the secret of it was he said it's prayer and I learned it from my father he said I could never forget how my father used to go into the little room at the end of our home and close the door and we all knew what he was doing and I can never forget how he used to come out of that little room with the light of God shining on his face they looked to him and they were lightened all the great men of God who have been used in blessing have without exception I believe been men of prayer now we know it in theory but do we really put this theory into practice Spurgeon we all talk about him we're amazed and we're humbled at what God did through him

Spurgeon was preeminently a man of prayer Dr. Lloyd Jones I don't know the intimate details of his prayer life but I would guarantee this that Dr. Lloyd Jones too was a man of prayer these men knew what it was to be alone with God solitude now one of the things that's hard to find in our generation is just a place to be alone with God but make that place and then there's not only solitude here there's strife in this place of prayer there's wrestled and marred with them when I read this I become

afraid but I know not how to pray as I ought but I see this in it I see that this man laid hold of God in the angel of the covenant and that's what prayer must be a laying hold of God a coming to grips with God and the amazing thing is this not only did Jacob come to grips with God but God came to grips with Jacob and God laid hold of them and they wrestled together let me ask you when did you last know that God laid hold of you in the place of prayer when did you last know that you were in the eternal hands and in the eternal arms now there was a stage in my career in my folly when I used to do a little bit of wrestling in the highland games you know I learned one thing about wrestling and a few things that are wrestling but one very simple thing I learned about wrestling was this you can't stand six foot off from a man and see here we are with wrestling if he doesn't lay a hold of you and you don't lay a hold of him whatever you're doing you are not wrestling and let me say this whatever you do if you don't lay hold of God and know that God is laying hold of you whatever else you're doing you are not praying strife exertion and after thirty two years

I personally believe maybe it's just me but I'm glad when I find that it's true for others of my brethren too I find that the most difficult discipline for me as a Christian is to be faithful in a place of prayer to keep my mind from wandering to keep my words consonant with the glory of the God whom I am naming unto whom I am bringing my petition I find all these things extremely difficult and I begin to learn the older I grow what it is to have to expand energy in attempting to lay hold of God and having God lay hold of me there was strife these two things solitude and strife I was going to say something else but we'll leave it out we'll go on to a second thing this was not only a place of prayer this place of blessing it was a place of penitence now you ask me where do I see that it was a place of penitence and I want to say just two things there are other things which could be brought out which indicate that Jacob came under the power of repentance in this experience but just two things I think would highlight it for us and I'll mention them two things in particular there's first of all the touch of God's finger he wrestled with the angel and as he wrestled with him when the angel saw that he did not prevail against him he touched the socket of

[21 : 10] Jacob's the authorised version says he touched the hollow of his pie and it was just a touch how tender God is finger God could have slain him and yet in the touch of God there's all the power of omnipotence and all the wonder of omnipotent gentleness in the touch we were spoken to yesterday about this how tender God is in the exertion of his power with us the psalmist I think twice in fact says thy gentleness hath made me great can I give you a quick illustration of power and gentleness one of the most powerful men I ever knew was one of the heavyweights who went round the highland games he belonged to Albert Deanshire and he had been brought up in Scottish oatmeal mixed with a little water called porridge and I won't mention his name because the man is still alive he was one of the finest specimens of man who I have ever seen six foot five and a half inches and he was built into portion and he was one of the guys I had to wrestle sometimes and I was thankful that he was very good natured really but one day when the hammer throwing competition was taking place this man was up at the bar circle throwing the hammer

I was standing sorry someone else was throwing the hammer this man and I were standing down where the hammer was landing the field was fenced off but it was fenced off with just a single rope there were lots of people standing there there was a woman with a little girl a lovely little girl with fair hair three three and a half perhaps four year old she was playing about and she suddenly ran out onto the green grass right in the direction of where the hammer was wandering and just as she ran out one of the other big men was swinging the hammer and just letting it go was going into the air a 16 pound hammer with a shafted handle they threw these things 140 146 feet and there was twisting coming through the air and this little girl running out just to where it was and suddenly I just felt the absence of this huge man from my side and there he was he ran out five quick steps and he had scooped her up in the hollow of his arm with that and he turned his back to the hammer it didn't hit him it landed just beside him where the little girl had been standing and you notice he exerted all the every ounce of his nineteen and a half stone and he moved like lightning and his great arm went round the little girl and there wasn't even a tear in her face she was up there and cuddled in with we would say in Scotland before she knew what was happening and he dealt with her so tender he carried her over smiling at her and talking to her and handed her back to her mother what was that that was power power exerted in tenderness and that's the way

God deals with us a touch of his finger and you notice where he touches him in the hollow of his thigh why did he touch him in the thigh I didn't know I used to look at this and say why did the Lord

touch him here and then suddenly I remembered my wrestling days what is a thigh to a wrestler do you know what it is it's the pivot of its strength as a wrestler I know of no through in wrestling in which the thigh of the wrestler is not involved and if you want to disable a wrestler if you want to make him useless you have him in the one place that matters most to him and that's where God touched him in the thigh now if a man gets hearted and sometimes men do get hearted in wrestling if a wrestler gets hearted in his thigh what does he do there's only one thing he can do and that is wrap himself around his opponent and pull that man into him as tightly as he can so that his own thigh being useless he can use the pivot of strength in his opponent and try and overcome in that way and on the other hand if a man if you're wrestling with a man and he gets hurt and he suddenly wraps his arms around you what do you do the only thing to do is again to repeat the exercise you grab him and if you can't you grab him tight and he's grabbed you and you you then have to take not only your own weight but you have to take his weight and you have to allow the conflict to centre around your thighs do you see what God was doing with this he was showing Jacob he was showing Jacob that Jacob must become weak he showed that to the psalmist psalm 102 my strength he weakened in the way and part of our trouble is in our in our in our folly we are too strong in ourselves God has to hurt us and when God hurts us what happens what happened with Jacob he clung to the angel he didn't give up and when he clung to the angel what happened God let's say God wrapped his arms all the more tightly around his servant Jacob and then the whole conflict the whole wrestling and energy of the prayer and the intercession that went on centered around the strength of the angel and you see that's what prayer is God empties us of ourselves until we have got nothing to cling to but himself and when we cling to himself then we know that around and underneath are the everlasting arms and it's then I believe that we begin to pray we begin to pray in the energy and in the anointing in the sealing in the upholding of the Holy Spirit and it's all centering in Jesus the angel of the covenant all our blessing comes to us through him