

Abiding Fruit

John 15:16



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Dependence Upon God Genesis 32:22 – 32

In this passage we have the great confrontation between Jacob and God. Jacob has left his father-in-law, Laban's home and is now making his way back to the land of his fathers. He arrived in Mesopotamia with nothing (Gen. 28:1 – 5; 32:10) having left hurriedly due to his brother Esau's rage at being cheated out of the blessing (Gen. 27:18 – 29, 41). He has now left Mesopotamia a very rich man, having a large family of two wives, their maid-servants and his children, besides his extensive flocks, camels and donkeys (Gen. 32:13 – 15). Jacob has left because God instructed him to return to his father Isaac's land (Gen. 31:3), the land God originally promised to Abraham, his grandfather.

For twenty years he has suffered deprivation at the hand of Laban, his wages had been changed ten times (Gen. 31:38 – 42). The threat of Laban behind him is overcome by the end of Genesis 31, but now Jacob realizes the awful fact that ahead of him is Esau, the brother he deceived and wronged twice (by stealing the birthright and the blessing). We know that God would have ensured that Jacob receive both of these without the interference of Rebekah and Jacob.

The Bible is quick to assert that there was a fundamental difference between Esau and Jacob. Esau was a secular man (Heb. 12:16) who cared only for himself, whereas Jacob was a spiritual man who considered the things of God and his relationship to that covenant that God had made with Abraham and Isaac (cf. Luke 13:28). It was not that Jacob was perfect. We know he was not. He was a liar and a deceiver, but then all sinners who are saved by God were like this at one time, were they not?

The threat of Esau ahead of Jacob is completely unnerving to Jacob. He recognizes that the issue that drove them apart has never been resolved and therefore he has no idea how Esau will react toward him. The Scripture seems to imply that Jacob has not seen or heard from Esau, and this prompts his fear. Jacob resorts to a strategy that is designed to alleviate hopefully some of Esau's anger by dividing his family and possessions and by sending on ahead a variety of gifts. Jacob also seeks God in prayer (Gen. 32:9 - 12) something we have no indication of him doing in Mesopotamia, although he seems to have maintained some knowledge of God among his family as indicated by the names of his children (Gen. 29:31 – 30:24). In his prayer, Jacob shows an insight into God that is desperately needed by the Christian Church today. He reminds God of the covenantal relationship that exists between them because of what God had begun with Abraham (Gen. 31:9). He indicates that he is obeying the voice of God by returning to the land of Promise, and therefore he will receive the blessing of God as promised to him by God (vs. 9b).

Jacob acknowledges his complete unworthiness before God in comparison to the immeasurable blessing and kindness that God has lavished upon him in his exile (vs. 10). He left with only his staff in his hand, but now he has grown into two camps (vs. 10). He petitions God directly about his fear over Esau and prays that God would deliver him, since perhaps Esau would destroy all that he possesses including his family. So he is driven to extreme fear. As Christians we know that sin should prompt us to be exceedingly fearful about its consequences before God. Such is Jacob. He has been brought to this place of confession by God. He reminds God of the Abrahamic promise made also to him in verse 12,

and it is this reminding God of His eternal promises that prompts God to defend His holy name and delight in fulfilling his covenant with Jacob. As believers we are under the eternal covenant of redemption (Heb. 9:15; 13:20), and as such there are innumerable blessings that are ours. They are ours by privilege, but do we enjoy them and live in the light of them?

We come now to the scene where Jacob during the night having sent his wives and their children across the stream after having crossed the ford Jabbok remains behind alone (vs. 22, 23). Verse 24 points out the solemnity of that sight. Here is the man Jacob and he “*was left alone*”. But he is not alone for a man suddenly comes upon him and they wrestle through the night until the breaking of day (vs. 24). I can almost see Jacob being accosted by this man without a word being spoken. Jacob must have wondered who this individual was as they wrestled, as he strove with him, rolling in the soil, always fighting, always resisting, never giving up, perhaps discerning that in this lonely night visitor was someone who was beyond his comprehension. We must conclude by this account that Jacob was an intensely powerful man. By nature a lover of tents and peace (Gen. 25:27), he has become a wanderer, inured to the bitter cold of the coldest night, suffering also under the most intense heat of the day (Gen. 31:40). He is now embroiled in a fight to the death he might think, as there was no let up either by him or his antagonist.

The passage diverts our attention from Jacob to the man fighting Jacob (vs. 25). As the day starts to break, this man suddenly touches the hip socket of Jacob putting it out of joint, which immediately would mean the fight is over for Jacob, for he would not have been able to carry on due to the pain brought upon him and the inability caused by the injury. (The sinew in the hip joint is very strong, but in a touch, Jacob’s is shriveled and thus it would remain for the rest of his life, always reminding Jacob of his dependence on God.) This man then asks Jacob to let him go, for Jacob is now clinging to this man in dependence and surrender, as the sun begins to rise on the face of the earth. Can you see the scene before you? Through the glinting shafts of early sunlight there is a humbled man broken in the arms of another greater man. This is the place we must all come before our God. We must abandon all self-sufficiency and cast our selves into the arms of Jesus who alone sustains us. This is where Jacob is, for his antagonist is none other than the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ. Jacob has the right attitude now, for he does not wish to let go of God until he knows that God has blessed him. This is in contrast to how he received the blessing from Isaac. Now he is dependent on God.

At this stage, a great transaction occurs. The man asks Jacob to state his name (vs. 27) which he does (this is Jacob acknowledging his nature as indicated by his name – *heel-catcher*, but now he is the one caught), and then in an act of blessing, that Jacob had asked for in verse 26, the man pronounces a new name for Jacob. He is now Israel, a prince with God and with men, a man who has fought with God and prevailed. Jacob’s fighting is to secure the blessing of God – it really is a striving on Jacob’s part for the blessing of God. Jacob is unable to elicit from this man his own name, since Jacob knows who the man is and it is not necessary for the Lord to state his name. Since Jacob was in the hands of One greater than himself, it was absolutely useless to fight against him or to stubbornly do things his own way and in his own power. This is the great lesson that Jacob learned in this encounter. It was useless to struggle against God as he had done for the past twenty years. Now his struggle going forward would be in reliance on God. Jacob did not always get this right in the years that lay ahead, but the reward at the end of his life was to see Joseph and his grandsons and to bless all his sons (Gen. 49). It is this that the writer to the Hebrews commends Jacob for, (Heb. 11:21 - “*By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.*”). Now he was dependent on God in worship. That’s where I want to be too – what about you?