



Jacob: the man who met God. (Gen 28 & 32)

Last week we looked at Esau - the man who blew it. Esau was conned out of his birthright and blessing by his brother Jacob - the Grasper. We saw how he had so little regard for his birthright that he gave it away. He was a man who chased after the world and had little regard for the family which had been so blessed by God.

We are going to have a look tonight at Grasper. Let's go back to their birth and to the prophecy made then.

Gen 25:22 The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. 23 The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

Why did Jacob, the Grasper and Rebekah try to rob Esau of his birthright and blessing? Maybe they were thinking of this prophecy as they stole his blessing. That is what was prophesied so they thought Jacob should take the birthright and blessing.

As we saw this morning, we don't do things in our time and strength when we discern the mind of God - we wait for His time and move in His authority.

Last week we saw people moving in their strength _ Esau, Jacob, Rebekah, Isaac. There was no discussion with God. They just did it and found themselves responsible for their actions and all the consequences that came from it - and it was a shattering experience for all of them!

But just as we are responsible for our actions, God acts in His sovereign will according to His grace and His will was that the execution of His promises to Abraham and Isaac was to be through Jacob and not Esau. Let's read in Romans 9

Rom 9:10 Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. 11 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad--in order that God's purpose in election might stand: 12 not by works but by him who calls--she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." 14 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy

Paul was actually responding to a prophecy against Edom in Malachi. We saw last week how Esau was ultimately blessed and found his peace with Jacob and we read about this tonight too. But Edom became a nation that was at loggerheads with Israel. Why was Jacob favoured. Because God showed him mercy because it was God's sovereign will to do so. God showed compassion on the Grasper and gave him an opportunity of relationship with God as he ran for his life from his angry brother. Jacob had made no effort to redeem himself by his strength prior to the first meeting at Bethel.

He was an object of grace. We are objects of grace because while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. So what can we learn from Jacob's journey from sin to

being the official recipient of God's promises. Jacob may have been an object of grace but needed to live in it.

God met him (Bethel)

This is where God meets Jacob - in his personal failure and shortcomings. His sin had found him out and he was fleeing. Rather than the prophecy being fulfilled through his actions, he was now on the run from Esau. God's will is not played out in our way. We looked at this in the morning service. Just because we know something should happen does not mean that God is going to achieve it our way.. We need to understand that.

It's often when we come to an end of ourselves and our effort that God intervenes. I've proved that so many times in my life. We think we know how God is going to achieve something. Or maybe we think that we've got it under control. It doesn't matter what situations we have - family, sickness, problems - when we believe we can solve it, or other people can solve it - then we don't pray at though all authority on heaven and earth is given to Jesus and we're in trouble.

But for Jacob, his skulduggery had left him destitute and on the run. He was out of the camp where he was comfortable and out in the open. And he lies down for the night and he receives this vision. It's a vision from heaven

Gen 28:12 He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac.

Jacob didn't put the ladder there, he didn't ask for it. God placed the ladder there and Jacob could see for the first time something he could never see before - this link between earth and heaven. And he was being given a glimpse up into it. He didn't deserve it but for the first time he has a first hand experience of a God who wanted to talk to him.

When Jacob gets to the end of himself he finds that the reason for the prophecy is not that in human terms about Jacob and Esau's brotherly differences, but about the fact that God wanted to affirm the promises He had made through Abraham and Isaac through him - Jacob, the Grasper, the thief, the con-man. He was giving Jacob the birthright. Not the devalued one he stole from Esau - but a God-given one that only God could give. Only God can decide on whom His favour should rest and it fell on Jacob.

The most remarkable thing about God is that He comes to us in our fallenn-ess and failure and He can turn it to His glory. And He too this grasper and crook and poured out His grace on him. And that's us too. God meets us too where things seem difficult and even impossible - and we see His purposes for our lives are something greater.

That is the nature of the grace that God shows us in Christ and continues to do so. This is what is at the heart of the Gospel. We have a God who intervenes in our lives at their low points and brings us His presence and promises.

Jacob started to pray (Mahanaim)

What a great "mountain-op" experience Jacob had. You'd think it was life-transforming wouldn't you. You bet it wasn't. He still managed to con Laban in the process of the next 14 years. And what of his relationship with God who gave him this vision? Well, he doesn't seem to have done much about it because we find him back

on the run towards Esau and he meets the angels as he worries about what Esau might do to him. At that point he prays. Better late than never I guess.

I know lots of Christians that try to go from mountain-top to mountain-top and there are dark valleys in between. The mountain top gives them the injection of adrenaline or whatever until the next time they come to the end of the line and fall on God again. This was Jacob. How awful! This is no way to live. God wants us to spend time in His presence. How much better it would have been for Jacob to have spent more time with God. But by the grace of God, Jacob was always welcomed back and God's purposes were achieved through him. But how much easier it could have been for Jacob.

By God's grace His purposes can be worked through us. But how often we are like Jacob and do things the hard way.

32:9 "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,' 10 I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. 11 Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. 12 But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.' "

In the end it's a pretty personal and desperate prayer. He's asking God to save his bacon on the basis of the promises made. How little he knew God!

What is the substance of our prayer. Is it like Jacob's - only when he had to - or is it deeper than that. God loves it when we pray - and prefers it when we aren't forced into it by circumstance. Let's pray that we have that longing to spend time in God's presence!

Jacob desired the blessing (Peniel)

32:25 When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. 26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." 27 The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. 28 Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." 29 Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. 30 So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

But this was a learning time for Jacob as we find him next wrestling with a man. We are never quite given his identity but Jacob says afterwards "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." We don't know why they were wrestling but it seems that as wrestlers they were well-matched and the bout goes on till daybreak. The man eventually has to disable Jacob as he is so stubborn. Jacob still wrestles on with a dislocated hip. By this time Jacob must have realised who he was wrestling with and demands the blessing as the bout has to come to an end. I wonder what time in the night that he realised this. But having got to know God at close quarters in a way that he had probably not expected he asks the blessing.

A bit of a cheek to ask? For the first time in his life Jacob seems to have come to grips with God literally and he asked the blessing as he found that he couldn't beat God and had to yield.

How often do we get to grips with God? How often do we find ourselves spending day and night in His presence coming to grips with Him so that we can ask the blessing?

Interestingly, as Jacob got to grips with God he found the experience a painful one as he grappled with the things of God. Notice how I've used wrestling terms here - these are the terms we use when we come to grips with God because sometimes we need to wrestle with what He asks us to do. Growing as a Christian can be difficult and painful but it was at Peniel that Jacob at last seems to have come to grips with God and it was here that he got the blessing.

You'll remember that last week he conned the blessing from Isaac by subterfuge. Here he struggles with God and gets the blessing. Last week we saw man's way as he got the birthright and blessing. This week we seek God's way. It's a way of grace. In his failure, God gives him the birthright at Bethel and here at Peniel he gets the blessing.

As I said this morning, we don't get things we want by doing things our way but by recognising God's grace.

It starts by recognising our failure and accepting God's grace. We get the birthright that way - that second birth which comes from grace. But we get the blessing at Peniel.

God has shown us the grace. We have all seen mountain-tops. We've all been to Bethel but what of it? Are we still like Jacob - on the run and only speaking to God when we need help? We can't see blessing unless we go from Bethel to Peniel.

God wants us to wrestle with Him and to not let go until we get the blessing. We want Bethel experiences because Peniel ones are painful.

Do we want to see Jesus exalted here. Then we need to realise that we have already passed Bethel because we are the people of God and we're here. But I believe that God wants to bring us the blessings at our Peniel. He wants us to wrestle with Him and find the blessings.

The last thing I want to say tonight is that Jacob took a long time! He needn't have but he did. How long is it going to be before we as individuals and as a church are going to wrestle with God? To spend time in His presence. To find out His will and way. To demand the blessing. How much is he going to have to dislocate our hips before we yield to Him?