

Bethel

Prayer Meeting Addresses

Number 27 The Face of God

Reading: Genesis 33. 1-15

1 And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids.

2 And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindmost.

3 And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

4 And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept.

5 And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, Who are those with thee? And he said, The children which God hath graciously given thy servant.

6 Then the handmaidens came near, they and their children, and they bowed themselves.

7 And Leah also with her children came near, and bowed themselves: and after came Joseph near and Rachel, and they bowed themselves.

8 And he said, What meanest thou by all this drove which I met? And he said, These are to find grace in the sight of my lord.

9 And Esau said, I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself.

10 And Jacob said, Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me.

11 Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough. And he urged him, and he took it.

12 And he said, Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee.

13 And he said unto him, My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die.

14 Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I will lead on softly, according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure, until I come unto my lord unto Seir.

15 And Esau said, Let me now leave with thee some of the folk that are with me. And he said, What needeth it? let me find grace in the sight of my lord.

Address

We are met this evening for prayer. Genesis 33 is a chapter of prayer answered, prayer wonderfully answered. Chapter 32 is the chapter that contains the prayers. If you will, in chapter 32 there is the sowing in tears and in chapter 33 there is the reaping in joy. “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.” And do not forget concerning your prayers, public and secret, “In due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” There was some wrestling as well as prayer in chapter 32. “Wrestling prayer can wonders do.”

And also there was some real prayer. If you think of that prayer at the beginning of chapter 32, Jacob was faced with a dreadful trouble. It was something he had feared all the days of his life, and now the thing he feared had come upon him. What was it? Well, when he deceived his brother Esau and fled from home, Esau vowed his death. Now many, many years had passed, and Jacob realises he is going to meet Esau again. I suppose in his heart of hearts perhaps he thought the years had taken their toll; perhaps he has been pacified; perhaps he is a different man. But, “Thy brother Esau ... cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him. Then Jacob was greatly afraid.” Well he might be. I think you will find it at times, beloved friends. Sometimes there has been something in your circumstances for months, for years. You have dreaded that day coming, and at last the day arrives, and like Jacob you are “greatly afraid.”

O but didn't Jacob pray! There were really three things, and may you and I know these three things. One was he was able to lay hold of God's promise and plead it. That will help you to pray, if you can lay hold of God's promise. And then he completely confessed his unworthiness. “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies.” He did not deserve an answer. And the third thing, it was so short, so plain, so honest. He said he was afraid of his brother Esau: “Deliver me.” Do not be afraid of this honesty and simplicity in prayer. And then towards the end of the chapter was the wrestling.

And then the thing he had always feared came upon him. “And Esau ... fell on his neck, and kissed him.” That is prayer heard, prayer answered, a miracle accomplished, deliverance granted. Do not forget, it is the God of Jacob to whom you and I are praying this evening, and “wrestling prayer *still* can wonders do; bring relief in deepest straits!”

There is one thing with Jacob: despite all his sins, he had a good religion. He could say, “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.” How

many of us can say that: “I have seen God face to face”? O but that word he spoke to Esau! He said to Esau, “I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God.” “Seen thy face” – Esau’s face – “as though I had seen the face of God.” He saw a smiling face; he saw a friendly face; he saw a reconciled face, in answer to that wrestling prayer. The wonder, the miracle! It is a wonderful expression: “I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God.” Just two things. One is, as he looked on Esau’s smiling face he could see the smiling face of God who had heard his poor prayers and answered them. But the second thing, as he looked on Esau’s smiling face he saw that wonderful reconciliation. I know J. C. Philpot did not like the expression – and strictly speaking he was right – a reconciled God. But we know what the expression means. To be exact, it is God’s people who are reconciled. O but to see the face of Esau as if he saw the face of God! As Joseph Hart says in his beautiful hymn on the rainbow: “So smiles my cheerful soul to see my God is reconciled to me.”

Well, may we be able to pray to the God of Jacob, and may we know the answers.

This address was given at Bethel Chapel, Luton, by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom, on Monday, 29th March, 2004

