

Israel: A Prince with God

The Story of Jacob Retold

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE NOBLE RESOLVE

Genesis 28

“I slept and dreamt that life was beauty;
I waked and found that life was duty.
Was thy dream, then, a shadowy lie?
Toil on, sad heart, courageously,
And thou shalt find thy dream to be
A noon-day light and truth to thee.
Dreams grow holy put in action,
Work grows fair through starry dreaming;
But where each flows on unmingling,
Both are fruitless and in vain.”

- A. A. Procter

WE are studying the education of a human spirit in the story of Jacob, who became Israel the Prince. But before you can benefit by it, you must be quite sure that there is something in you capable of being educated. Education means drawing out; as culture will draw fragrance, color, and graceful beauty, out of the bulb which looks uninteresting and dead. No amount of education could draw such products from a stone.

Education only avails when there is some latent germ containing the promise and potency of life. So the discipline of God will be a failure, so far as you are concerned, unless you have got within you, as Jacob certainly had, the principle of a nobler life than that which comes by nature. In a word Have you been born again? Has there been placed within you, by the Spirit of God, the principle of a new and better life? Is there within you a something which is not of self, or of man, or of the will of the flesh, but of God? If so, you are welcome to acquire any help that may be afforded by a study of God's dealings with Jacob, in whose original constitution there was little to admire. There were three steps in God's dealings with this mean and crafty spirit; and, in one form or another, they have a universal application.

To begin with, *God revealed Jacob to himself.*

He might have gone on for years in dreamy self-content, ignorant of the evils that lurked within his breast. So a strong temptation was permitted to cross his pathway. There was no necessity for him to yield; but he did yield.

And in yielding, he stood face to face with the unutterable baseness of his own heart. A rock, jutting up in the midst of a stream, often reveals the set of the languid current. Flung a strong light into a cave: and the wretched tenants will hurry out screaming, as they behold the loathsome creatures that had crept around them. This is the first step towards soul-health. A Nathan must be sent to unveil the evils that fester within, and to accost us with the terrible apostrophe, "**Thou art the man!**"

If, of late, you have begun to see the hidden evils of your heart; and to discover the workings of things of which you could not have supposed yourself capable; and to loathe yourself, as Job did: then take heart. God is dealing with you; and is commencing a work which He will never abandon, till you are presented faultless in His presence, with exceeding joy. The first and indispensable work of the Holy Ghost, in the human spirit, is to convict of sin.

In the next place, *God permitted Jacob to suffer the loss of all earthly friends and goods.*

The prodigal, in the far country, was reduced to heart-rending straits. "**When he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land: and he began to be in want. And he was sent into the fields to feed swine; and no man gave unto him.**"

And yet he was not much worse off than Jacob was at this moment. We saw in our last chapter that he was lonely, destitute, and in fear. He had little or no property, but a cruse of oil (v. 18) and his staff (32:10). He dreaded his brother's wrath. He was compelled to content himself with a stone for his pillow on the moorland waste. But he was not the last man who has had reason to bless God, to all eternity, for having swept his life clear of much which he had accounted absolutely needful to his existence.

The "**still small voice**" can only be heard when all other voices are hushed. The silver stars can only be seen in the dark. It is when the weary fishers have toiled all the night, without taking a solitary fish, that they are prepared to see, in the morning haze, the form of One who loves them standing on the shore. Do not be surprised if to soul-trial there have been added other bitter trials beside.

Finally, *God thrust into Jacob's life a revelation of His love.*

"Behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven."

That ladder symbolized the love of God. All through his life, that love had surrounded Jacob with its balmy atmosphere; but he had never realized, or returned, or yielded to it. But now it was gathered up and crystallized into one definite appeal, and thrust upon him; so that he could do no other than behold it. And in that hour of conviction and need, it was as welcome as a ladder put down into a dark and noisome pit, where a man is sinking fast into despair; he quickly hails its seasonable aid, and begins to climb back to daylight. Can you not remember the moment when the love of God in Jesus Christ first broke on you? You were deeply convinced of sin; you dreaded lest at any moment the sword of the Avenger should smite you down; you would have gladly exchanged places with the dumb animals around you; you were broken by trouble, anxiety, and care. And just then you were arrested by the Cross of Jesus.

At first you only looked on it with the casual gaze of curiosity; but as you looked, your attention became so fixed that you were spellbound. You saw it transfigured beneath the light of Heaven; you felt that Divine love shone in those dying eyes; and streamed in tides of blessing from every open wound; and spoke in every accent of that faltering voice. And as you lingered still, there stole into your heart the conviction that it was all for you a conviction which forced tears to your eyes, and these words from your lips: "He loved me, and gave Himself for me. My sins nailed Him there; my curse poured its vials upon that drooping head; my stripes broke that royal heart."

"So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble; and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightsome; and said, with a merry heart,

'He hath given me rest by His sorrow,
And life by His death.'

Then he stood still awhile to look and wonder; even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks."

Has this been your experience? If not, seek it; ask that your eyes may be opened to see the love of God to you, revealed in the Cross of Jesus, and let down into your life. Then will you also give three leaps for joy, and go on your way singing. The revelation of God's love will have five results on the receptive spirit.

I. IT WILL MAKE US QUICK TO DISCOVER God

Jacob had been inclined to localize God in his father's tents: as many localize Him now in chapel, church, or minster; supposing that prayer and worship are more acceptable there than anywhere beside. Now he learned that God was equally in every place on the moorland waste as well as by Isaac's altar, though his eye had been too blind to perceive Him.

In point of fact, the difference lay not in God, but in himself; the human spirit carries with it everywhere its own atmosphere, through which it may see, or not see, the presence of the Omnipresent. If your spirit is reverent, it will discern God on a moorland waste. If your spirit is thoughtless and careless, it will fail to find Him even in the face of Jesus Christ.

There are many men, who might have kept as close to the Apostle Paul as his shadow, who would not have seen one angel vision or heard one heavenly word. On the other hand, if the Apostle were to spend a day with us, he would see traces of the glorious presence of God in our busy streets and wrangling marts. The difference is not in the place, or in the degrees of God's presence; but in the keenness of the spiritual eye, since all places are equally hallowed, and God is everywhere.

When we have been touched and solemnized by some stately service or stirring discourse, we are disposed to say, "**This is none other but the house of God; and this is the gate of heaven.**"

But we are not disposed to say as much of the shop or counting-house in which we spend the greater part of our time. The reason for this is to be found in the materialism of our spirit. If only we were full of God, we should find that every spot was sacred, every moment hallowed, every act a sacrament; from every incident we should see a ladder stretching up to Heaven: and our happy spirits would be constantly availing themselves of the opportunity to run up the shining way and embrace their dearest Lord.

Similarly, when we have met with a great deliverance as Abraham on Mount Moriah we are led to exclaim, "**This is the finger of God.**" But we are not apt to say as much of every trivial incident in daily life. The reason, again, is in ourselves. We need the quick insight which only love can give. It was the disciple to whom Jesus had revealed His special love that discerned Him on the lake-shore, and cried, "**It is the Lord.**" And if we were as willing as he was to drink in the love of Jesus, we should be as quick as he was in discerning the presence of the Lord.

Up to this moment the Lord has been in many of the moorland wastes of your lives; but you have not known it. He has been beside you in that lonely chamber of pain; in that irksome situation; on that rugged pathway; by that bitter cross; amid those godless companions; during those hours which you have counted secular and profane but your eyes have been holden. What wonder that your path has been so drear! But if you will only take home to yourself the message of the Cross of Jesus, "God loves me;" and if you will let it shed its perfume through your secret heart then you will never feel lonely or outcast again.

- You will be able to see Him where no other eye can discern Him.
- You will feel the ruddy glow of His love when others carry chilled and torpid hearts.
- You will discover that a desolate moor is one of the mansions of your Father's house.
- You will detect your Father's handwriting in every letter;
- Your Father's seal on every parcel;
- Your Father's will in every event.
- You will be able to commune with Him equally on the hill-side as amid the congregation. And
- You will be often compelled to exclaim, as you meet with fresh revelations of Himself, in the most unlikely places, "**This is none other but the house of God; and this is the gate of heaven.**"

II. IT WILL INSPIRE US WITH GODLY FEAR

"He was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place!"

"Perfect love casteth out fear" - the fear that hath torment; but it begets in us another fear, which is the beginning of wisdom and the foundation of all noble lives; the fear that reveres God, and shudders to grieve Him; and dreads to lose the tiniest chance of doing His holy will. True love is always fearless and fearful.

- It is fearless with the freedom of undoubting trust; but
- It is fearful lest it should miss a single grain of tender affection, or should bring a moment's shadow over the face of the beloved.

Those who look from without sometimes rebuke us for dwelling so constantly on the infinite love of God, surrounding us, as the warm Southern seas lap around shores enameled with shells. Some say, "You will lead people to live loosely, if you tell them that there is no sin which may not be instantly forgiven." Ah! they do not know that there are none who fear sin so much as those who know that they are greatly loved. For them every spot is full of the presence of the Beloved. Heaven itself does not more evidently glow with it than each spot of earth. And thus, though all other fear has fled before all-mastering love, there will have come into the spirit another fear, which distrusts self and clings to Christ, and works out its salvation with fear and trembling.

III. IT WILL CONSTRAIN US TO GIVE OURSELVES TO GOD

The ordinary reading might lead us to suppose that, true to his worse self, Jacob tried to make a bargain with God; and promised to take Him as his, on certain conditions. "**If God will be with me, and keep me in my way, and give me bread to eat and raiment to put on: then . . .**" But as we understand the issue, it relieves him of this sad imputation; and tones the words down to mean that if the Lord would be his God, then the stone should be God's house. *But, however the words may run, this was evidently the moment of his consecration.* He was constrained by love of God, "**no longer to live to himself, but to Him.**"

Have you done thus, dear reader? It is the sole condition of soul-health, and peace, and power.

You are Christ's by right; but you have been living as if you were your own, and had never been bought by His precious Blood. Is it then to be wondered at, that your life has been such a miserable failure? You are robbing Jesus of His own purchased possession; and you cannot expect to enjoy the fulness of His salvation. Give yourself to Him now. And, as soon as you will to do so, He takes that which you give. Or, if you cannot give yourself, then lie low at His feet, and ask Him to take all you are and have. And so soon as the words have passed your lips, He will answer your prayer, and make you His forever.

IV. IT WILL PROMPT US TO DEVOTE OUR PROPERTY TO HIM

"Of all that Thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

There is no reason to doubt that this became the principle of Jacob's life: and if so, he shames the majority of Christian people most of whom do not give on principle; and give a very uncertain and meager percentage of their income. The Church would have no lack if every one of its members acted upon this principle.

Let the proportion be diminished, if you will; though that were surely unworthy of us, who sing,

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my all."

But whether the proportion be diminished or not, let each Christian person resolve to give systematically to the Lord's cause; and to put aside, as first-fruits from all profits and receipts, a certain part, which shall be considered as distinctly and exclusively the Lord's, to be applied as He may direct.

There is something better than this viz., to consider oneself, one's earnings, one's strength, one's all, as belonging to the dear Master; as the rags, and earnings, and jewels, of slaves belonged absolutely to their owners, who had bought them off the block. But many, admitting this theoretically, do nothing practically; and, therefore, it is better to give a regular proportion certainly, and as much more as you choose, as a perpetual reminder that all you have and are is not your own, but Jesus Christ's.

It is failure in this which so often brings barrenness and joylessness into Christian lives.

This is the reason that so many of the ascending angels never come down again, or return with empty hands. This is why we sow much, and bring in little; eat, and have not enough; drink, and are not satisfied; and put our wages into a bag with holes. We have robbed God in tithes and offerings.

But if we would resolve to give Him tithes of all, and to bring them into His storehouse, we should find that He would open the windows of Heaven, and pour us out such a blessing that there would not be room to receive it.

V. IT WILL FILL US WITH JOY

“Then Jacob went on his journey” (29:1).

The margin says that he “lifted up his feet.” Does not that denote the light-hearted alacrity with which he sped upon his way? His feet were winged with joy, and seemed scarcely to tread the earth. All sorrow had gone from his heart; for he had handed his burdens over to those ascending angels. And this will be our happy lot, if only we will believe the love that God hath to us.

We, too, shall lose our burdens at the foot of the cross; and we shall learn the blessed secret of handing over, as soon as they arise, all worries and fears to our pitiful High Priest. Then shall our mouth be **“filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing.”** Our heart shall “bubble over with good matter.” **“Our soul shall make her boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.”**

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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