

# Suffering

## Part 6

### Humbling Down Before the Lord

*“1 And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. 2 And when Jacob saw them , he said , This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim. 3 And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom. 4 And he commanded them, saying , Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: 5 And I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight. 6 And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying , We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee , and four hundred men with him. 7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed : and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; 8 And said , If Esau come to the one company, and smite it , then the other company which is left shall escape. 9 And Jacob said , O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: 10 I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. 11 Deliver me , I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me , and the mother with the children. 12 And thou saidst , I will surely do thee good , and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.” (Genesis 32:1-12)*

Our rule is to call upon God in the time of trouble; we have here an example to this rule, and the success encourages us to follow this example. It was now a time of Jacob's trouble. In his distress he sought the Lord, and he heard him. Times of fear should be times of prayer; whatever frightens us should drive us to our knees, to our God. Jacob had lately seen his guard of angels, but, in this distress, he prayed to God, not to them; he knew they were his fellow-servants. To him he addresses himself with all possible solemnity, so running for safety into the name of the Lord, *as a strong tower, Prov. 18:10* . This prayer is the more remarkable because it won him the honour of being an *Israel, a prince with God*, and the father of the praying remnant, who are hence called *the seed of Jacob*,

What there was extraordinary in this prayer? The request itself is one: *“Deliver me , I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me , and the mother with the children.” (Genesis 32:11)* There was no human on his side, yet he believed the power of God could rescue him as a lamb out of the bloody jaws of the lion. We have to be truthful in our prayer to God, to mention the difficulties we are in. When people aim to be our destroyers, it is our comfort that we have a Father to whom we pray to deliver us.

The pleas that Jacob offered were powerful. Jacob offered up his request with great faith, fervency, and humility. How earnestly does the beg! *“Deliver me, I pray thee.” (Verse 11)* He addresses himself to God as the God of his fathers *“O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac.” (Verse 9)* Such was the humble self-denying sense he had of his own unworthiness that he did not call God his own God, but a God in covenant with his ancestors. Then he mentioned to God *“the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee.” (Verse 9)* He did not rashly leave his place with Laban, nor undertake this journey out of foolish fondness for his native country, but in obedience to God's command. We may be going where God is calling us, and yet in our way we caught up with difficulties. But if we had put God as our guide, then He will be our guard. Jacob humbly acknowledges his own unworthiness to receive any favour from God *“10 I am not worthy of the*

*least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.” (Verse 10)* Some would think he should have pleaded that what was now in danger was his own, and that he had earned it dear enough; no, he pleads, *Lord, I am not worthy of it. Self-denial and self-abasement well bring us in all our addresses to the throne of grace.* Christ never commended any of his petitioners so much as him who said, *“Lord, I am not worthy,” (Matthew. 8:8 )* and her who said, *“Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table,” (Matthew 15:27)* Now you observe:

**1- How Jacob speaks of the mercies of God to him:** We have here, *mercies*, in the plural number; that is, past mercies given according to the promise, and further mercies secured by the promise. Do understand, all what you have is part and outcome of God's mercies.

**2- How meanly and humbly Jacob speaks of himself, disclaiming all thought of his own merit:** *“ I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies,”* Jacob was a considerable man, and, upon many accounts, very deserving, and, in treating with Laban, had justly insisted on his merits, but not before God. Do understand, the best and greatest of men are utterly unworthy of the least favour from God. Those are best prepared for the greatest mercies that see themselves unworthy of the least.

**3- He thankfully owns God's goodness to him in his exile, as he said to God:** *“with my staff I passed over this Jordan;”* Jacob had no guides, no companions, no attendants, no conveniences for travel, but his staff only, nothing else to stay himself upon; *“and now I am become two bands.”* What Jacob was saying that he is now surrounded with a numerous and comfortable children and servants. Though it was his distress that had now obliged him to divide his family into two bands, yet he makes use of that for the magnifying of the mercy of his increase. The increase of our families is then comfortable indeed to us when we see God's mercies, and his truth, in it. Those whose latter end greatly increases ought, with humility and thankfulness, to remember how small their beginning was.

**4- Jacob pleaded to God:** *“Deliver me , I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me , and the mother with the children.,” (Verse 11)* Do not be shy in telling God your fears, God will consider them. The fear that quickens prayer is itself pleadable. It was not a robber, but a murderer, that Jacob was afraid of; nor was it his own life only that lay at stake, but the mothers' and the children's, that had left their native soil to go along with him.

**5- Jacob insisted especially upon the promise God had made to him:** *“which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee,” (Verse 9),* and again, in the close *“And thou saidst , I will surely do thee good , and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.” (Verse 12)* The best we can say to God in prayer is what he has said to us. God's promises, as they are the surest guide of our desires in prayer, and furnish us with the best petitions, so they are the firmest ground of our hopes, and furnish us with the best pleas. Jacob pleaded with God to do him good *“I will surely do thee good,”* and to *multiply his seed. “and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.”*

There are promises in prayer that we can pray for family-mercies, *“His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.” (Psalm 112:2)* *“The children of your servants will live in your presence; their descendants will be established before you.” (Psalm 102:28 )*

Very early in the morning, a great while before day, Jacob had helped his wives and his children over the river, and he desired to be left alone, that he might again more fully spread his cares and fears before God in prayer. *“21 So went the present over before him: and himself lodged that night in the company. 22 And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven \* sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. 23 And he took them ,*

and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had. 24 And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. 25 And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. 26 And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. 27 And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. 28 And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. 29 And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. 30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. 31 And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh. 32 Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank." (Genesis 32:21-32)

Above we read the remarkable story of Jacob's wrestling with the angel and prevailing, which is referred to in *Hosea 12:4* "Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us." He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there-- While Jacob was earnest in prayer, stirring up himself to take hold on God, an angel takes hold on him. Observe how Jacob and this angel engaged, "And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." (Verse 24) It was a single combat, hand to hand; they had neither of them any seconds. Jacob was now full of care and fear about the interview he expected, next day, with his brother, and, to aggravate the trial, God himself seemed to come forth against him as an enemy, to oppose his entrance into the land of promise, and to dispute the pass with him, not permitting him to follow his wives and children whom he had sent before. We are told by the prophet in *Hosea 12:4* how *Jacob wrestled*: he wept, and made supplication; prayers and tears were his weapons. It was not only a corporal, but a spiritual, wrestling, by the vigorous actings of faith and holy desire; and thus all the spiritual seed of Jacob, that pray in praying, still wrestle with God.

What was the success of the engagement? **1. Jacob kept his ground:** Though the struggle continued long, the angel, prevailed not against him (v. 25), that is, this discouragement did not shake his faith, nor silence his prayer. It was not in his own strength that he wrestled, nor by his own strength that he prevailed, but in and by strength derived from Heaven. We cannot prevail with God but in his own strength. It is his Spirit that intercedes in us, and helps our infirmities, *Rom. 8:26*. **2. The angel put out Jacob's thigh, to show him what he could do, and that it was God he was wrestling with, for no man could disjoint his thigh with a touch:** Wrestling believers may obtain glorious victories, and yet come off with physical disabilities; for when they are weak then are they strong, weak in themselves, but strong in Christ, *2 Co. 12:10*. **3- The angel requested Jacob to let him go: (Verse 26)** The reason the angel gives why he would be gone is because the day breaks, and therefore he would not any longer detain Jacob, who had business to do, a journey to go, a family to look after, which, especially in this critical juncture, called for his attendance. Everything is beautiful in its season; even the business of religion, and the comforts of communion with God, must sometimes give way to the necessary affairs of this life. **4. Jacob persists in his holy request to God: "And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." (Verse 26)** Whatever becomes of his family and journey, he resolves to make the best he can of this opportunity, and not to lose the advantage of his victory: he does not mean to wrestle all night for nothing, but humbly resolves he will have a blessing, and rather shall all his bones be put out of joint than he will go away without one. Note, those that would have the blessing of Christ must be in good earnest prayer. It is the fervent prayer that is the effectual prayer. **5- The angel puts a perpetual mark of honour upon him, by changing his name: (Verse 27 and 28)** He is a prince indeed that is a prince with God, and those are truly honourable that are

mighty in prayer indeed. Yet this was not all; having power with God, he shall have power with men too. Having prevailed for a blessing from heaven, he shall, no doubt, prevail for Esau's favour. Notice that whatever enemies we have, if we can but make God our friend, we are well off. **6- God dismissed Jacob with a blessing: (Verse 29)** Jacob desired to know the angel's name, that he might, according to his capacity, do him honour. But that request was denied, that he might not be too proud of his conquest, nor think he had the angel at such an advantage as to oblige him to what he pleased. But, instead of telling him his name, he gave him his blessing, which was the thing he wrestled for: *He blessed him there*, repeated and ratified the blessing formerly given him. Thus Jacob carried his point; a blessing he wrestled for, and a blessing he had; nor did ever any of his praying seed seek in vain. **7- Jacob gives a new name to the place; he calls it Peniel, the face of God: (Verse 30)** Because there he had seen the appearance of God, and obtained the favour of God. Observe, The name he gives to the place preserves and perpetuates, not the honour of his victory, but only the honour of God's free grace. He does not say, "In this place I wrestled with God, and prevailed;" but, "In this place I saw God face to face, and my life was preserved;" Those whom God honours should take shame to themselves and cherish the mercies of God and his grace to them. **8. The memorandum Jacob carried of this in his bones: "He halted on his thigh." (Verse 31)** Some think he continued to do so to his dying-day; and, if he did, he had no reason to complain, for the honour and comfort he obtained by this struggle were abundantly sufficient to countervail the damage, though he went limping to his grave. He had no reason to look upon it as his reproach thus to bear in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus (*Galatians 6:17*) Yet it might serve, like Paul's thorn in the flesh, to keep him from being lifted up with the abundance of the revelations.

**My dear and beloved:** The inspired traditional custom which the seed of Jacob had, in remembrance of this, never to eat of that sinew, or muscle by which the hip-bone is fixed in its cup: thus they preserved the memorial of this story, and gave occasion to their children to enquire concerning it; they also did honour to the memory of Jacob. And this use we may still make of it, to acknowledge the mercy of God, and our obligations to Jesus Christ, that we may now keep up our communion with God in prayer, in humility faith, hope, and love as we agree to pray.

**My Prayer:** Father God I come before you in the name of Jesus who died on the Cross for my sins and rose from the dead to give me eternal life. Lord I thank you for your word to me, that helps me to realize the application of your word in a more practical way. Lord I commit myself to the principle of your word that I read in this message and I thank you for that, this all I ask and pray in Jesus name, Amen.

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