

Monday, September 7, 2020 ▫ Read Exodus Genesis 32:1–12

Questions from the Scripture text: Who met Jacob after he departed from Laban (v1)? What did Jacob say when he saw them (v2)? What did he call the name of the place? Who sends messengers to whom in v3? Where does Jacob say he has been (v4)? What does Jacob say that he has (v5)? What does he hope to obtain? When the messengers return, whom do they say is coming (v6)? And whom else? How does Jacob feel about this news (v7)? What does he do with all of his people and livestock? What is his reasoning (v8) for this? Then Whom does Jacob address in v9? What does he call Him? What does Jacob say about himself in v10? With what had he crossed over the Jordan? What is his condition now? For what does he ask at the beginning of v11? What does he say that he feared from Esau? Of Whose words does Jacob remind God in v12? What had God said?

One of Jacob's areas of greatest spiritual weakness is his lack of self-awareness and God-awareness: he is not very sensible of his unworthiness or of God's abundant goodness. But in this passage, the Lord brings him to a moment of awareness, highlighting several means by which He does so. As readers who suffer from the same weakness as Jacob, this enables us to watch for, recognize, and respond to the opportunities that the Lord uses in our own lives.

The Lord brings to remembrance, and renews by new experience, Jacob's previous great encounter with God. These angels who meet him in v1 are like those whom he first met in the vision at Bethel. He had called that place the house of God, and now he calls this the camp of God. The Lord sometimes gives us experiences of Him that draw us back to other significant moments in our walk with Him. When He does so, this calls to our attention how great His steadfast love and faithfulness have been to us in the intervening time, and how we have not been worthy of the least of it!

The Lord's providence sets before Jacob a difficult task. In the 26 years that Jacob has been with Laban, Esau has established himself as a nation between Padan Aram and Canaan (v3). Jacob's planning and initiative show the significance in his mind of the challenge of crossing through. Often, when we have a challenge in front of us, it emphasizes to us our neediness of God's help, our unworthiness of that help, and His goodness and grace to give His help to the unworthy.

This moment is one that leads Jacob to recount the Lord's mercies toward him in the previous season of his life. As he sends the message to Esau, he must summarize what has happened in the time since that day when he was running for his life, and that summary is a summary of marvelous grace (v4–5), the impression of which we see in the second half of v10. Seeing all of this steadfast love and faithfulness drives Jacob to conclude that he is not worthy of the least of it, and that this astonishingly generous and gracious God has an unlimited supply for the unworthy ones to which He has bound Himself. Birthdays, anniversaries, new years, funerals, Lord's Days, and bedtime prayers are all built into the rhythms of our lives as opportunities to review just how good God has been to us, in contradiction to our unworthiness!

Soon, the challenge before Jacob turns from very difficult to downright dangerous. The messenger returns with the news that Esau is on his way with a force greater than grandfather Abraham's, when he defeated the combined forces of Chedorlaomer's multinational coalition (v6, cf. 14:14). Jacob's response is to be greatly afraid and distressed (v7). And yet what a blessing this fear and distress are, as instruments by which the Lord brings him to the conclusion and confession in v10! Often, the threat of an imminent danger is a means by which the Lord snaps us out of our stupor and crystalizes for us our view of His power, His mercy, our need of it, and our unworthiness for it.

Finally, as the previous four factors work together, the Lord brings to Jacob's mind remembrance of His Word. As Jacob asks for help, he identifies the Lord's relationship to him as "Yahweh who said to me" (v9), and when he makes his plea he concludes his case by saying, "for You said" (v12). When we know that God is faithful to all of His promises, we do well to store up those promises in our hearts and call them to mind frequently. For, this stirs up our confidence that He will be graciously abundant in His goodness to us, over and against our unworthiness.

Indeed, we know that it is ultimately in His keeping of these promises to Jacob that He sent His Son, our Lord Jesus to be our own worthiness—so that when we are in Christ by faith, our worthiness (which is Jesus Himself) and His faithfulness agree and conspire to pour out all of the abundance of His goodness upon us!

When have you had great experience of God? What other times have been like it or related to it? What significant challenges may lie ahead of you? What opportunities do you have to review God's goodness to you, and what use are you making of them? What threats of imminent danger might you be facing? What are some of your favorite promises from God's Word? How are you increasing this store of promises? What use do you make of them and when?

Suggested songs: ARP130 "Lord, from the Depths to You I Cried" or TPH434 "A Debtor to Mercy Alone"