

**Genesis 32: 1-21; "Jacob walking by Faith", Sermon # 90 in the series -  
"Beginnings", Delivered on January 14th, 2007, by Pastor Paul Rendall in  
the Morning Worship Service.**

"So Jacob went on his way," it says in verse 1. Jacob has left the service of Laban where he has been for the last 20 years, and he is journeying on to Canaan to the land of promise. He has learned some very important lessons in the first 20 years of knowing God. God Himself has had to teach him. He had to be taught to leave off being clever and tricky when trying to obtain what he wanted in life. Jacob did learn this lesson. It is so with every true Christian who would be godly. We must all be taught of God to leave behind sinful ways, worldly ways, and selfish ways of living. Becoming godly means that we make a break with our past ways of thinking, which were like this. It means moving on to a sincere obedience. But, oh, what a rich and glorious blessing it is; it is a blessing of the New Covenant which is purchased for us by the Lord Jesus Christ. Jacob believed in the promises that had been given to Abraham and to Isaac about the Messiah, and he believed in all of the promises that God had given to him personally at Bethel. This is the life of faith; believing in the promises and learning to walk by faith and not by sight. That is what we find Jacob doing in this chapter. What does it mean to walk by faith and not by sight? That is what I want to examine this morning.

After we have come to know God, He Himself is the One who goes before us and is with us as we journey through this world toward the heavenly inheritance. He is the One, and the only One, who can teach us what we need to learn in our journey, and help us to face everything that is distressing to us. He will keep our souls and protect us from all evil. The question is, "How does God do this?" How is it that God goes before Jacob, to teach him to walk by faith and not by sight? I believe that since God taught Jacob, that He will teach us to walk by faith as well, in the following ways.

**1st- God reminded Jacob that He was with Him to teach Him and to help him, by showing Him the angels.** (Verses 1 and 2)

It says in verse 1, "So Jacob went his way, and the angels of God met him." "When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is God's camp." "And he called the name of that place Mahanaim." Now that is all that said of the angels; nothing more. But the timing of this happening to Jacob is very important and significant to our study. Why does God do this? Why do the angels show up at this particular time in Jacob's life, and why does Jacob call them Mahanaim? We are not told directly in the text why the angels came at this time, but it should become apparent as we go through this sermon. They came just before a time of great testing in Jacob's life. They came, I believe, as an encouragement to his faith. Their presence was supposed to convey to Jacob the thought that God had been with Him on this journey and that he would be with him and keep him, and the families with him, safe from the harm of any person, or thing which tried to harm them. These angels did not show up during the time when Jacob became fearful and distressed about Esau. They came before that, in the time of peace. This is often the way that God does things with his saints. In our days, angels are not often, if at all, given permission by God to come visibly and encourage and minister to God's saints. And there is a reason for this. God believes that it ought to be enough that we understand and know that there are angels all around us, who are fulfilling God's word to the very letter in

regard to protecting and helping us, even though we cannot see them. We are to live by faith and not by sight. Psalm 91 is a psalm which shows God's great protection over His people when in verse 9 it says, "Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place." "No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways." "In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone." This is the kind of care that God gives to all His saints. These verses that I just read to you found their greatest fulfillment in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ when, in being tempted by the devil, the devil quoted them to Him. He conveniently left off the words, "in all your ways", but I am sure that the Lord Jesus remembered them. And it says in Matthew 4: 11, after the Lord Jesus answered correctly, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God,' "Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him." The Lord Jesus walked by faith, keeping that Scripture, and the angels did come and minister to Him. We are to hold fast to God's promises and all His truth, as well, and even though we do not see the angels, we are to know that they are there, ministering to us on God's behalf.

Psalm 34: 7 says, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear God and delivers them." Jacob saw the angels in this way. He says, "This is God's camp." God sent the angels at this point so that Jacob would remember that they would be there later to protect him in the time of His distress. They would be there later, unseen by Jacob, but active in his defense. I like the words of Matthew Henry in his commentary on this. He says, "They met him to bid him welcome to Canaan again; a more honorable reception this was than ever any prince had, that was met by the magistrates of a city in their formalities." "They met him to congratulate him on his arrival, as well as on his escape from Laban; for they have pleasure in the prosperity of God's servants." "They had invisibly attended him all along, but now they appeared to him, because he had greater dangers before him than those he had hitherto encountered." "Note, when God designs his people for extraordinary trials, he prepares them by extraordinary comforts." "We should think it had been more seasonable for these angels to have appeared to him amidst the perplexity and agitation occasioned first by Laban, and afterwards by Esau, than in this calm and quiet interval, when he saw not himself in any immanent peril; but God will have us, when we are in peace to provide for trouble, and when trouble comes, to live upon our former observations and experiences; for we walk by faith, not by sight." Thus Matthew Henry. But do you see what he is saying? He is saying that God will give us good spiritually encouraging and strengthening experiences at times of his appointment, not so that we would feast upon them continually, but so that we will be able to face and endure our testings, and overcome our distress and fear in a way that will honor Him. This is what God was doing with Jacob giving him a sight of the angels. It was what he did for Peter, James, and John in the transfiguration of Christ. It was something very special given, in order that faith would be strengthened.

**2ndly- God taught Jacob how to pray and to see himself rightly when situations of distress came upon him.** (Verses 3-12)

Jacob, it says in verse 3, "sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom." Jacob knew that God was with him because the Lord had sent his angels. The word for angels here in the Hebrew, in verse 1, is the same as the word for messengers that is found in verse 3. God had sent his messengers and now Jacob felt confident to send his messengers. I think that Jacob felt that since he had

seen this appearance of angels that it bode well for his sending to Esau to tell him that he was passing through his territory. Jacob sends him a very respectful and humble message. He says to his servants, "Speak thus to my lord Esau..." Some commentators have taken Jacob's use of this word "lord" to mean that Jacob was already afraid of him, and that he used this title in a fawning way of showing complete submission to him. But I believe that it was simply a term of respect. If you look over at chapter 36 where a list of Esau's descendants is found, and you can see that many of his clan were desirous of having a great title in front of their names. It says in verse 31, "Now these were the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the children of Israel." And Verses 15-20 and 40-43 of that chapter, there is a list of the "Chiefs" of the sons of Esau. I think that it was Esau who taught them this mindset of self-appointed greatness. Jacob was just being careful to show respect to his brother, hoping that he was not still of a mind to kill him, as he had been before he left. Jacob instructed his servants to tell Esau that he had dwelt with Laban and stayed in Haran until that point in time, and that he had during the time of his stay there built up possessions of oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants. Jacob calls himself Esau's "servant". He is attempting to show his older brother that he does not want to "lord it over" Esau in any way that would indicate that he still believed that it had been right to obtain the birthright and the blessing of Isaac in the way that he had. This is why he used the words "my lord Esau" and the words "your servant" in relation to himself. Things really were different in him; he hoped that it would be different with Esau.

But what a surprise it was when his servants returned saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him." What a jolt to faith! Jacob now has the distinct impression that Esau has not forgotten the past offenses and he is going to make sure that Jacob and all that are with him will never escape this time. Such are the fears which immediately enter Jacob's mind. Verse 7 says, "So Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies." You see, Jacob didn't know what was really in Esau's mind at this point. He could not know whether Esau was still holding a murderous grudge against him because he had stolen the blessing 20 years before. 400 armed men could easily wipe out his two little companies. So Jacob "divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies," it says. He reasons this way; that "if Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the other company which is left will escape."

There is a tendency in even redeemed hearts, to think the worst in any situations of fear which we come into. Our initial reaction is to forget God, to forget the promises of His word, and to forget the tokens of His presence with us, when we become distressed and fearful. Jacob, I think, forgot the Mahanaim. He forgot the two companies of angels that he had seen. They had already divided up into the 2 companies long before Jacob divided all those that were with him into 2 groups. That sight of the two companies was intended to be to Jacob a sign that all those with him of both his families and their children and servants were under God's immediate care. Two companies of men would be accompanied by two companies of angels. They would come back safely into the land Canaan. But Jacob is distressed. Why? Because it is the guilt of his past sins in relation to Esau. He fears that these sins will be remembered and that he may die along with the mothers and the children at Esau's hand.

But God is simply teaching him to pray and to see himself rightly in this situation. Will you not remember, dear saints of God, that the first thing that you should do when fears and distresses come upon you, is to pray to God as Jacob does here? Some believers do not pray when fears come upon them. It is as if God does not exist, or that He has forgotten them. But Jacob not only prays at this crucial time, but he is a good model of prayer for all of God's people. The first thing that he does in his prayer is to address God as the God who had called his grandfather Abraham, his father Isaac, and even he himself, into a relationship with this faithful covenant keeping God. Let me ask you this morning whether you address God in this personal way, as your God? The God who has made you will listen to you if you remind Him that it is He who has begun a good work in you, and you are now asking him to help you so that it will be completed. But perhaps there are some here this morning who have never called upon God and you do not know whether God will show you favor or hear your prayers. Jacob had never heard the name, and would not in his lifetime hear the name of His Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, but he would remind God of the promise that he and his father and grandfather all trusted in. "O God of my father Abraham and God my father Isaac, the Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you.'" You should know this morning, if you don't already, that it is only in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that salvation is found, that favor is found, that eternal life and the eternal blessings of God are found. It is only when you trust in Jesus that God will deal well with you. For there is no other name given in heaven or among men by which we must be saved. Will you not call upon Him in your distresses? Will you not call upon Him when you come to understand how great a sinner in the sight of God that you really are in your heart of hearts? Even the best of men, to become Christians, must come to realize this awful truth of the reality of their sinfulness.

Jacob had walked with the Lord for 20 years and God had led him all the way. And yet we find him taking nothing for granted. We still find him being humbled under a sense of his own sinfulness and unworthiness to receive God's mercy and help that day. He says words which have been thousands of times upon the lips of the saints who came after him. "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant." The Revised Standard Version says, "I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness which thou hast shown to thy servant." If you put these two translations together I think that you can understand what Jacob was saying. He has a right attitude in prayer. He deserves nothing from God. He has been given the privilege of receiving a vision of God at Bethel. He has received mercy from God in all the great and precious promises that he has received. God has prospered him even though Laban did not take good care of him or provide for him. God protected him from Laban and commanded him to return to the land of Canaan and to his father's house. God had shown him steadfast love and his faithfulness to watch over him during all those 20 years. And Jacob knew and acknowledged in his prayer that it was all of God's grace, that he was unworthy that the least of these good things had come to him. This is the way that every Christian should think of Himself in terms of what they have been given, by way of favor and grace, and in all the situations that they find themselves in. Reflect upon the faithfulness and steadfast love of your God. Where would you be without Him? Where would you be without grace? Where would you be without His steadfast love being exercised toward you?

And Jacob also had the courage to pray for deliverance from the hand of Esau. He states the matter plainly in verse 11. "...for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children." And here he pleads the promise which God had formerly given to him at Bethel. "For You said, 'I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'" It was worded this way in Genesis 28: 15 at Bethel, "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go., and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you." You see how it is with true Christians. God deliberately ordains the situations of distress that each one is to pass through and by that means he teaches them to pray. He so works in their lives that they must exercise faith, they must learn to see themselves as unworthy and helpless to deliver themselves from the trial. True Christians learn to plead in prayer in this way, and the ones who won't will be brought into greater trials yet so that in their distress they will call upon Him and plead with Him in this way. Oh, dearly beloved, do not fight against God; rather submit to Him. See yourself in this holy way of unworthiness, but do not let it paralyze you and keep you from prayer. "Men ought always to pray, and not lose heart," the Lord Jesus says in Luke 18: 1.

**And then 3rdly- God taught Jacob how to prepare for, and to face, the person who had something against him.**(Verses 13-21)

We will look at his wrestling with God the next time that we are together. Right now I want you to see that Jacob did think about the reality of what he thought it would take to "appease" his brother in this matter. He not only prayed, but he prepared a present for his brother. Now remember, Esau is a man of the earth. He has no interest in spiritual things. He has no regard for God. He is consumed with an earthly inheritance, not a heavenly one. Jacob thinks quickly about what would be the gift that he could give to his brother that would show him that he wanted to be reconciled to him. It says in verse 13, "So he lodged there that same night, and took what came to his hand as a present for Esau his brother; two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milk camels with their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten foals." "Then he delivered them to the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, 'Pass over before me, and put some distance between successive droves.'" Jacob would line up all of these successive droves and each one would be saying the same thing when the questions were asked. "When Esau and his men came they would ask, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going?'" "Whose are these in front of you?" "Then they were to say, 'They are your servant Jacob's.'" "It is a present sent to my lord Esau; and behold he also is behind us." So he commanded the second, the third, and all who followed the droves, saying "In this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him." "And also say, 'Your servant Jacob is behind us.'" All of these droves lined up would really make an impression on Esau, he hoped. This is a biblical way of approach with those who are angry with you. Listen to Proverbs 21: 14 says, "A gift given in secret pacifies anger, and a bribe behind the back, strong wrath." The only difference here is that Jacob's gift would not be secret; it would be open, but it would be un-looked for. The word in the Hebrew, Minchah, means a donation or a tribute, a bloodless sacrificial offering that Jacob would give him. This generous gift I have for you, Esau, in order that you will be appeased for past wrongs that I have done to you, Jacob is thinking. Matthew Henry says, "Nothing is more violent than anger." "O the force of strong wrath!" "And yet a handsome present,

prudently managed, will turn away some men's wrath when it seemed implacable and disarm the keenest and most passionate resentments." "Covetousness is commonly a master-sin and has the command of others lusts." "Money commands all things." "Thus Jacob pacified Esau and Abigail David." So says Matthew Henry. It is only God who can teach a man to be generous in a good and necessary way, to prevent further offense and to appease the wrath of a man more unworthy than himself. But this is what Jacob did.

This leads me in closing to speak to you about the appeasing of God's wrath. God appeased, or satisfied His own wrath by sending His Son to make propitiation for our sins. He appeased the wrath of God by the gift and sacrifice of Himself on the cross for us. John Gill says concerning Jacob, "He hoped the present would produce the desired effect; that it would turn away his wrath from him, and pacify him; and then he should be able to appear before him, and see his face with pleasure: or I will expiate his face, as some render the words, or make him propitious and favorable; or cover his face as Aben Ezra interprets it, that is, cause him to hide his wrath and resentment, that it shall not appear; or cause his fury to cease. This is what we bring to God when we believe in Jesus Christ for our salvation. He is the "Lamb of God" who takes away the sin of the world. He offered Himself up as a sacrifice in the place of sinners such as Jacob, and such as you and I, so that God's wrath and anger would all be turned away and we should be able to appear before him and see His face with pleasure. This is the only thing that we can bring to God. Micah 6: 6 says, "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?" "Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?" "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands rivers of oil?" "Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" This was what Jacob was taught by God to do in this situation. He knew that he was unworthy of the least of God's mercies, but his gift to Esau shows forth the reality of his faith in Christ. Jacob sent the present on before him. Even so, the Lord Jesus Christ is the "present sent on" before us into heaven itself, so that someday we may see God face to face. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Not an angry God, but a God whose face will shine upon them. Next time, we will see how Jacob had to wrestle for the blessings of deliverance and a new name with God.