

God Delights to Save Sinners

Hebrews 11:21

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ,

This saying is trustworthy and deserving of hearty acceptance among us that God saves sinners. What doctrine comforts us more than this truth? That God so loved, from all eternity, my soul that he would send his own very Son to die that he might have me, you, and all who would ever believe. Yet there are many, even some here today, who doubt if this truth is also for them. There are many who come to church Lord's day after Lord's day who wonder, "does God love even me?", "Am I a partaker in this gospel truth?", "Am I to be counted among the elect?" These are serious questions.

In verses 20, 21, and 22 Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph are given to the church as examples of faith. The general principle is this: *Faith enabled Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph to do what they could not do. Principally, to believe God and pronounce blessings upon their posterity.* In their own strength these men did not demonstrate enough merit for salvation, they could not (in their own strength) evidence enough fruit of election, but are our examples of believing upon the Lord Jesus in faith unto eternal salvation.

So we take up the Bible's example of Jacob, we will look at:

Point 1: The Character of Jacob

Point 2: The Faith of Jacob

Point 1: The Character of Jacob (v. 21)

*"By faith **Jacob**, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff."* (v.21).

Jacob is a Bible character often mentioned in the scriptures. 378 times he is referred to in the pages of scripture. For reference the other patriarch Abraham is mentioned 239 times, and Isaac 129 times (depending on translation). Clearly then, God the Holy Spirit has much to teach us about the subject of our study. I believe the significance of Jacob in the Bible is that he is a character that demonstrates in a vivid way what it means to be saved by grace through faith.

1.1 - *The name of Jacob*

First, we notice the name *Jacob*. The life of Jacob is recorded in Genesis 25-49 beginning rather eventfully in a twin birth with his elder brother Esau of whom he quickly followed out of the womb grasping his heel. And so his name was called Jacob, meaning supplanter or deceiver, a twister.

This name very much characterized his life. He was very much like his father Isaac, Jacob had a quiet and gentle disposition, when he grew up he followed in the life of a shepherd. Yet in his dealings with Esau, Isaac, and Laban he showed much selfishness and deceit (Gen. 25:29-34).

The remarkable detail recorded about Jacob's birth, upbringing, and life demonstrates that he, like every human being ever born, is born with a sinful heart. Even his very name illustrates this truth.

Yet it's to the name of *Jacob* that God frequently attaches his name to throughout the scriptures. 20 times in the Bible God describes himself as the God of "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob". Now it would be naive to assume that God only mentioned the patriarch because they are patriarch (our founding fathers). The patriarch inclusion in Hebrews 11 is that they are not only our founding fathers but our examples of faithfulness. But how is this deceiver and example of faith?

1.2 - *The Life of Jacob*

It's remarkable that Jacob is an example for our faith because as we look at his life he is a fairly unsavoury character. In the narrative of Jacob's life we are told:

- That rather than feeding his starving brother he swindled his birthright from him (Gen. 24:29-34).
- He lied to his aged and blind father, using God's name, to steal his brother's blessing.
- Lest we miss the significance of this in our modern age. The blessing secured to him who possessed it;

- (1) superior rank in his family (Gen. 49:3);
- (2) a double portion of the paternal inheritance (Deut. 21:17);
- (3) the priestly office in the family (Num. 8:17–19); and
- (4) the promise of the Seed in which all nations of the earth were to be blessed (Gen. 22:18).
- He marries both Leah, Rachel and their servants (Gen. 29-30).
- He deceives his uncle Laban to enrich himself, then leaves in the middle of the night with his family.
- He forgot God’s promise at Bethel.
- He marries his daughter to a heathen and his son’s trick and murder the entire family of the husband.
- He has 10 children who lie about selling their younger brother in Egyptian slavery and instead say he was eaten by a wild beast.

To put it this way, if your daughter comes home with a Jacob, send him packing. But dear friends, what we need to see is that the problem with Jacob is not his parents (for he is a grandson of Abraham and a son of Isaac), it isn’t his culture (for he is a child of the promised land), it’s not that he is a worldly person for his is a son of the covenant (for he was circumcised and raised in the fear of God), the problem is not even his actions... The problem with Jacob is the same problem with all of us that he is a sinner.

He, like us, has a sinful heart that manifests itself with sinful actions. And those sinful actions not only affect him but also make an indelible impression upon his children. Who among us cannot see a picture of ourselves in the patriarch Jacob? We have never deceived? Never misuse God’s name? Never stolen? Have been perfect parents? No, we are more like Jacob than we care to admit.

Yet, it was to this character, it was to Jacob that God 20 times in his Bible says, “*I am the God of Jacob*”. Do you know how comforting this is? That God is the God of Jacob! You know if God named himself the God of Bible characters who are described without sin we could understand that. If God called himself the God of Caleb, it would be no comfort to us since Caleb in the Bible never sins. Or the God of Daniel or Mary the most righteous of Bible characters, we would say “well yeah but I am no Daniel or Mary”. But he identifies himself with Jacob and calls himself the God of Jacob. Do you realize how comforting that is? If God would save a sinner like Jacob, call him his own, and save his soul, surely he can be my God too.

1.3 - *The Death of Jacob*

“By faith Jacob, when he was dying”

I think it is wise to look at the death of Jacob because I believe it tells us much about the nature of Jacob’s life. We have to look at the facts or actions of his life but what of his nature? I have had the privilege of doing many funerals and have noticed that at the end of someone’s life often those dear to them will characterize their life with a word or a sentence. Maybe that’s joyful, musical, godly, ect.. But how would you characterize Jacob’s life? I think the answer is quite clear, *love*. The inherent quality of Jacob’s life is love. Not because Jacob was loving, or he loved much, but because Jacob was much loved.

In the Word of God it is written “*Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated*” (Mal. 1:3; Rom. 9:13). What characterized the life of Jacob was that God loved him. God has “deep affection” for Jacob and wishes spiritual good upon him. Beloved, that’s all grace. God richly demonstrates his love for Jacob throughout his life:

- Before Jacob is born God says the elder shall serve the younger. That’s grace.
- When Jacob flees his father’s house because of his sin against Esau God appears to him at Bethel, and God promises that he is with him. And he wrestles with the angel of the Lord, the preincarnate Christ (Gen. 32). Jesus Christ is revealed to him. That’s grace.
- Laban tries to deceive him but instead God multiplies 10x the flocks of Jacob (Gen. 30). That’s grace.
- When Jacob flees Shechem and they come after Jacob to kill him God puts fear in their heart and says “*Touch not my anointed*” (Gen. 35:5). That’s grace.
- Then in his final years God provides for him a place in Egypt during the famine. That’s grace.

Then just before he dies, he brings his feet up into his bed and says, “*I have waited for your salvation, O Lord!*” (Gen. 49:18). What does this mean? He says I have been loved with your love all my life, I have been graced with your grace, and now I give myself to eternal salvation in Christ Jesus. That's grace.

Application:

- So dear friend, what bars you from the love of God? If God is so willing to save sinners like Jacob, he is willing to save sinners such as you as well. You may say, well Jacob saw visions and wrestled with God! What assurance do I have that God loves me? Dear friend, you have a greater assurance than Jacob. You have Christ upon Calvary's cross. He died that he might save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15)! He cried out upon that cross “*Father forgive them for they know not what they do*” there is no sin so heinous, no crime so foul, no soul so stained that can't be redeemed by the blood of the lamb.
- If I may speak candidly, there has sometimes been a tradition in our churches that if someone struggles with the question of assurance, we tell them to look into themselves to see if they are bearing good fruits, or the fruits of election. I want to propose to you today that to look inward to ourselves is only cause for fear and doubt. For even our greatest triumphs of faith are often stained with sin. So what must those struggling with assurance do? We must look outside of ourselves to Christ. See his heart inflamed with love on the cross, we see his promises to save sinners in his word, finding in ourselves nothing that can save but finding in him all that we need for eternal salvation (CoD. 5:10).
- How do you die happy?
- I want us to notice that dying words of Jacob, I await for *your salvation*. Not salvation that he received by grace but still has to stay in by faithfulness, for that would be Jacob's salvation. He says this is salvation that is coming to him from God. I was privileged for my younger years to have both sets and grandparents and a set of great grandparents all with strong faith. When my great grandfather was dying my father, who was so dear to him, sat by his bedside and ever so faintly my grandfather was whispering a hymn. But the only word my father could make out was the name ‘Jesus’. You don't die happy looking for the streets of gold, or even your loved ones (although that's a benefit) you die happy as you look to the saviour who loved you with an everlasting love.

Point 2: The Faith of Jacob

What is demonstrated in the life of Jacob is a radical change of character. What is the cause of this change? The author of Hebrews tells us, *by faith*. It was faith that took Jacob from an egocentric, self regarded, inconsiderate sinner to someone who with their dying breath looked unto God in faith.

You see, despite Jacob's failures he is remembered as a man of faith. Matthew Henry says, “Jacob's life was a life of faith.” To demonstrate this truth God the Holy Spirit provides us with two aspects of Jacob's faith. He *blesses* and he *worships*.

2.1 - *By faith Jacob blesses*

“*By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph*”

This of course refers to the story recorded in Genesis 48 where we are told that Joseph hears that his father is sick and goes to visit him with his sons Ephriam and Mannasah. We are told of a beautiful family scene where Jacob sits up in his bed and says, “your two sons, born in Egypt before I came to Egypt are mine; just as much Reuben and Simeon are mine”. Meaning he counts these children as his own, despite the fact that he has not met them, and that they are Egyptian by nationality.

Jacob then crosses his hands and blesses Ephriam the younger first, and Mannasah the elder second. Sometimes we can become so familiar with a story that we give little thought to the meaning of the actions of the Bible characters. But it really is here that Jacob's faith shines out most triumphantly.

After a checkered life of mingled self will, and subjection to God, he blesses the children by faith. But what does it mean that Jacob blesses them by faith? This is why it's important to read our Bible in context, for in the proceeding verse we are told, “*By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau*” (v.20). How does a tricked blind man, blessing the wrong son, bless *by faith*? I believe John Brown to be right when he says that “a revelation was made to the mind of Isaac by God about his future descendants.”¹ You see, Isaac on his own accord would have blessed Esau forgetting that God before the children were even born said to Rebekah, “*Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older*

¹ John Brown, *Hebrews*, 530.

shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23). God's plan was not thwarted, and when Isaac pronounced the blessing it says he *trembled exceedingly* (27:33), and when Esau sought the blessing with tears (Heb. 12:17) Isaac's faith had revived and said "*I have blessed him and he will be blessed.*" Although his faith was weak, God's will prevailed through him.

So too when Jacob blesses he does not act according to the cultural norm of blessing the elder but blesses the younger first. John Calvin says, "There was nothing here agreeable to reason; but faith ruled supreme. If, then, the Jews wish to be anything, they should glory in nothing else, but in faith." Thus Jacob like his Father saw an unhindered vision of the future of his people, he believed God, and he obeyed.

- Jacob believed that the revealed will of God was true.
- He spoke with confidence that God will be faithful to his promises.
- Thus we see that Jacob blesses *by faith* not because he is faithful, or that Ephraim was more faithful than Manassah, but because God is faithful.

2.1 - *By faith Jacob worships*

Here we come to the most important part of any life that is characterized by faith, *Jacob worships*. This is recorded in Genesis 47:29-31:

"And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "If now I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal kindly and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers. Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place." He answered, "I will do as you have said." And he said, "Swear to me"; and he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed."

Plainly spoken, when dying, Jacob by faith expressed an earnest desire to be buried in the land of promise; and upon receiving satisfactory assurance that his wish would be granted - he worshiped bending over his staff which was necessary to support his feeble frame. Faith was worked into his heart by the Holy Spirit that led him to worship.

It was Jacob's faith in the promise that Canaan was to be the inheritance of his family that led him to not want to be buried in Egypt. He was convinced that one day he and his family would possess the promised land which led him to worship. Brothers and sisters nothing but faith could have enabled him to do so. Faith, and nothing but faith, can enable you, amid life's events which seem to make God's promises to you all but an impossibility, have a confidence that God will be faithful to his word and this causes us to worship.

Jacob praised God for what he had done for him; and the prospect of approaching salvation. And thus even in dying he acts by faith. He lived by faith, he died by faith and in faith.

Application:

- An application I often mention needs repeating here. What is it that God has expects of us? For so many Christians we and others tie up heavy burdens upon ourselves, knowing that we are saved by grace, but making sure my children are well behaved, and that even when I am sad I appear joyful, and that we have to demonstrate an external piety so that people know we are Christians! We want to be successful in the Christian faith. We are trying to earn something. Please, weary soul, notice that Jacob's sin did not change his opinion of him before he was born God loved him, God was always with him, and God on that last day ransomed him from hell. God does not measure your worthiness of heaven based on your success. On the last day when you stand before the Almighty, the question is not "what have you done for me?" But have you accepted what I have done for you in Christ?" He has not asked you to be successful, he has asked you to be faithful.
- Jacob is remembered for his faith (11:21). We are able to go back and see where he fell short, but his plaque in the hall of faith makes no mention of his sins, only his faith. So too are all in Christ washed from all sins. We all, like Jacob, have many shortcomings but if you are in Christ it is as if you have never sinned and we shall not be known for our wickedness but shall be known as those in whom Christ has done a mighty work.

Conclusion:

We return then to our original question, "does God love even me?", "Am I a partaker in this gospel truth?", "Am I counted among the elect?" From Jacob's life is demonstrated the answer, God will save any and all who come to him in penitent faith. Do not wait a moment longer! But trust in Christ, right now, in this moment. Jesus will receive even your weak faith, lean upon his everlasting

arms, look to Almighty for strength and you too will know that God delights to save sinners. It's only by faith we believe God and are able to do that which he has called us too.