

(Beauty for Ashes) 2. the Pathway to the Christ-Life (I) : Being Broken

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being broken and humbled in order to receive the power of the Holy Spirit and to be transformed into the image of Christ.

Scripture: Genesis 3:24, Psalm 46:7, Proverbs 4:18, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 1:6, Hebrews 12:10

Topics: "Brokenness", "Spiritual Transformation"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the transformative power of being broken before God, using the life of Jacob as an example. He emphasizes the importance of surrendering our self-life to allow Christ to manifest His glory within us. Through Jacob's journey of being broken, we learn that God's discipline and honesty with Him are essential for experiencing His fullness and blessings. The sermon highlights that true power with God and men comes when we are earnest, hungry for God, and completely honest in our brokenness before Him, leading to a life of dependence and worship.

Transcript

Being Broken

One of the verses which clearly describes the pathway that leads us out of our self-life into the full beauty of the Christ-life, is Galatians 2:20:

"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live. But it is no longer I that live but Christ Who lives in me."

To us, this may be merely a good verse to be memorized or to get three points for a sermon from! But to the Apostle Paul who wrote it, it described his experience. He had exchanged the ashes of his self-life for the beauty of Christ's own Divine life. And this had become possible for him, because he had accepted death to himself.

It is only when the 'I' (the self-life) is crucified that Christ can manifest Himself in His glory within us. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, we read that the Holy Spirit transforms us into the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another. This is the primary ministry of the Holy Spirit. Day by day, and year by year, the Spirit of God seeks to conform us increasingly to the likeness of Christ. But the pathway from each step of glory to the next is via the cross. If we through the Spirit, put to death our self-life, we shall know the abundance of

Christ's life, not otherwise.

We today, can no longer go freely to the tree of life as Adam could, before He fell. In Genesis 3:24, we read that God placed a flaming sword in front of the tree of life. And so, before we can partake of this tree, the flaming sword has to fall upon and slay our self-life. There is no other way to reach the life of God. The way of the cross is the only way to fullness of life. This truth is taught in plain words as well as through symbols, throughout the Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation.

The cross breaks us as well as empties us. We shall consider these two aspects of the cross in this chapter and the next.

Jacob's Two Meetings with God

Jacob was a man who learnt experimentally what it meant to be broken. We can learn many truths from his life.

One excellent thing about the Bible is that it is absolutely honest in recording the faults and failings of its greatest men. The Scriptures do not portray marble saints. We see in the Word of God, men and women exactly as they were - warts and all. This is why the biographies of Biblical characters are a greater encouragement to us than many biographies written in our day (which invariably hide the failings of the men they describe, and present them as super-saints).

Jacob was a man of like passions as we are. He was called of God, no doubt, and eternally predestined to be a chosen vessel for the working out of the Divine purposes. But he had a corrupt and deceitful heart, just like ours. God calls ordinary people to His service - not supermen. Very often, He calls the base and the despised and the weak of the world, to fulfil His purposes. He puts no premium whatever on human cleverness and ability in His service.

Jacob must have met with God many times in his life. But in the record given us in Genesis, there are two meetings with God that stand out. The first at Bethel, where he dreamt of a ladder reaching up to Heaven, and where he said, "This is the house of God" (Genesis 28:10-22). The second at Peniel, where he wrestled with God and where he said, "I have seen God face to face" (Genesis 32:24-32). Between these two incidents lay twenty years.

At Bethel, we read, he stopped to camp, when the sun had set (Genesis 28:11). That of course is only a statement indicating the time of day at which Jacob arrived at Bethel. But as we read the subsequent record of Jacob's life (in the next four chapters), we find that the sun had indeed set upon his life. And during the twenty years that followed this incident, the darkness grew deeper and deeper. But that was not the end of the story.

At Peniel, he met with God again. And there, it is recorded, immediately after his meeting with God, that the sun rose, and he journeyed on (Genesis 32:31). Again a geographical fact - but true of Jacob's life as well. He was a different man from that day. The darkness passed away and the light of God shone upon his life.

God has given us the record of Jacob's darkness to show us that he was an ordinary man. He experienced the same darkness that we do. But he experienced a sunrise as well. And this encourages us to believe that no matter how great the darkness of our self-life, we can yet see the rising of the sun, if we will follow in Jacob's footsteps at Peniel.

Let us then look at Jacob's life - first when the sun had set on him; and secondly when the sun rose.

The Sun Sets

Jacob came out of his mother's womb, grabbing his brother's leg. "So they called him Jacob (meaning Grabber)" (Genesis 25:26 - LB). And that is exactly what he was. He was always grabbing something from someone for himself. He grabbed the birthright from his brother and later the blessing from his father. He grabbed Rachel from her father Laban, and later grabbed Laban's property as well.

Jacob was a bargainer too. He bargained with Esau for the birthright. And later, he bargained with Laban for Rachel. At Bethel, we find him even bargaining with God.

Jacob was also a deceiver. When he wanted his father's blessing, he was prepared to deceive his father in order to get it. He was even prepared to take the Name of God in telling the lie. When Isaac asks him how he got the meat so quickly, he replies, "The Lord brought it to me" (Genesis 27:20). How lightly he could even take the Lord's Name and tell a lie! He certainly had no fear of God.

Such was Jacob's nature - grabbing, bargaining and deceiving - looking after his own earthly interests all the time. He was very much a child of Adam.

Coming Short of God's Calling

Finally, at Bethel, the sun set upon his life. There, in a dream, God gave Jacob a revelation of His great and glorious purpose for his life. He gave Jacob the same promises that he had given Abraham. But how does Jacob respond? He says, in effect, "Lord, I'm not so interested in all those spiritual blessings. If you'll only protect me from harm and danger and give me food to eat and clothes to wear, I'll be quite happy. I'll give you one-tenth of my income and acknowledge you as my God" (Genesis 28:20-22).

Many Christians are just like that. God calls them to something great and glorious and they settle for something far, far inferior. God calls them to expend their energies in His work, but they waste their lives making money and seeking honour in this world. How few there are among God's people who recognize their high calling! One such was a man of God who told his son, "I should not like it, if you were meant by God to be a missionary, that you drivel down to becoming a king or a millionaire. What are your kings and nobles compared with the dignity of winning souls to Christ."

God's purpose for us - as for Jacob - extends far beyond mere physical blessings. His purpose is basically twofold - first that we might manifest the life of Christ to others; and secondly, that we might minister that life to others. This is the calling of the Christian - and there can be no greater calling on earth. Yet many Christians like Jacob, don't recognize this - even some who are in Christian work. God gives them some spiritual gift or ability and soon they are taken up with that, and go off on a tangent, away from the central purpose of God for their lives. Like a child who is taken up with a toy, they are taken up with their gift. It fills their whole vision and they never see anything beyond. How cleverly Satan has sidetracked them without their even realizing it!

Jacob could not take in the vastness of God's purpose for his life. He was satisfied with toys, when God wanted him to have heavenly riches. The result of such a narrow vision was that God's purposes for Jacob's life were delayed. God had to wait twenty years, before Jacob was willing to take his mind away from the things of the world and set it on things above. How many Christians are hindering and delaying God's glorious purposes for their lives, because of the narrowness of their vision, because they are taken

up with things lesser than God's highest.

Paul was a different man. He could say at the end of his life that he had not been disobedient to the heavenly vision. On the Damascus Road, God had given him a vision of the great ministry He had for him - to open the blind eyes of people and to deliver them from Satan's power through the message of the gospel (Acts 26:16-19). And Paul never got bogged down with social work or anything lesser than what God had called him to.

But Jacob did not respond like that, when God spoke to him. And so the sun set on his life, and things grew darker and darker. But the wonderful thing is that God did not let Jacob go. God had promised him at Bethel, "I will not leave you until I have fulfilled My promises to you;" and God kept His word. This is what encourages us - the perseverance of God with His stubborn children.

Divine Discipline

In order to fulfil His promises to Jacob, God had to discipline him severely. And so we see from this point in the story up to the second meeting at Peniel, twenty years of Divine chastening in Jacob's life in order that Jacob might come to the point where he would accept God's highest for his life.

First of all, God placed Jacob alongside another shrewd person. Laban was just as smart as Jacob, and as they lived together and came into close contact with each other, plenty of friction was generated and some of Jacob's rough edges were rubbed off. God knows whom to place us with in order to purge us of our crookedness. God measures out His disciplines to us, according to our individual need; and He makes all things work together for our good, even when He places us alongside someone like Laban - provided we don't rebel against God's providences. Many people have learnt sanctification through God leading them to marry someone just like themselves. "The sparks fly when iron strikes iron" (Proverbs 27:17 - LB) - but it sharpens both pieces of iron!

Jacob, as last, begins to reap what he had sown. All his life he had been cheating others. Now he gets cheated himself. He goes through his wedding ceremony, thinking he is marrying Rachel, but discovers the next morning that he has actually married Leah! He had met his match in Laban! He now gets a taste himself of the bitter medicine that he had been doling out to others. God does not discipline without a purpose or arbitrarily. He knows what dosage each person needs and gives the medicine accordingly. With the merciful, God shows Himself merciful; and with the stubborn, He shows Himself stubborn (Psalm 18:25). He knows how to deal with every Jacob.

Jacob's problems were not yet over. After fourteen years of hard work, he obtained Rachel, only to discover that she was barren. God was merciful and finally gave Jacob a child through her, but even this brings no change in Jacob. He still cannot trust God, but continues to scheme.

He next plans to rob Laban of his property. Jacob was clever. He knew all the tricks of the trade, and he knew how to get the best of Laban's cattle. How long God had to wait before Jacob learned to trust in Him and forsake his own human ingenuity. It is the same problem that God has with many of His children today. He is not impressed by our cleverness. He waits for us to see the folly of all that, before He can use us to fulfil His will.

We find Jacob finally scheming to run away from Laban. He is tired of living with his father-in-law and wants to go away. But when he does run away, he finds that he has only jumped out of the frying pan into

the fire. He hears that Esau is approaching him with a large army and that Laban is pursuing him from the rear. The one who tries to escape God's disciplines finds that it is not an easy task. If Jacob had left the matter in God's hands, God would have released him from Laban in His own way. But Jacob had not learned to trust God yet.

Finding himself hedged in and his life in danger, Jacob now begins to pray. He is quick to remind God of His promises made at Bethel (Genesis 32:9-12). But prayer alone is not sufficient for Jacob. He has to scheme too. He thinks up a clever plan of saving part of his company at least - just in case God lets him down. How very much like those who talk of trusting God and "living by faith", but all the time have some earthly source of security to fall back upon just in case faith in God alone does not work! Jacob was indeed very much like us.

And how often we have seen, as Jacob realized when he met Esau, that our fears were unfounded, that there was no need to have schemed and worried and doubted God. Esau's heart was in God's hands, and God could turn it (as Proverbs 21:1 says) in whichever direction He chose. "When a man is trying to please God, God makes even his worst enemies to be at peace with him" (Proverbs 16:7 - LB). God had told Jacob clearly that He would take care of him. But Jacob could not believe God's promise.

Jacob had twenty long and painful years of chastening under God's hand. We are not given all the details of what Jacob underwent - but he must have had a very rough time. It must have been physically exhausting too - working and sleeping out in the open, exposed to the sun and the dew and the rain. But all this discipline was necessary, in order to shatter Jacob's self-sufficiency and self-confidence. Only in later years, when he looked back, would he be able to appreciate what God took him through - not now. "God's correction is always right and for our best good, that we may share His holiness. (But) being punished isn't enjoyable while it is happening - it hurts! But afterwards, we can see the result, a quiet growth in grace and character" (Hebrews 12:10, 11 - LB). As the well-known hymn says:

"With mercy and with judgment, my web of time He wove

And aye, the dews of sorrow were lusted by His love:

I'll bless the Hand that guided, I'll bless the Heart that planned

When throned where glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land."

The Sun Rises

We have seen how the sun set upon Jacob's life and how the darkness deepened through the ensuing twenty years. He was indeed an ordinary man just like us. And on such a man the sun rose one day. God met with him a second time and changed him into an "Israel" - a prince of God.

Only God could have seen any good in such a useless person as Jacob, and followed after him patiently, without giving up hope. There we see the grace and greatness of our God. And this is what encourages us. In spite of all our self-centredness, God does not throw us on the scrap-heap. He is patient with us.

We may not believe in the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, but we cannot but believe in the perseverance of God. "I will not leave you until I have done that which I have promised," was His promise to Jacob at Bethel - and His promise to us. How wonderful and how humiliating it is to know the long-suffering of God in His dealings with us. If He were not like that, none of us would have any hope.

At Peniel, God dealt a final blow to Jacob. He had been disciplining Jacob and breaking him, bit by bit, over the previous twenty years. But now the time had come to finish the work with one final blow. If God had not done that here, it might have taken twenty more years for the sun to rise on Jacob. God knows the right time to shatter our self-confidence once-and-for-all.

Blessed by God

And when God finally broke Jacob, then he was truly blessed. The record reads, "God blessed Jacob there" (Genesis 32:29). The word "bless" is perhaps the most frequently used word in the prayers of Christians. But few understand its real meaning.

What is blessing? What was the blessing Jacob got? It is described in verse 28 as "power with God and power with men". This is the blessing that we all need and that we should be seeking for. And this alone can make the sun to rise upon our lives. Nothing less than this is what God desires to give His people. Jesus referred to this blessing when He asked His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father. He said, "When the Holy Spirit is come upon you, you shall receive power" (Acts 1:8) - power with God and power with men. Jacobs would be transformed by the Spirit's power into Israels. This was what made the sun to rise upon Peter's life and upon the lives of the other disciples that day in the upper room at Jerusalem.

And this alone can provide the answer to the crookedness of our self-life. It is not a question of reformation or of good resolutions or even of our determination. It is a question of the Holy Spirit possessing us fully and governing and ruling our lives.

But where does the Spirit lead us? Always to the cross. It is only when we are crucified, that Christ can live in us in His fullness, It was when Jesus was baptized, buried under the waters - symbolically accepting death to Himself - that the Holy Spirit came upon Him (Matthew 3:16). It was when Jacob was broken that he was blessed. It was only after Moses' self-confidence had been shattered through 40 years of looking after sheep, that he was ready to deliver Israel. The rock had to be smitten before the living waters could flow. The Israelites had to go through the River Jordan (symbolizing death and burial) before they could enter Canaan (symbolizing life in the fullness of the Spirit). Gideon's army had to break their pitchers before the light inside was visible. The alabaster vial had to be broken before the odour of the ointment could fill the house. Peter's boastful self-confidence had to be shattered before he was ready for Pentecost. We find this truth throughout Scripture.

It would be dangerous for God to empower an unbroken man. It would be like giving a sharp knife to a 6-month old baby, or like handling 20,000 volts of electricity without proper insulation. God is careful. He does not give the power of His Spirit to those in whom self is still unbroken. And He removes His power from a man when he ceases to be broken.

Jacob was now blessed by God Himself. Earlier, Isaac had laid his hands on Jacob and blessed him, when Jacob brought him the venison (Genesis 27:23). But that had brought no change in Jacob's life. The real blessing came at Peniel. And this is the lesson we need to learn too. No man can ever give us this blessing. A man - even a saintly man like Isaac - may lay his empty hands on our empty heads and pray for us. Yet we may get nothing. Only God can really empower us. When Isaac put his hands on Jacob's head, the sun merely set on Jacob's life. But when God blessed him, the sun rose! Power belongs to God and He is the only one who can ever give it to us.

The record says, "God blessed Jacob there" (Genesis 32:29) - there, where Jacob fulfilled certain conditions and came to a certain point in his life. There were reasons why God blessed Jacob there - at Peniel.

Alone with God

First of all, Jacob was blessed in the place where he was alone with God. He sent everyone else away and was alone (Genesis 32:24). 20th century believers find it difficult to spend much time alone with God. The spirit of the jet-age has got into most of us, and we are in a perpetual state of busyness. The trouble is not with our temperament or our culture. We just don't have our priorities right - that's all.

Jesus once said that the one thing needful for a believer was to sit at His feet and listen to Him (Luke 10:42). But we don't believe that any longer and so suffer the disastrous consequences of disregarding Jesus' words. If we are always busy with our various activities and do not know what it is to get alone with God in fasting and prayer, we shall certainly not know God's power or blessing - His real power, I mean, not the cheap counterfeits of which many are boasting.

Broken by God

Secondly, Jacob was blessed in the place where he was broken completely. At Peniel, a Man wrestled with Jacob. God had been wrestling with Jacob for twenty years, but Jacob had refused to yield. God had tried to show him how everything he had put his hand to had gone wrong, despite his cleverness and his planning. But Jacob was still stubborn. Finally God struck Jacob's hip-socket so that his thigh was dislocated (verse 25). The thigh is the strongest part of the body, and that was the part that God struck.

The strong points in our life are what God seeks to shatter. Simon Peter had once thought that his strong point spiritually, was his courage. Even if everyone else denied the Lord, he would never do so. And so God had to break him there. Peter denied the Lord before any of the others did, and not just once but thrice, and that too when questioned by a weak little servant-girl! That was enough to shatter Peter. In the physical realm, Peter's strong point was fishing. If there was one thing he was an expert at, it was fishing. And so God broke him at that point as well. Peter fishes all night and catches nothing. And that happened not just once but twice (Luke 5:5; John 21:3). God broke him at his strongest points to teach him his total inability to serve God.

It took 3½ years for the disciples to learn, that without Christ they could do nothing. It takes even longer for some of us. But it is only in the measure in which we learn the truth of those words that we can know God's power. When Peter was shattered at his strongest points - when he had been struck by God in his "thigh" - then he was ready for Pentecost.

Moses' strong point was his leadership potential, his eloquence and his training in the best academies of Egypt. He thought he was well qualified to be the leader of the Israelites (Acts 7:25). But God did not stand by him until, forty years later, shattered in his strongest points, he said, "Lord, I'm not the person for a job like thatI'm not a good speakerplease send someone else" (Exodus 3:11; 4:10, 13 - LB). Then God took him up and used him mightily. God has to wait till our self-sufficiency and our self-confidence are shattered, and we are broken and no longer think highly of ourselves or our capabilities. Then He can commit Himself to us unreservedly.

Hungry for God

Thirdly, Jacob was blessed in the place where he was earnest and hungry for God. "I will not leave you", he cries out, "until you bless me" (verse 26). How God had waited for twenty long years to hear those words from Jacob. He, who had spent his life grabbing the birthright, women, money and property, now lets go of them all and grabs hold of God. This was the point towards which God had been working in Jacob's life all along. It must have delighted God's heart when Jacob at last lost sight of the temporal things of earth and longed and thirsted for God Himself and for His blessing. We are told in Hosea 12:4, that Jacob wept and pleaded for a blessing that night at Peniel. What a different man he was that night compared with his earlier years when he desired only the things of this world. God's dealings with him at last bore fruit!

Before God blessed Jacob fully, He tested Jacob's earnestness. He said to Jacob, "Let me go," testing whether Jacob would be satisfied with what he had got or whether he would yearn for more. It was just as Elijah tested Elisha in later years. Elijah said, "Let me go," again and again, but Elisha refused to be shaken off - and so got a double portion of Elijah's spirit (2 Kings 2). Jesus, likewise, tested the two disciples walking to Emmaus (Luke 24:15-31). When they reached their house, Jesus acted as though He would go further. But the two disciples would not let Him go - and they got a blessing as a result.

God tests us too. He can never bless a man fully until the man is in dead earnest for God's best. We need to thirst like Jacob, saying,

"Lord, there is more to the Christian life than I've experienced thus far. I'm not satisfied. I want all Thy fullness at any cost."

When we come to that point, it is but a short step to the fullness of God's blessing.

Notice in the incident at Peniel, that it was when Jacob was in a state of weakness (after his thigh had been dislocated), that he said, "I will not let you go, God." God could easily have left him and gone, but He didn't. For it is when a man is most weak in himself that he has greatest power with God. As the Apostle Paul said,

I am glad to boast about how weak I am; I am glad to be a living demonstration of Christ's power, instead of showing off my own power and abilities ...for when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10 - LB).

God's power is most effectively demonstrated in human weakness.

And so with Jacob, it is when he is defeated, broken and utterly weak, that God tells him, "You have now prevailed." One would think that God should have said, "You have at last been defeated." But no. The word is, "You have prevailed. You shall henceforth have power with God and with men" (verse 28). We prevail, when God has shattered us of our own strength and self-sufficiency - as the words of the hymn say,

"Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free."

This is the glorious paradox of the Christian life.

If ever there was a picture of weakness, surely it is seen in a man hanging helplessly on a cross. Beaten and buffeted and finally nailed to the cross, Christ died as a weak and exhausted man. But there the power of God was displayed in the overthrow of the Devil and the deliverance of men (Hebrews 2:14;

Colossians 2:14, 15). "Christ crucified is the power of God," Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "He was crucified in weakness, but He lives by the power of God. We also are weak with Him, but shall live with Him by the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23, 24; 2 Corinthians 13:4). The Corinthian Christians were mistaking the gift of tongues for evidence of being endued with God's power, and so Paul had to correct their error. In essence he tells them,

"Brethren, the power of God is not seen in the gift of tongues. Thank God if you have that gift. But don't make any mistake. The power of God is manifested only in and via the cross. It is in human weakness that the might of God is seen."

I remember hearing a man of God saying how God showed him the secret of spiritual power. He had been seeking God for some spectacular manifestation for some time. Finally the Lord asked him,

"How did you receive the forgiveness of your sins?"

He replied,

"Lord, I recognized that I was the greatest sinner on earth and You forgave me freely."

Then the Lord said to him,

"Now recognize that you are the weakest man on earth and you will have My power."

Thus he began to experience God's power in his life.

The way of the cross is the way of power. In the measure in which we walk that pathway we shall have God's power in our life, and people will be blessed through our life and our ministry. When the five loaves are broken, then and not until then, will the multitude be fed.

Honest with God

Finally, Jacob was blessed in the place where he was honest with God. God asks him, "What is your name?" Twenty years earlier, when his father had asked him the same question, he had lied and said, "I am Esau" (Genesis 27:19). But now he is honest. He says, "Lord, I am Jacob" - or in other words, "Lord, I am a grabber, a deceiver and a bargainer." There was no guile in Jacob now. And so God could bless him.

Years later, when Jesus looked at Nathaniel, you remember what He said: "Behold an Israelite - a true Israel, a genuine prince of God - in whom there is no 'Jacob', no guile" (John 1:47). This is what God waits to see in us too. Only then can He empower us.

God blessed Jacob there - when he was honest, when he did not want to pretend any more, when he confessed, "Lord I'm a hypocrite. There is shame and pretence in my life." I tell you, it takes real brokenness for a man to acknowledge that from the depths of his heart. Many Christian leaders say words like that with false humility - to gain a reputation for being humble. I am not referring to that type of abomination. What I mean is an honesty that comes out of a truly broken and contrite heart. That is costly. There is so much guile in all of us. May God have mercy on us for pretending to be so sanctified when we are not. Let us covet sincerity and honesty and openness with all of our hearts, and then there will be no limit to God's blessing upon our lives.

The Ascending Sun

Jacob was broken and thereby he became Israel. The sun rose on his life at last. This did not however, mean that Jacob had become perfect. There is no once-for-all experience that guarantees perfection. God had to discipline him further, for he still had plenty to learn. In Genesis chapters 33 and 34, we read of some of Jacob's disobediences and blunders.

But the sun had risen on his life and he had entered into a new spiritual plane. The light had to increase in its brightness, no doubt, but that would come as the sun continued to ascend in the sky to its noon-day position. The Bible says,

The path of the just (the justified man) is like the shining light (of the sun) that shines more and more (from sunrise onwards) unto the perfect (noon) day (Proverbs 4:18).

So it was with Jacob and so it must be with us. If we submit to God's dealings with us, as Jacob finally did, the light of God will continuously increase upon our lives. And as it does so, the shadow of our self-life will continue to decrease until finally when the sun is overhead (when Christ returns), the shadows will disappear altogether and Christ will be all in all. What was Jacob's testimony in later years, about his Peniel experience? He did not keep telling everyone that on such-and-such a date he had received a second blessing. No. His testimony was something quite different. In Hebrews 11, we are given an inkling as to what Jacob's testimony was. There, we are given a record of some of the exploits of great men of faith in the Old Testament - shutting lions' mouths, raising the dead etc., Jacob's name appears in the list too - and what do you think is recorded of him? "He worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff" (verse 21). It looks quite incongruous to include something like that in a chapter full of spectacular events!

What Jacob did, certainly does not look like a "miracle of faith." But it was. It was perhaps a greater miracle than the others miracles recorded in the chapter. The staff had become necessary to Jacob, because his thigh had been dislocated at Peniel. Leaning upon that staff, he would always remember the miracle that God had wrought in his life, in breaking his stubborn self-will. His leaning upon his staff now symbolized his helpless, moment-by-moment dependence on his God. He worshipped God now as a broken man. He gloried in his weakness and his infirmity - and that was his daily testimony. So it was with the Apostle Paul too. And so it has been with the great men and women of God in all ages. They rejoiced in their limitations and not in their achievements. What a lesson for proud, self-confident 20th-century Christians!

Towards the end of his life, we see Jacob as a prophet. He prophesies concerning the future of his descendants (Genesis 49). Only a man who has been under God's hand and who has submitted to the Divine disciplines is qualified to prophesy. Jacob had learnt through experience. He was no seminary-qualified theoretician. He had been through the grill and qualified in God's University. He knew the secret counsels of God. Truly he was a prince of God. What a wonderful thing it is to be purged by God. What fruitfulness it results in!

Notice finally, a word of encouragement that runs through the Bible. God calls Himself, "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (not "Israel," but "Jacob")." This is wonderful indeed! He is the God of Jacob. He has linked His Name with the name of Jacob, the grabber and the deceiver. This is our encouragement. Our God is the God of the man with the warped personality. He is the God of the woman with the difficult temperament. What meaning there is in the psalmist's words, "The God of Jacob is our refuge" (Psalm 46:7, 11). He is not only the Lord of Hosts, but also the God of Jacob. Praise be to His

Name!

What God has begun in us He will complete. As perfect as was the work of the Father in creation and as perfect as was the work of the Son in our redemption, so perfect will the work of the Holy Spirit be in our sanctification. God is faithful.

"He Who began the good work within [us] will keep right on helping [us] grow in grace until His task within [us] is finally finished on that day when Jesus Christ returns" (Philippians 1:6 - LB). He will complete His work in us, as He completed His work in Jacob. But we must respond as Jacob did at Peniel. If however we do not cooperate with Him, but frustrate His workings in us, we shall ultimately stand before Him with the tragedy of a wasted, fruitless life. God wants us to be fruitful, but He won't compel us. He wants to transform us into the likeness of Christ, but He will never override our free-will.

The pathway to the Christ-life is via the cross - being broken thereon. What power is released when an atom is broken! What power can be released when a child of God is broken in God's Hand!

May the Lord teach us this lesson and write it deeply upon our hearts.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/beauty-for-ashes-2-the-pathway-to-the-christ-life-i-being-broken/>

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