

WRESTLING JACOB

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"I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." Ge 32:26

THE person by whom, and the circumstances under which these words were uttered, must be familiar to all here who have a tolerable acquaintance with the letter of God's written word. I need therefore scarcely remark that they are the words of Jacob when he was wrestling with the angel. He was returning to his native land under peculiar circumstances. Though he was a child of God, his treachery against his brother Esau had not passed unnoticed and unchastised by the Lord. Nay, for that very reason, because he was a child, he experienced chastisement. And not only so, but he had the very same treachery that he had shown to his brother Esau amply repaid into his own bosom by the Lord's permitting Laban to deceive him in a point where his tenderest affections were concerned, besides oppressing and defrauding him continually.

After a lapse, then, of twenty years, at the Lord's command he escapes from the hard oppression of Laban, and sets out to return to the land of his fathers and to his kindred. Ge 31:3 But after being miraculously delivered from the vengeance of Laban, and drawing near the borders of Canaan, he learns to his dismay that his brother Esau was at hand with four hundred men. The recollection of his former treachery flashing upon his conscience immediately filled him with the deepest distress and alarm, lest his justly incensed brother should fall upon him, all defenceless as he was, and "smite the mother with the children." But what was Jacob's resource? He did what every child of God must do under similar circumstances. He goes and wrestles with the Lord. We read that he "was left alone." He allowed no person to be present while he poured out his soul before God. Thus Hezekiah "turned his face toward the wall," when the sentence of death was felt in his conscience. Isa 38:2 Thus Nehemiah stood in silence behind the king, when he put up a secret petition on Jerusalem's behalf. Ne 2:4 Thus Moses lay at the feet of the Lord on the shore of the Red Sea, venting the secret groaning of his soul, unknown and unnoticed by the ear of man. Thus Hannah too left her husband and her rival, to pour out her soul before the Lord in solitude and sorrow. 1Samuel 1:9,10,15 And thus, in the days of his flesh, the Man of Sorrows "went into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God" Lu 6:12; and again, deserted and alone in the gloomy garden of Gethsemane, "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." Heb 5:7 Sweet and encouraging examples for living souls to follow!

But O! how graciously did God interpose on Jacob's behalf! When reduced to extremity, the Lord showed Himself. And how did He appear? In human shape; not indeed by an actual assumption of real flesh and blood, as some have vainly imagined; that was reserved for the time when He took part of the "flesh and blood of the children." Heb 2:14 The Son of God could only once become actually incarnate; and therefore these appearances in the Old Testament of the Lord in human shape were but shadowy representations, and preached to the church that then was, the future

incarnation of the Son of God. With this "man," as He is called in the word, Jacob wrestled till the break of day; and whilst thus wrestling, these words, the words of the text, burst forth in the extremity of Jacob's case from his lips, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

Two things in the text strike my mind as its leading features.

1. -The earnest importunity of the wrestling patriarch "I will not let Thee go." And,
2. -The desired object which pressed so hard upon his soul-"except Thou bless me."

1. -Let us revert once more to the circumstances under which these words were uttered. Several things appear to me to have met together in Jacob's soul, in order to bring this petition out of his lips. And I believe, the very same things must, to a degree, meet also in our hearts, if the same petition is to escape from our lips honestly and sincerely before God.

1. Guilt lay hard upon Jacob's conscience. He knew that he justly deserved to be cut off by the angry sword of Esau. The recollection of his past treachery came fresh before his eyes, and his soul sank under the sense of his guilt, as knowing that he merited all that his incensed brother might do against him. Thus it is also with every quickened soul that comes earnestly and sincerely before the throne of mercy. If the guilt of sin lie not upon his conscience, it is but mocking God to ask Him to take it away. If the recollection of his sins do not press him down, it is but insulting God, it is but deceiving himself to beg of the Lord to remove the burden. Guilt, when laid upon the conscience by the blessed Spirit, will make a man honest; guilt, under the Spirit's intercession, will press a cry out of a man's heart, and force the language of confession and supplication out of his lips.

2. Fear was another circumstance that met in Jacob's soul-the fear of being cut off by the hand of Esau. The tidings brought back by the messengers that Esau was at hand with four hundred men, and he himself utterly defenceless, surrounded by weak women, feeble children and flocks and herds a tempting booty to the wild hunter of Mount Self filled Jacob's soul with alarm. Thus he felt that Esau had but to draw his sword, and he and all that belonged to him must be sacrificed to his vengeance. Is not the same thing, in a spiritual sense, felt in the heart of a child of God, when he comes with similar language to the throne of grace? Does he not fear lest the Lord should draw His avenging sword against him, as Jacob feared lest the blade of Esau should be plunged into his heart; a fear arising, as in Jacob's case, from his defenceless state? fear lest he should not escape deserved punishment.

3. But, besides this, want also, urgent necessity, was another feature in Jacob's case; a pressing circumstance, which, combined with others, brought this petition out of his lips. He was in the extremity of need; he must have the Lord to appear for him, and that immediately. Delays would not suit his case; he must have help now. He could not wait; delay was death. Is it not so spiritually in the child of God, when he is brought to a throne of mercy? He must have immediate help; his soul is often in extremity; he cannot bear delay. God must appear for him, and that instantly; he must sink, he must faint, he must die, unless immediate help is given him.

4. But combined with these things, a measure also of faith was in Jacob's heart. If there had been no faith in Jacob's soul, he could not thus have wrestled with the Lord; for it is by faith alone that we come unto God. It is by faith alone that we have power with God and prevail; it is the prayer of faith alone, which enters the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth; it is the petition that is mixed with faith, which alone draws down an answer from God into the bosom. And this faith in Jacob's heart was strong faith. It was not faith, viewing dangers and difficulties at a distance, and then congratulating itself upon its amazing strength. It was not like some tall bully, who can be very courageous when no danger is at hand, but slinks immediately into the rear when anything appears alarming and terrifying. And this was the very mark of the strength of Jacob's faith-that it "lived under load;" that it manifested itself in spite and in the face of all opposing circumstances; that it was not damped, was not destroyed, was not overcome by dangers and perils; but shone the more brightly the more it was dipped in the floods, and struggled the more vehemently and manfully in proportion to the difficulties which it had to encounter.

Is not this the grand distinguishing feature of living faith in the soul-that it does not vaunt itself and swell high in times of quiet and ease, and immediately that difficulty appears shrinks and runs away? Living faith acts in a manner the direct contrary to this. It is indeed often timid and trembling in the face of danger; but yet the nearer the danger comes, the more boldly does it maintain its ground. Thus the very necessity of the case, so far from weakening, so far from overcoming, so far from destroying Jacob's faith the Lord making His strength perfect in the patriarch's weakness rather put fresh vigour into it. Thus he prayed the more earnestly and the more believingly, in exact proportion to the urgent want of his soul. Is it not so also in the heart of a child of God? When is faith most in exercise? When there is neither doubt nor fear, distress nor alarm? when the sun shines, and all things wear a favourable aspect? When things in providence go well? when outward circumstances flourish? when the family is in health? when everything in grace and everything in nature seem on our side? False faith may be lively and strong in such summer weather; but not that faith which is the gift of God. That is the most active when the sky is most cloudy; that shines the most brightly, when it is most opposed by enemies, has to fight against and triumph over most difficulties and perplexing circumstances. Did not Jacob take hold of the Angel in order to wrestle with Him? And is not this typical and figurative of the way in which faith lays hold of Jesus? Does not God say, "Let him take hold of My strength that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me?" Isa 27:5 This is the very character of faith-that it takes hold of God's word, brings into the heart God's promise, relies upon God's truth, hangs upon what God has declared, and maintains its hold in spite of death, Satan, and hell. If Jacob had merely viewed the Angel at a distance; if he had merely touched Him with his finger, and then immediately withdrawn his hand; or if he had begun to wrestle, and not gone on, would he have gained the blessing?

5. And this leads me to another feature that shines conspicuously in the wrestling of Jacob with the Angel-his unwearied and persevering importunity. Jacob was not satisfied with merely beginning to wrestle, or with just taking hold of the Angel, and then immediately letting Him go. His case was so urgent; the extremity was so great; he so felt in his soul that the blessing he must have or die, that he not only took hold, but maintained his hold; he not only began, but he continued; he not only continued, but he persevered, till he came off more than conqueror through the Lord that loved

him. And is not this the case with all living souls? Wherever there is true prayer, there is importunity. Wherever the Lord brings trials upon the soul, He pours out upon it the spirit of grace and supplications. He thus encourages and enables the soul to be importunate with him. The blessings and benefits of perseverance and importunity in prayer the Lord has brought prominently before us in two parables-one, of the man in bed with his children, who would not get up and relieve his friend, but yet was overcome by his importunity; and the other, of the woman, who had a cause at issue, and went before the judge who feared not God, neither regarded man; yet, by her continual going to him, overcame him at last by her importunity. Lu 11:5-8 Lu 18:1-7 Thus importunity and perseverance form the very feature of true prayer. If the child of God has a burden-if he is labouring under a strong temptation-if his soul is passing through some pressing trial-he is not satisfied with merely going to a throne of grace and coming away. There is at such times and seasons, as the Lord enables, real importunity; there is a holy wrestling; there are fervent desires; there are unceasing groans; there is a labouring to enter into rest; there is a struggling after deliverance; there is a crying unto the Lord, until He appears and manifests Himself in the soul, "I will not let Thee go."

But what strength had Jacob against the God-Man so as to prevail? Might He not by one touch have ground him to powder? He might. But He graciously suffered Himself to be overcome; and yet to shew that it was not by might, nor by power, but by gracious permission, that "the worm Jacob" prevailed, He touched "the hollow of his thigh," and immediately it "was out of joint." By this He shewed effectually that He permitted Himself to be overcome, and that it was no strength of Jacob, which procured him the victory. Thus this man of war, this God-Man, this "Immanuel, God with us," who commanded all things into being, and before whose frown one day the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll, and all creation be dissolved into primitive nothingness, suffered Himself to be overcome by weak, timid Jacob, all fearing and trembling before the face of his brother Esau.

How encouraging it is for the Lord's poor and needy family, that this manifestation of the Son of God was in the shape of a man! Do we not see in it a pledge of His incarnation in the fullness of time? Do we not view it in His infinite condescension in taking upon Him the flesh and blood of the children? For did not the Lord, in thus assuming human shape, foreshadow Himself as the divinely appointed Mediator between God and man? as the "Consolation of Israel?" as Jacob's help? as the church's hope? It is encouraging then, to the Lord's people, as they are from time to time placed in similar circumstances of trial, exercise, perplexity, sorrow or distress with Jacob, to see the blessed result of his wrestling with the Angel. He crosses the ford of Jabbok all weakness; he recrosses it all strength. He leaves his family, and wrestles alone, a fainting Jacob; he returns to them a prevailing Israel. He goes to the Lord in an agony of doubt and alarm, fearing every moment lest he and all that was dear to him should be swept off from the face of the earth; he returns with the Lord's blessing in his soul, with the light of the Lord's countenance lifted up upon him. And is not this instance recorded for the instruction and consolation of the Lord's living family? Are they not from time to time in circumstances experimentally, which resemble Jacob's circumstances literally? Have they not often similar difficulties, similar wants and similar necessities? And does not the Lord from time to time raise up in their heart the same faith to lay hold? the same importunity to keep hold? And shall He, who gave Jacob such a merciful deliverance-shall He, who has recorded in His holy word this

remarkable event in Jacob's life for the edification and instruction of His people in all times-hear Jacob, and not hear them? It is derogatory to the sympathizing "Man of Sorrows;" it is treason against the Majesty of heaven to believe, that a child of God, in similar circumstances, can go to the Lord in a similar way, and not get a similar blessing.

But what is the reason why there are so few blessings bestowed? What is the reason why the Lord's people experience so few signal interpositions in providence or in grace? The reason is, because they have so little of the utterance of Jacob's lips, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

II. -And this leads me to the second branch of our subject, "Except Thou bless me." This is what Jacob wanted - a blessing for his soul. He wanted not merely deliverance, temporal deliverance from the threatening sword of Esau. He went indeed to the Lord with that burden; that was the petition he laid chiefly at the Lord's feet; for he said, "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." Ge 32:11 But, it seems to me, whilst he was thus pleading with the Lord for a temporal deliverance, he was so overcome, and so overpowered with a view of the Lord's glory, and there was such an unfolding and flowing out of His fullness into Jacob's heart, that his soul's desires mounted above the temporal deliverance that he went mainly to seek, and he poured out his soul after a spiritual blessing. He seems in the very act of wrestling to have received some token and pledge of temporal deliverance; and then soaring upwards beyond mere temporal necessity, he begged of the Lord to give him a spiritual blessing. For he does not say, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou answer me, except Thou deliver me from Esau, except Thou appear for me;" though he wanted all these. But his soul at this time was as if looking into the very bosom of the Lord; and seeing how that heart was full of mercy, kindness and love, and panting after those spiritual blessings which alone can satisfy and save, he cried out with vehement desire, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

But what is a blessing? Blessings are very much talked about in our day; and there are those who speak of being blessed under well-nigh every sermon; but their blessing is all gone before they have walked a hundred yards from the chapel door. Blessings so transitory, that so soon evaporate, that slip away so easily, are not worth the name. A flash of transitory excitement, some movement of natural feeling, a trowelful of untempered mortar, or a fresh coat of white-wash, pass with many for blessings under the word; but none of them can be, or are considered, blessings by God's poor and needy family. An appetite so easily appeased, a thirst so soon satisfied, is not like the hungering and thirsting of God's own people. They call nothing a blessing but that which comes stamped with the hand of God, and carries with it its own clear and decisive evidence. All that falls short of coming into their hearts from the lips of God - all that falls short of the manifestation of the Lord's mercy and love, they cannot consider to be "a blessing indeed," or such a one as their souls are panting to enjoy. And yet there are minor blessings. I dare not deny that there are blessings that fall short of those full, clear and ravishing manifestations which the Lord's people are longing after and often on the look out for; and these the living family are glad to receive when they are not indulged with a full one. A sip will relieve thirst, though it falls short of a full draught; a crumb even from the table of the Lord will be prized for the time, when a more abundant morsel is withholden.

1. It is a blessing then to have the fear of God in the soul; for the implantation and possession of godly fear is a certain proof of the Lord's having quickened the soul into eternal life. Are not these the Lord's own words? "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good, but I will put My fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from Me." Jer 32:40 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Pr 9:10 It is therefore the very first evidence that God has planted in the soul spiritual life. There are many times and seasons, however, when the fear of the Lord appears as it were stagnant in the soul. It does not manifest itself; its refreshing streams for it is declared to be a "fountain of life to depart from the snares of death" are not sensibly felt; the heart appears cold and dead, the conscience less tender than formerly. There are not those godly sensations; there are not those trembling emotions; there is not that holy sensitiveness; there is not that sense of God's great majesty; there is not that bowing down before His footstool, which the soul perhaps has experienced in times of old. But prizing highly godly fear almost as much from its felt absence as from its former presence, the soul may apply the words, and say, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me" with this grace.

2. A testimony of our interest in the love and blood of the Lamb, is a blessing that those of the Lord's people who have not yet attained to that favour are earnestly begging of Him to bestow. Many of the Lord's people are kept very low for years; but still the Lord from time to time revives their souls. When harassed and perplexed with the evils of their heart, and mourning and sighing over the body of sin and death which they bear about with them, He sometimes shows them that this is the way, and that they must walk in it. Sometimes He draws forth tender affections towards Himself, opens up the word with savour and sweetness to their souls, makes the truth precious, and gives them a heart to love His people. Sometimes He makes the promises drop like dew into their soul, shows them the suitability of the invitations, and gives them to taste their sweetness and savour. Sometimes He gives them glimpses and glances of the glory and beauty of Jesus, and melts and softens their hearts at the sight of His sufferings and dying love. But yet they have not that full deliverance, that clear testimony, which their hearts are longing to enjoy.

There are, therefore, often times and seasons when they are earnestly pleading with the Lord to bestow this rich mercy upon them. For instance: when they have been in company with any child of God more highly favoured than themselves, one more deeply taught, and who can speak more decidedly of the manifestations of God's mercy and love and the sweet enjoyment he has experienced in his soul, their hearts begin to sink, and they are sent groaning home. It casts them down in their souls, as not being able to find a similar blessing in their own heart. But what is the effect? It leads them to go to the Lord more earnestly. They go home, perhaps up into their chamber, fall down upon their knees, and ask the Lord that He would appear for them, that He would give them a clear testimony, that He would shine upon their heart, that He would bless their souls with some sweet manifestation of His love, -in a word, that He would give them that rich and full peace and joy in believing which alone can abundantly and amply satisfy them that they are the Lord's own children. And thus, at these seasons, the language of their heart is, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

Sometimes too, when death seems near at hand; when some illness seizes their body, and they are laid upon a sick bed; when some neighbour, relative or friend is suddenly

taken off; when some disease like cholera or fever is roving up the street, or approaching their door and they have no clear testimony that the Lord is their God-how it stirs up the sighs and cries of their souls that He would give them a manifestation, and shine into their hearts! So also, sometimes when guilt presses heavily upon their conscience, when the wrath of God is let down into their souls and they doubt and fear whether hell may not be their eternal portion, they are made to cry and sigh, and that earnestly, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." "Bless me instantly; bless me fully; bless me with that which shall amply satisfy me, that I am eternally thine."

3. Sometimes the Lord indulges His people with a view of the glorious Jesus, opens up with savour and power some Scripture that testifies of His Person, lets down some discovery of it into their conscience, enlightens the eyes of their understanding to see, and raises up faith in their heart to believe, though it falls short of the fullness of the blessing of pardon and peace. Jesus appears; but He does not come into their heart. They see His glory, and their souls are ravished by it. But they are not satisfied with beholding it at a distance; they want to have it brought fully and completely into their souls. But the Lord leads them out, from time to time, with earnest cries; He puts a wrestling petition into their heart; His own blessed Spirit intercedes for them and within them with some of His unutterable groanings, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

4. Others of the Lord's people who have been indulged with some testimony, who have felt a measure of the Lord's presence, and been enabled to rejoice in His name, are tried upon this point-they have not felt a full and powerful application of the atoning blood of Jesus to their conscience. They want it sprinkled upon their souls; to have it so clearly revealed to them that they may have no doubt whatever that that blood was indeed shed for them. They want it applied in a more clear, more manifest, more satisfying way than they have yet experienced. They cannot doubt that the Lord has done something for their souls; they do believe that He has given them some testimony of His goodness and mercy; but they are not yet assured that they have received upon their conscience the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. And this makes them from time to time, when they long to receive it into their souls and feel its cleansing efficacy, cry, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

5. Others of the Lord's people who have had a measure of the manifestations of the Lord's mercy, seem to fall short in this-that they have not had fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. They do believe that Jesus is the only propitiation for sin; that there is no other redemption, no other sacrifice for transgression. They have felt too a measure of the love and blood of Jesus in their conscience; but they have not been led, as they desire to be led, into a fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. They have not been led into the garden of Gethsemane, nor have they accompanied Jesus to the cross; nor have they seen Him by the eye of faith crucified before their eyes Ga 3:1; nor have they entered by faith and feeling into the inward agonies and sufferings of the Man of Sorrows. They feel that this is one of the greatest blessings shall I not say, the greatest blessing? that the Lord can bestow. Thus, from time to time, as they see the glory of it, and feel their need of it, they cry, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

6. Others of the Lord's family are plagued with the world. The things of time and sense lay such hold of them; the temporal cares that they are beset with, anxieties in the family, distressing circumstances in providence, and that busy bustling world in which their hearts are sometimes shut up from morning to night, seem to steal away all their thoughts from the Lord. They desire therefore to have such a work upon their heart, and such divine teaching in their soul, as shall wean, separate, and bring them out of their carnal anxieties, that they may know nothing save Jesus and Him crucified. When their hearts are a little melted and softened, and they are brought a little off these perishing vanities, they want to retire into the innermost closet of their bosom, lie low before the Lord, and beseech Him to separate them from the spirit of the world; to accompany His word with power to their hearts, that they may live to His glory, enjoy His presence, and be delivered from being so much encumbered with worldly cares. This, then, is sometimes, if not the express language, yet the substance of their cry, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

7. Others of the Lord's people are much subject to the fear of death. Though the Lord has from time to time appeared for them, yet when their evidences are beclouded, when their testimonies have sunk out of sight, when guilt lies upon their conscience, when doubts and fears press hard, when Satan harasses or tempts, when eternity appears before them an unknown and awful reality, the fear of death will very often lie hard and heavy upon their souls. They know that nothing but the Lord's own power, and the Lord's own manifestations of Himself in their soul, can take away this fear of death through which often all their lives they are subject to bondage. They want to have a happy dismissal when they come to lie upon their dying pillow; they want then to have the love smiles of the Lord sweetly experienced; not to die under a cloud; but to leave behind them some bright and clear testimony, that when the saints of God surround their bed, they may not be forced to hide their heads under the bedclothes in an agony of guilt and despair, or turn their faces away, and have nothing to tell of the Lord's goodness to their souls; but to be able to speak to His honour and praise, and tell aloud of the manifestation of His love and mercy to them; and, like aged Simeon, when he had seen the Lord's Anointed, may depart in peace. These too may say, when the fear of death lies upon them, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

8. Others of the Lord's family are labouring under temptations. And these temptations are so suitable to their fallen nature, and they are so unable in their own strength to overcome them, that they are afraid lest one day they should be awfully carried away by them. The lusts of their flesh; the evils and corruptions of their wicked heart; the daily, hourly snares that Satan spreads for their feet; and their own thorough helplessness, their own proneness to fall into these very snares, all contribute to distress their souls. And thus, sometimes, in an agony of soul, the tears rolling down their cheeks, and heaving sobs gushing from their bosom, they are importunate with the Lord, and say, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me," in delivering me from this temptation, in breaking this snare, in setting my soul free from this besetment in which I am so cruelly and grievously entangled.

9. Others of the Lord's people desire to live to His glory; that they may not always be carnal and worldly minded, but that their thoughts and affections, body, soul and spirit, may be all devoted to His ways, all be such as He may approve of. When then they feel their darkness, carnality and death, at what a distance they live from God,

and how little they do for His glory, the desire of their souls is, that God would make it otherwise; that He would work in them to will and to do of His good pleasure, and bring forth in their hearts, lips, and lives, the fruits and graces of the blessed Spirit. Thus these too say, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

Whatever be the trial, the peculiar trial; the temptation, the peculiar temptation; the perplexity, the sorrow, the anxiety which each burdened soul feels, he is invited, he is encouraged and sometimes he is mercifully enabled to go with it to the throne of grace. What use is there venting our complaints into the ears of fellow mortals, of poor dying worms? Can they relieve? What help could Jacob get from his lamenting wives, his crying children, his timid servants, his bleating sheep, his lowing herds? He had to leave them all. They could not comfort him; they might increase his distress by harrowing up the affections of his heart; but they could not relieve. And therefore he turns away from them all, to pour his complaint into the ears of that God who is ever mighty to save. He turns away from human help and creature strength, and goes as a petitioner to the Lord's footstool of mercy; and there he gets an answer; there he obtains deliverance; there he receives that which satisfies his soul, which blesses him, and makes him blessed. What profit shall you or I, then, ever get by pouring our complaints into the ears of some fellow sinner? or what relief shall we get by keeping our complaints locked up in our bosom? There is but one place whither we can go for these cares, these anxieties, these perplexities to be removed. And the Lord will bring all His people there. It is no matter of choice with them whether they will go or not. It was no matter of choice with Jacob. There was no wrestling whilst Jacob was keeping Laban's sheep; there was no wrestling whilst Jacob was travelling leisurely home. But when difficulty arose; when alarm presented itself; when the sword of revengeful Esau was being withdrawn from its scabbard, and its gleaming edge was about to be sheathed in his heart, then extremity, necessity, urgency all met together in Jacob's bosom; and meeting together, they pressed this cry out of his lips, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

And will not this be the case with all the Lord's living family? I may go to the footstool of mercy; I may bend my knees; I may lift up my hands; I may use words; and what are they? words, words, empty words; breath, breath; the mere talk of the lips that tendeth to penury; that like the eddying smoke curls round and round, and never rises higher than the ceiling of the roof. But when the Lord is pleased to lay some urgent necessity upon a man's heart and this He ever does in the experience of all His people, though in different times and in different ways, and at the same time pours out a spirit of grace and supplications, and raises up and draws forth into exercise living faith, then he will, yea, he must come to the throne of mercy; not because it is his duty, or his privilege; not out of custom nor tradition, nor from what he has learned from men, or imbibed in childhood. All these things are effectually slain. But he comes under the immediate operation of the Spirit, under His immediate teaching, leading and guiding, under His supportings and blessed enablings. He it is who puts the cry into the heart and language into the lips, and intercedes in the soul with unutterable groanings, until in God's own time and way the answer comes full of mercy, grace and peace; an answer that amply satisfies, and more than amply satisfies every desire of the praying heart. "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

But some may say, "It seems almost like presumption in Jacob thus to speak. What could he have felt of the divine Majesty to use such irreverent language?" It was not

so, my friends; it was not so. There was deep reverence mingled with faith in his soul; but his necessity compelled him. The Lord did not resent it. He did not rush upon the bosses of God's buckler; he did not intrude presumptuously into God's presence with a lying tale and a feigned lip. His was not the language of mock humility, that offends God more than the language of confidence when He Himself raises it up. But the Lord Himself raised up these cries in Jacob's soul, and put these petitions in Jacob's lips, and the Lord Himself acknowledged it and honoured it with his manifested blessing, for He said to him, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with man, and hast prevailed."

How many wrestling Jacobs have we within these walls this morning? Just so many as have urgent cases; just so many as the Lord is powerfully dealing with; just so many as the Lord is laying trying perplexities and difficulties before their eyes and upon their hearts. And how many mock prayers have gone up before God this morning? how many unanswered petitions have ascended before the throne? From every heart not circumcised to fear God's name; from every unburdened, unexercised, unhumiliated professor; from every one that knows nothing of living faith mingled with his petitions and cries. So many sorrowing souls, so many earnest cries; so many urgent cases, so many urgent petitions; so many cases of extremity; so many cases of importunity; so many wrestling Jacobs, so many prevailing Israels.

Wherever, not the words, but the substance of them, has gone out of labouring, burdened, sorrowing, groaning hearts this morning, the answer is in the Lord's bosom already stored up, and in His own time and in His own way He will fully, He will amply, He will blessedly give you, who look to His throne in simplicity and godly sincerity, the desire of your souls. For wherever He has created the fruit of the lips, He will answer; wherever He has indited the language of supplication in the soul, His ear is open to hear, His heart is open to feel, and His bounteous hand is open richly and mercifully to bestow.