

# Divine Excess

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“I had not thought to see thy face; and lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed” (Gen 48: 11).

IN the chapter from which the above is a quotation, the aged patriarch Jacob recalls some of the prominent incidents in connection with his eventful but chequered career. Amongst these are two which stand out from all the rest: the appearance of God to him at Luz and the death of Rachel. The one occurred at the beginning of his wanderings, the other at the close. The event which was associated with his greatest blessing, and the one which proved to be his deepest sorrow, both rise up before him in the closing moments of his life.

It is hard, sometimes, to reconcile these two phases of life: the rich unmerited blessing which God confers, on the one hand, and all that He seems to deny us, or take from us, on the other. In the one case, Jacob can say, “ God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz, in the land of Canaan and blessed me”; and yet he cannot help recalling the tragic end of Rachel, in words of pathetic import: As for me, . . . Rachel died by me ... in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath.”

These are the varied experiences of a child of God. Yet, at the close, when all is over and life’s journey is about to terminate, Jacob’s confession in reference to Joseph is this: “*I had not thought to see thy face; and, lo, God hath showed me also thy seed.*”

Surely we pause in the presence of such a statement as this, and as we realise how it pleases God often to exceed our thoughts and anticipations in the way He enriches our experience of life, we are filled with joy and wonder. “I had not thought to see thy face; and, lo, God hath showed me also thy seed.”

Should not every child of God, provided that he or she walks with God, expect a similar experience? Has it not already been the experience of some who read these lines, and as they go back over their lives and recall some of its occurrences, do not some incidents confirm and illustrate this very principle, that God has been better to them than they dared to hope? His goodness has taken us by surprise, His provision for us has been unexpected in its amplitude. There have been turns in the road where new surprises of Divine forethought and care awaited us. And for us it has been true: “ I had not thought to see thy face; and, lo, God hath showed me also thy seed.” May we not call this the Divine excess?

In Jacob’s case it was indeed so. As the last sands of the hour glass are running out, memory is busy, and he recalls the momentous periods of his life. His mind goes back to Luz. “God Almighty,” he says, “appeared unto me at Luz, in the land of Canaan, and blessed me.” How could Jacob ever forget that! “*He blessed me*” he says, “*God Almighty blessed me.*” He was a fugitive! He was disgraced! His fortunes appeared to be at their lowest ebb, and it was at that moment God Almighty blessed him. “Was he ever likely to forget it? Separated from parents and from home, a lonely traveller with no one to befriend him, there he sleeps upon the earth with a hard stone for his pillow. And, while he sleeps, he dreams. He sees a ladder reaching to heaven; angels ascend and descend upon it; and, breaking the stillness, there is a voice— the

voice of the Lord; and it addresses him; and without any reference to his more than questionable conduct, and without reminding him of his past in any way, the most lavish promises are made to him.

It is well to notice that Jacob has made great advances in his apprehension of God's promises and purposes since that night. Only by degrees did the full purpose of all that God undertook to do dawn upon the patriarch. When he awakes from his sleep his language is, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace: then shall the Lord be my God." This represents only the merest shadow of all that God had really promised; but on his dying bed Jacob speaks differently. This is what he remembers now: "*Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession.*" He enters into the "Divine Excess." At first he thinks only of being preserved and fed, and of a safe return to his father's house. And truly this would have been more than he deserved. Now he apprehends that the Divine promises went beyond his mere individual necessity. They reached out beyond all his thoughts. But even yet his mind does not seem to grasp all, for he makes no mention of that part of the promise which says, "*And in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*" What Divine excess is here, and how it illustrates and enforces our text; "I had not thought to see thy face; and lo, God hath showed me also thy seed." At the beginning Jacob's realisation did not proceed beyond God's providential care of him, yet the promise really reached unto the "utmost bound of the everlasting hills" and embraced all peoples.

The greater includes the less. If there is "excess," there can be nothing lacking. And so, when Jacob blesses Joseph, it is in the following language: "The God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads." If God is true to His larger purpose, He certainly will not be untrue to His lesser.

If He gives us the *more*, He will not withhold the *mite*. He, who spake to Jacob of blessing as wide as the earth, and embracing every family of the earth, did not overlook Jacob the individual. He, who is able to do more than we ask or think, will not forget to give that which we do ask, providing we ask according to His will, and for that which really is for our good.

Probably, as far as our *natural* thoughts go, we should all of us be content with a "God, who fed us all our life long, and redeemed us from all evil." But this does not content God, and it should not content us. There is the *excess*. And in the presence of it, our thoughts of God become enlarged. Let us seek to comprehend His wider purpose. 'He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give *us all things*.' In doing so, we come to see that Christ is the centre and object of God's thoughts and not ourselves. The angels of God, in Jacob's vision, were not ascending and descending upon Jacob, but upon the ladder. And that ladder prefigures Christ, who alone will unite heaven and earth in one glad harmony (John 1: 51). The excess is that God not only cares for us and delivers us from evil, but has brought us into association with His beloved Son, and made us participators of His glory. How slow we are to apprehend his full purpose, and what losers we are in consequence!

There is one incident in Jacob's life, to which he refers, which seems to contradict this thought

of excess. He speaks to Joseph of his unforgettable loss in the death of Rachel. ‘As for me, when I came from Paden, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan, in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath, and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath; the same is Bethlehem.’”

Perhaps some who read these lines are ready to say, “Life seems to become poorer instead of richer as the days go by.” Impoverishment rather than excess seems to be the lot of some. Yet notice that it is at the end of his days, and *after* the irreparable loss of Rachel, that Jacob is able to testify that God had done for him far more than he had anticipated. “I had not thought to see thy face; and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed.”

With regard to the death of Rachel, two things have to be said. It is not unlikely that this heavy blow was in the nature of discipline, due to a want of understanding on Jacob’s part, or perhaps even to an act of wilful disobedience. God had told him to go up to Bethel, that sacred spot where He at first met with him. We never find that God told him to leave it! This was the error that Jacob committed, and it cost him Rachel. All we read is ‘And they journeyed from Bethel.’ There is no word of command from God. Evidently Jacob had once more formed his own little plan. If we take ourselves out of God’s hands, and act away from, and independently of, His will, we know not what may happen. Possibly Jacob’s one thought was to reach his father Isaac, to see him once more before he died. But if we are to be fully blessed, that which is spiritual must take precedence of that which is natural. Rachel probably would not have died as she did, had Jacob waited for divine direction, and tarried at Bethel until it came.

And yet there is another aspect of the case, for, thank God, if we are sincere and truly submissive to His chastening hand, He can manifest His own power and goodness, even where we have failed. Benjamin is born, and Rachel dies and is buried in the way to Ephrath — “*Ephrath which is Bethlehem.*” Centuries after, Bethlehem witnessed another birth. The Lord and Giver of Life, the Redeemer of the World, God’s anointed, who is to rule all nations, was born there. Jacob’s faith seems to apprehend this. Rachel named the child, Ben-oni — ‘the son of my sorrow,’ but Jacob called him Benjamin — ‘the son of my right hand.’ A name that sets forth that which, in a special way, is true of Christ, as witnessed by the words of Peter on the day of Pentecost, when he declares, “Being by the right hand of God exalted.” And so amidst the sorrow and the sense of loss, Jacob’s faith is in exercise, and he realizes in some degree the excess.

But although Jacob’s life had been marked by some grievous mistakes, it is good to have such a testimony from a dying bed. When the writer of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* is setting before us the men of faith, and he comes to Jacob, the reference is to this closing scene of his life *By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph: and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.*” Only one incident is recorded, but all through this closing scene Jacob is the man of faith, and no death-bed has ever been more triumphant. It is good to be at our best at the last. And surely the grace of God was never more magnified than it was in the beginning and at the close of Jacob’s spiritual history. Divine strength is made perfect in weakness. And he could have said, as another, himself an object of supreme grace, did say, “When I am weak, then am I strong.” God *exceeds* where we are most helpless and deficient, provided always that we are truly dependent. A dying man, so weak that he must lean upon the top of his staff, can testify to God’s unfailing goodness, to the fulfilment of His promises,

and to the fact that He had exceeded all his thoughts, and we see him, as the curtain drops, a blessing and a worshipper.

One more illustration of the principle we have been dwelling upon remains, and it is found in the last verse of the chapter. "Moreover, I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow." "*One portion above thy brethren.*" Here is the *excess*. And it affords us another view of the subject. There is the excess which comes to us as a free gift from God. That is illustrated by what happened at Luz, and by the words we have already so often quoted; but there is also the excess which becomes ours by the exercise of spiritual energy. To adopt Jacob's language, that which we take with our sword and with our bow. Does not this principle obtain still, at all times and everywhere? If we are to have portions to give, there must be the energy, first of all, to obtain them. In other words, there is that which is purely a gift from God, and there is that which we must make our own. It is good for us to have something to give, but this cannot be apart from spiritual enterprise. The sign of power some one has said, is acquisition.

"*I had not thought to see thy face; and, lo, God hath showed me also thy seed.*" These words have a fascination all their own. There is One, after all, who cares, and who does not forget us. Through all Jacob's chequered career, and through all the ups and downs of his pathway, God had followed him, and had never failed him, and the words he is able to utter at the close represent an experience of surpassing sweetness and satisfaction they tell us of the excess God gives above all our expectations. May this rich experience be ours, and may our own individual lives bear witness to the goodness of God in this way! How better can life close, with what greater satisfaction, than by being able to say, "I had not thought . . . but here it is, and more beside"? And then at last, with the whole Church of God, we shall join in that doxology with which the inspired Apostle closes the third chapter of his epistle to the Ephesians:

"Now unto Him that is able to do (and not merely able to do, but has done) EXCEEDING ABUNDANTLY *above all that we ask or think*, according to the power that worketh in us.

Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

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*Angels in White — OR — Words to the Worried. P. 234*