

How to Fill a Broken Jar? Genesis 28:10-22

Intro

Let me begin today's sermon with a quiz. Do you know how to fill this broken cup with the full of water? Think of how you can fill it during the sermon. The answer will be given at the end of the sermon. Even if you are eager to know the answer, don't skip the sermon but wait! Patience is an important Christian virtue! Right?

We read the story of Jacob today. Along with Abraham and Isaac, Jacob is known as one of the patriarchs of faith. But I often wonder why he was named among them. Abraham and Isaac were not perfect men but they were faithful, obedient to God and lived a good life. But Jacob? I don't think so. He was a cunning and sneaky man. He tricked his own brother, deceived his father, and snatched his brother's birthright and blessing. Later, he also tricked his father-in-law, Laban, and embezzled Laban's property. You may respect him as an ancestor of our faith but I am sure that you would not want your son or your son-in-law to be like Jacob. Nor would you want to have him as your business partner? Of course, no. Right?

1st "You reap what you sow"

Jacob might be an ambitious and smart young guy who wanted to be the head of his tribe. But as we all know, Jacob reaped what he sowed. Jacob tricked his own brother and stole his birthright and blessing. Esau[이서], Jacob's eldest brother, was so angry that he even plotted to kill him. Jacob, he himself knew that he could not beat his brother. The only option he had was to run away from home to save his life.

In today's text, Jacob is broken. He is in a vulnerable state, traveling alone and sleeping in the wilderness. Jacob is running away from his own guilt. He was self-centered, disloyal to his family, cheated his brother and father, and never apologized for his actions. Jacob tried to get what he wanted by any means necessary. And now, it seems he got what he deserved. It seems that Jacob reap what he sowed. He got what he deserved.

2nd Unconditional Grace of God that makes Broken Jacob as New Person with Purpose

But that is not the end of the story. Reaping what you sow is only half the truth for Christians. An exhausted Jacob lied[라이드] on the ground, using a stone he found as his pillow. He missed his soft pillow at home. He missed his cozy tent that sheltered him from the chilly wind of the night; He missed his beautifully woven rug his mother Rebekah had made for him. He missed the sweet wine he drank and the roasted lamb he ate with his family for dinner. But everything that he wished for was now gone and here he was, alone in the wilderness. He could see nothing but darkness. Although the cold night breeze made Jacob shiver, the physical and mental exhaustion from fear, loneliness and unresolved guilt put him to sleep.

And in a dream, when he was most defenseless... when his guard was down, Jacob encounters God. Jacob assumed he was traveling alone, with survival the only thought in his mind. But that was not true. God was right before him, saying, "I am God, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. I'm giving the ground on which you are sleeping to you and to your descendants." The promise of land and offspring that had been given to Abraham and Isaac, is now given to Jacob.

But God gave Jacob additional promises. God says, "I'll stay with you, I'll protect you wherever you go, and I'll bring you back to this very ground. I'll stick with you until I've done everything I promised you."(15)

It is a very gracious promise, especially considering Jacob's circumstances. Jacob cheated his brother and is now running for his life. Yet God promises to be with Jacob, to keep him from harm, and to bring him back home again.

God demands nothing from Jacob. God does not ask him to apologize to his brother. Nor does God say, "no more lies, no more cheating o.k.?" God's promise is unconditional.

Now Jacob received more than he deserved: a promise of land and offspring. A fleeing Jacob received more than he deserved: a promise of accompaniment, protection and homecoming. A disoriented Jacob received more than he deserved: a new purpose of life over survival. A disloyal Jacob received more than he deserved: God's royal promise. Do you think that Jacob deserved all of these blessings?

Jacob does not deserve any of God's promises but God grants him grace and blessing. Jacob did not sow anything deserving of God's grace, but receives God's royal words and blessings anyway. Jacob received more than what he deserved.

But haven't we also received more than what we deserve? God gave his only Son Jesus Christ while we still were sinners and Christ died for us. (Rom 5:8) We sowed nothing, but we received God's unconditional grace and love... and now we are called as children of God. We received more than we deserved. Reaping what you sow is only half the truth for Christians.

3rd Unconditional Love of God and Jacob's Conditional Response

However, it is really difficult to go against one's old habit of mind. God gave Jacob unconditional grace and blessing. Then, what might be Jacob's proper response to God's grace? Receiving God's grace with gratitude. Right? It's simple. Jacob can say, "Thank you!"

But, instead of accepting God's unconditional grace, Jacob offers something in return! Jacob simply cannot accept or trust God's generous and unconditional promises.

So Jacob says, "God, if you are faithful and keep all your words and promises... then you will earn my credit and you will be my God... and I will give you one-tenth of my salary for that." He wanted to make a deal with God even if he had nothing to offer. Jacob must be a very talented business man or terrible liar.

It seems that Jacob casted God in Jacob's own image. Jacob would never make an unconditional promise. Jacob is not able to comprehend a God who would promise something for nothing, so he bargains with this God of his fathers. The Lord may be the God of Abraham and Isaac, but Jacob will claim him as his God if... and only if God protects and prospers him. God surely seems to picking a wrong business partner here.

But we also often find ourselves similar to Jacob. We often try to make a deal with God instead of simply trusting God's grace and promise. We have internalized our cultural values such as "everything has its price" or "you reap what you sow" and thus, we are unable to comprehend God's unconditional grace and love for us.

But we have to remember that God's unconditional love and grace is at the center of Christian faith. We don't have to pretend that we are qualified to receive God' blessing. We don't have to pretend that we have something to offer to God in return of God's grace. What we really need is to accept God's unconditional love and grace with faith.

4th The way to fill the broken Jar

We don't see how Jacob had been changed by God's unconditional love in this text but God's grace and promises surely had an effect on Jacob and completely changed his life. Twenty years after this encounter at Beth-El, Jacob returns home from Haran and prays another prayer. But this time, he does not bargain with God. He acknowledges his own unworthiness and God's faithfulness:

"God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, God who told me, 'Go back to your parents' homeland and I'll treat you well.' I don't deserve all the love and loyalty you've shown me," prayed Jacob. You can see the change in Jacob in this short prayer. Right?

He didn't try to make a deal with God even if he was in a desperate situation. He remembered God's faithfulness and trust God completely.

The change is not Jacob's doing, but God's. God's gracious promises and God's faithfulness in fulfilling those promises transforms Jacob from a self-centered youth to the man who, on his deathbed, fearlessly claims God as his God, "the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day" (Genesis 48:15).

God's steadfast love heals Jacob's broken heart. God's unconditional grace gradually changed Jacob's distorted self-understanding and gave him wisdom. It is this very love and grace from God that can heal and change our hearts like a broken Jar.

How to fill a broken jar?

Let's go back to the quiz. Have you figured out how to fill this broken jar in full? Let me show you how to do it.

Our hearts are like this broken jar. Some are better, some are worse. But all of us have somewhat broken hearts like this jar (보여 줄 것)

We don't like other people to know that our hearts are somewhat broken. So we often stitched it with fancy manners or sacred religious words so no one can notice it like this jar. (보여줄 것)

However, we can never fill our broken hearts with God's love. (show) Even if we tried to fill it with God's love and grace, it soon slips away. (show)

The only way to fill a broken jar in full is to throw the jar into the pond of endless God's love.

With Faith, throw our broken hearts into the wellspring of God's grace. God will fill our hearts with God's love and God will transform us to be faithful children of God. Trust God's unconditional grace. God's everlasting love will be with us all. Amen.