

Our Greatest Foe Conquered

Genesis 32:22-32

Halifax: 24 July 2016, 10:30 AM

Introduction:

Today in our Genesis sermon series, we have come to one of the most remarkable passages in scripture.

- It is a passage that shows us how the whole church, represented here by Jacob, overcame her greatest foe!
 - Remember that Jacob, as the one through whom the kingdom of God was to come and through whom Jesus Christ the Saviour was to come, represents the entire church in all ages...
 - In him, the whole church is represented in type and shadow and we see here how the whole church overcomes her most formidable foe...
- And what is so remarkable is the fact that the foe we overcome is none other than the Lord Himself!
 - We shall see in today's text how we overcome *Him*.
 - As I say, it is a remarkable passage,
 - It speaks of Christ,
 - it speaks of the entire church,
 - and it speaks of us as individuals.
 - It has associations with the cross and with prayer...
 - And like the cross, it is deeply disturbing and at the same time extremely encouraging!

But let me warn you—you cannot come to this passage without humility.

- It is about God Almighty and He is not always what you want Him to be.
 - If you come demanding to have Him conform to your own expectations, then you will need to find another religion.
 - It won't do you any good, of course, to have a false religion;
 - But if you want one, there are plenty of them to choose from.
 - But if you come to know the truth and to know the true God and to walk with Him; then what we have here is something you need to hear.

With this in mind, let us proceed to the reading of our text—Genesis 32:22-33.

Gen 32:22-32: And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. ²³ He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. ²⁴ Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. ²⁵ Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his

hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. ²⁶ And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" ²⁷ So He said to him, "What *is* your name?" He said, "Jacob." ²⁸ And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have

prevailed.”²⁹ Then Jacob asked, saying, “Tell me Your name, I pray.” And He said, “Why is it that you ask about My name?” And He blessed him there.³⁰ And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: “For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”³¹ Just as he crossed over

Peniel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip.³² Therefore to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, which is on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob’s hip in the muscle that shrank.

May the LORD bless the reading of His holy Word.

- And now may He bless us also as I seek to show you what this passage means to you as God’s people...or as those who are becoming His people...

I. Sometimes, you are following the LORD, honestly seeking to do His will, and out of the blue you are opposed!

- A. You know what I mean by following the LORD and honestly seeking to do His will...
1. Like we have seen with Jacob of late.
 - a. He has made so much progress in his faith.
 - Here he is, seeking the blessing that God has promised him.
 - He is returning to Canaan primarily because God has told him to go there and that He will bless him there...
 - And Jacob wants God’s blessing.
 - b. It was the promise of God to His church at that time that He would bless them in Canaan...remember that we are one church with them...
 - And at that time, God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He would bring forth a kingdom of righteousness through their offspring!
 - It would be a kingdom in this sinful world of people who were restored to God as their God.
 - You know what happened to the whole human race to ruin us, don’t you?
 - We all rejected God as our God and decided to run our own life—to be god to ourselves.
 - It was very foolish and very wicked...and we knew better.
 - And because of this, God cursed the world and He sentenced us to death and misery.
 - So it was a very gracious thing for God to come to Abraham, and promise that He would bless him and be his God and the God of his descendants...
 - And to tell him that his descendants would bring forth a kingdom of righteousness in this sinful world—
 - a kingdom that would be a blessing to all the nations of the earth so that some from all the nations would enter this kingdom.
 - We know how God brought forth Jesus through Abraham’s offspring to bring the promised blessing to them and to the whole world.
 - Jacob did not know all that the blessing entailed,
 - but he knew that being blessed by God to have Him as his God was a thing to be desired above all else!

- And as God had told him (and his fathers) that this kingdom of righteousness was to be raised up in Canaan,
 - And as God had called Jacob to return to Canaan at this time, Jacob had taken up his four wives and eleven sons and his daughter and was now about to enter the land.
- He was following the Lord, seeking His blessing.
2. Perhaps you have been making progress in your pursuit of God’s kingdom the way Jacob had...
- a. You are learning to trust God to provide for His kingdom to come...
 - Remember how Jacob had seen God provide financial resources for him to make the trip to the Promised Land!
 - God provides for you so that you can help send missionaries and support the church with your tithes.
 - b. Maybe you are also learning to trust God to protect you (and His church) the way Jacob did...
 - Jacob had seen how God had stopped Laban when Laban had power to destroy him...
 - just as we see how He stops our enemies who want to destroy us—
 - We have many enemies you know—they try to separate us from God...
 - Either by enticing us away with delectable temptations...
 - Or by seeking to destroy us with harsh treatment, slander, and even murder.
 - c. And maybe like Jacob you are also stepping out to do God’s will...
 - even when there is the threat of trouble if you go forward—just as Jacob returned to the land even though it meant he had to face Esau who wanted to kill him...and that because Jacob had wronged him...
 - We have seen how Jacob prayed earnestly to God to protect him—the first earnest prayer we have seen from Jacob—
 - And we have seen how he also went out of his way to make restitution to Esau for the wrongs he had done, and to assure him that he was coming with a desire to serve him...not to make a slave out of him.
 - Maybe you are learning what it really means to serve others.

TRANS> Again the point is, you are making progress in your walk with God and seeking to do His will...

B. But then suddenly, you are opposed...

1. With Jacob, this is presented to us in a very graphic, physical way—
 - Just as he is crossing the Jabbok River into the Promised Land, a man comes out of nowhere as night falls and starts wrestling with Jacob!
- a. Jacob probably thought he would be able to quickly throw this man.
 - He is blocking the way of his entry into the Promised Land.
 - He is like a bouncer at the door that won’t let you go in.
 - What a nuisance this man is!

- b. It is as if he is saying,
 - You can't come into this place!
 - Who do you think you are?
 - You do not belong here—you are a sinner and you do not fit.
 - There is no blessing for you here.
- 2. But you fight this man because you know that God has called you to come to this place...to enter His kingdom...
 - a. You are persuaded that this is the only place to find blessing.
 - You know that there is nothing in the world for you but misery and death.
 - Even if you gain the whole world and do not have God's blessing, you are nothing.
 - b. And so you engage in this battle...
 - It goes on and on—for Jacob, it continued all night until the day was breaking.
 - For him it was a real wrestling match, with sweat and strain and tired muscles feeling the strength of your opponent.
 - All this to show graphically how the way to the kingdom can be blocked for us, even when God has called us to come.
 - Like Jacob, you fight and fight and refuse to give in because you know that God has a place for you here.
 - Like Jacob, you will not give in even though you are exhausted!
 - You know that it is too important a matter to give in.
 - This is the proof of how much you have grown in your faith.

II. But then the “man” becomes weary of you and breaks you with supernatural power.

- A. All He does is touch you, and your strength is gone.
 - 1. For Jacob, this disabling touch is described in verse 25:
 - **Now when He [the man] saw that He did not prevail against him [He was unable to defeat Jacob], He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him.**
 - Dislocating the hip of wrestler makes it impossible for him to wrestle.
 - He cannot win with a dislocated hip—
 - the ability to resist this man has been taken away from Jacob!
 - When the man is able to dislocate Jacob's hip with a simple touch—the word refers to a soft touch—
 - Jacob realises that he is not contending with an ordinary man but with God.
 - This takes the fight right out of him.
 - 2. This illustrates the way God often deals with His people!
 - a. Surely we can see this with Job...
 - Job contended with the Almighty—he struggled and struggled and would not give in...
 - But then the Lord came to Job and Job saw the glory of the LORD,
 - The fight was taken out of him.

- Job 40:1-5 says: **Moreover the LORD answered Job, and said:** ² **“Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it.”** ³ **Then Job answered the LORD and said:** ⁴ **“Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. ⁵ Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; yes, twice, but I will proceed no further.”**
- b. And I could mention how Isaiah, seeing the glory of the Lord,
 - immediately cried out and said, “Woe is me, for I am undone, a man of unclean lips in the midst of a people of unclean lips.”
 - We could speak of Peter and John and many others...
 - c. We could even speak of Christ when He was preparing for the cross—
 - The cross stood, as it were, between Him and the Promised Land for His people; between Him and the kingdom of righteousness...
 - It was the opposition of God Himself that He must face...
 - And so the scripture says (in Mark 14:33-34), as He faced this, that: **He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. ³⁴ Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.”**
- B. What a thing it is to realise that the LORD Himself is opposing you!
1. It is one thing to have financial struggles, or a Laban or an Esau oppose you...
 - It is one thing even to have the world, the flesh, and the devil oppose you—yes, even the devil...
 - These are enemies that we learn to resist by the power of the LORD...
 - But it is quite another thing to realise that the LORD Himself is opposing you!
 2. But this is exactly what is revealed to us here—and it is something that God brings us to understand more and more fully as we go on for Him.
 - He works in us, and He shows us His kingdom, and then we come to the door He says, “Who are you to come in here?” and He opposes us!
 - “You are a sinner—what place do you have in my righteous kingdom?”
 - And how can you answer Him?
 3. It is He who has placed the angels with the flaming swords at the door to paradise because we have been cut off by our sins!
 - Like Isaiah, we are undone when the Almighty speaks!
 - As Job, we see that we are dust and ashes; we cannot fight with Him.
 - Our sins condemn us—they block us.
- C. Now all you can do is cling to the LORD for mercy—for *promised* mercy!
1. What a lovely picture we have of this with Jacob!
 - a. There he is, helpless with a dislocated hip, and the man says (v. 26), **“Let Me go, for the day breaks.”**
 - Can’t you see you are ruined?
 - Can’t you see that you cannot contend with the Almighty?
 - And of course you can see that.

- b. But we are told of Jacob’s wonderful reply...
 - Now he knows this is the LORD—now he knows that he cannot defeat him.
 - So he says (the end of verse 26:) **“I will not let You go unless You bless me.”**
 - c. With what desperation he latched on to Him!
 - He knows that unless he has God’s blessing, he has nothing...and God has promised—so he refuses to take “no” for an answer!
2. When the LORD contends with you, you are left without strength...but not without faith to hold on to Him!
- You have no argument, you have no power, you have no plea; but you can hold on to Him and to His promise of blessing,
 - for He has said in His covenant that He will bless us—and so He must!
 - That is what Jacob did and that is what we must do.
 - That is even what Jesus did when He was on the cross with our sins!
 - He was there, crying out for the mercy that God had promised to show to us when Jesus made Himself an offering for our sins!
 - The Father had declared that He was a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek; so on that basis, we are told in Hebrews 5:7, **that in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.**
 - He cried out for deliverance as the priest and the sacrifice for all of His people—nothing but promised mercy was His claim.
 - This is what we must do when the LORD opposes us.
 - He may oppose us, He may break us completely...
 - But then let us hold to Him and refuse to let Him go until He blesses us according to His promise.

III. This is how we overcome God! The Lord Himself acknowledges that Jacob has prevailed against Him!

- A. He changes your name when you have overcome Him from *Jacob*, as it were, to *Israel*!
1. You see here in our text how He gets Jacob to confess who he (Jacob) is...
 - Verse 27: **So He said to him, “What is your name?”**
 - Who are you that I should bless you? What is your name?
 - a. And Jacob replies with one word that says it all: **He said, “Jacob.”**
 - Jacob, the twister; Jacob, the deceiver; Jacob, the supplanter...
 - That is what his name means...
 - b. What can you say—who are you?—the sinner, the deceiver, the twister, the blasphemer, the adulterer—your own name says it all—I am John...it is I!
 - Your own name is you...God knows what you are.

- c. Even Jesus Himself had to confess on the cross,
 - “I am the sin-bearer; I am the Head of a sinful people; I am the Lamb of God on whom the sins of the world have been laid; I am a worm and no man at all.”
- 2. But then the Father replies to Jacob, and to you...and even to Jesus...
 - v. 28: **“Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.”**
 - a. Jacob is Israel because he prevailed!
 - The name *Israel* probably does not actually mean *prince with God* as it says in the margin of the New King James Bible.
 - That was a conjecture that was made because it is similar to a word that means *prince* in a sister language...
 - But it has been confirmed that it actually means “God fights” or “May God strive;”
 - But as is often the case with Hebrew names, the exact meaning is altered a bit, and here Jacob is given this name as the one who has fought with God and prevailed!
 - b. But how did Jacob do this?
 - I have said already, but be sure that you are clear about this:
 - Jacob prevailed because he held on to God for the mercy that God had promised.
 - He prevailed because he was brought to the end of himself and was left with nothing but a plea for mercy.
 - Faith is the victory that overcomes the world.
 - That is what enables us to overcome our greatest foe—God the judge of all the earth.
 - There is nothing worse than to fall under His wrath!
 - c. God assures us that we have overcome when we have no more fight in us and give ourselves up to His mercy!
 - When we say with Job, **“though He slay me, yet will I trust Him!”**
 - It is then that God says, you are no longer Jacob, but Israel, for you have prevailed with God and man.
 - It is then that Jesus says to the Canaanite woman whom He opposed because she was a Gentile...
 - **Mat 15:28: “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.**
 - She is a Gentile who became a true Israelite!
 - And so have you if you have been reduced to faith!
- B. And next you see how Jacob asks about God’s name.
 - You can see this in v. 29: **Then Jacob asked, saying, “Tell me Your name, I pray.”**
 - 1. He already knows that He is God, but he wants a fuller revelation of this One who has graciously accepted him!

- Of course he does !
 - He wants to see more clearly who this is that has accepted him even though he is unacceptable.
 - He wants to know, “what is this mercy? How has it been given to someone like me—Jacob—the twister?”
 - It is a godly desire!
- 2. But the time is not right for him to know the name of this God-man.
 - See how the Lord responds: **“Why is it that you ask about My name?”**
 - It is not for Jacob to ask this—God will reveal His name when the right time has come.
- 3. But my brothers and sisters, the right time has already come for us to know the name of this man!
 - We know the name of the one who comes as a man—
 - Who comes and shows us that we are completely undone and who then receives all who come to Him for mercy!
 - He is Jesus Christ, the Son of God who came to earth in human flesh that He might die for His peoples’ sins!
 - That is His name, and it has now been revealed!
 - We know Him as the One who breaks us when He speaks to us, leaving us wallowing in the dust as helpless sinners.
 - We know Him as the One who went to the cross for us.
 - We know Him as the high priest who offered Himself for our sins, and was heard when He cried out for mercy for our sake.
 - We know Him as the One who Himself became the sin bearing sacrifice that takes away the sin of the world.
 - We know Him as the One who was raised from the dead to reign at God’s right hand.
 - We know Him as the Judge of all the earth who will return and summon all to appear before Him for judgement.
 - We know His name—He has been revealed to us!
 - In Him, we are crucified, and in Him we are raised again!
 - He destroys us so that we might obtain His mercy when we cry to Him.
 - He is the Almighty who overcomes us so that we can overcome Him and His judgement by His own grace.
 - There is no other name given among men by which we must be saved!
 - Now that He has been revealed, all who come to God for mercy must come through His name...
 - That was true in a certain way in the Old Testament, only His name had not yet been fully revealed—but those who came had to trust in God’s promises of Him as revealed in shadows.
 - We have the privilege of coming boldly to God in His name!

C. And you see what Jesus does to all who come to Him for mercy—He blesses us!

1. You see it right there at the end of verse 29... **“and He blessed him there.”**
 - He does not reveal His name to Jacob, but He blesses him anyway.
 - a. Jacob, though unworthy, is able to go into the Promised Land.
 - This man blesses him at the gate of the kingdom.
 - He is able to have God as his God and to belong to Him as one of His people.
 - He is able to do this even though he is unworthy and undeserving just like you are.
 - b. He is accepted because he clings, as it were, to Jesus for blessing.
 - He is without strength in himself, but he has found mercy in Christ, this man that he has wrestled with.
2. God’s acceptance of us is never forgotten...
 - a. When we come to the gate, we are given a new name...
 - We have seen how Jacob was named *Israel*...
 - a name that his descendants took as well as those who joined with them that reminded them that they prevailed by seeking mercy from God—not by works of righteousness or merit.
 - And for us today, we too are given a new name.
 - We are baptised into the name of Christ—into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - We take God’s name in baptism.
 - Baptism signifies the washing that we have by Him to make us accepted—the washing away of our sin and guilt by Jesus that we might have God as our God.
 - We are given a bath so we can come into His kingdom.
 - We place our children in His name when we baptise them because God has promised to show mercy to them also—to such as continue in His covenant.
 - They also have His name upon them for mercy.
 - b. There is also a new memorial place—the place the Jacob named Peniel which means Face of God,
 - **30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: “For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”**
 - And for us, the cross is our Peniel...
 - The cross where, like Jacob at Peniel, we are crucified with Christ, yet we are also accepted through His mercy—we die that we might live.
 - c. And finally, our acceptance is never forgotten because once we have met God face to face like this,
 - from then on we have a limp.
 - Jacob literally went away from this place with a limb from his dislocated hip.
 - He was hurt here, just as we are hurt at the cross...disabled as it were.
 - Like Jesus Himself, we have the prints of the nails and the hole in our side from the spear from then on.

- Those who have this limp are never the same...
 - There is a certain humility about them—a certain gentleness toward fellow sinners.
 - They are not so shocked and so horrified by the sins of others because they have been reduced to nothing before God...
 - They do not come to one like Job the way Job’s three friends did, but they come as Elihu came.
 - They come as one sinner to another, reverencing the Lord, yet pointing the way to His mercy.
 - Sinclair Ferguson made the very helpful comment that when someone asks him why so and so is not an elder,
 - he often thinks of this passage and says to himself, “because he doesn’t have a limp.”

Conclusion: Indeed, a person is never the same after Peniel—

- They meet the LORD as their greatest foe and He has reduced them to nothing—
 - and they have met Him as their greatest friend who has mercy on them!

But there is one more thing I would like to say about this...I will put it in the form of a question:

- Does everyone need to have this experience to be saved?
 - And the answer is, “Yes, but it will not be the same for everyone.”
 - Anyone who comes to God for blessing must see that Jesus is an enemy to us because of our sin—our most dangerous adversary—our condemning judge...
 - He is the One who judges, who is a consuming fire of holiness—the One who casts His enemies into the Lake of Fire and Brimstone.
 - But at the same time, He is the One who saves us from our sins through sheer mercy and grace!
- For all of us, these things are seen more and more clearly as we grow in our relationship with God.
 - For some, like Jacob, it is a step by step revelation—
 - for others, it is more like a continuous ramp than stairs...
 - and for still others, it comes about in one big crisis.
- Many will want to know if this was Jacob’s conversion...Was Peniel the place where he was saved and entered into God’s righteous kingdom?
 - or was it at birth as a covenant child when God made promises about him?
 - or was it as he grew up and wanted God’s blessing even though he did not understand it—but wanted it, unlike Esau who was profane?
 - or was it when he left home and met the LORD at Bethel and built an altar to Him and received His promise of mercy?
 - or was it after he started trusting God at Laban’s house and rose up with his family to go to the promised land, trusting God even to face Esau?
 - or again, was here at Peniel where he fought with God—and then realise that it was God and that he could not defeat Him, and cried out for mercy and was heard?

- Who knows when it was?—and who cares?
 - for God was at work in him all along the way—just as He is in all of His elect people whoever and wherever they are.
 - The important thing is, that like Jacob, we are looking to the Lord Jesus for His promised blessing of mercy.
 - If we are, we will become more and more clear that the enemy to be feared is God Himself,
 - and that He is overcome by clinging to Him for His mercy.