

Genesis 32:22-32
Jacob Wrestles with Almighty God

The Christian life is oftentimes a paradox

- Being a Christian flies directly in the face of what the world teaches and exemplifies

The world teaches us that if we want to be exalted, we should flex our muscles and push our way to the front

- But Jesus told us, “**And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted**” (Mt 23:12)

The world teaches us that serving others is not for those who desire to be great in this world

- “**whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many**” (Mt 20:26b-28)

The world teaches us that we should be self-sufficient and self-dependent

- The book of Proverbs tells us to “**Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil**” (3:5-6)

The world tells us that we should be strong all the time, never admitting our weaknesses

- Paul was given a thorn in the flesh and told by Jesus Christ, “**My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness**” (2 Cor 12:9a)
- Paul’s response was rather telling, “**Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me**” (2 Cor 12:9b)

All around us are words of earthly wisdom that are oftentimes in conflict with the Word of God

- We must make a choice of what to believe
- We must make a choice of how to live

In this morning’s passage, we will see God disclose another paradox

- Up to now, Jacob has achieved victory through deceit, manipulation, and trickery

But God will bring those self-absorbed efforts to an end

- In a very unusual method, God will confront Jacob and change his very nature forever

Let’s read Genesis 32:22-32

I am excited to bring you this message this morning

- Because I believe that we are, in some way, a lot like Jacob
- We are self-reliant too many times
- What we need is to learn the value of looking to God instead of being self-dependent

Specifically, God’s Word will teach us three important lessons regarding our relationship with God

- We will learn the value of
 - o Wrestling with God (32:22-25)
 - o Clinging to God (32:26-28)
 - o Rejoicing in God (32:29-32)

Those of you who have been on our journey through Genesis know what has happened in the past chapter or two

- Jacob has fled from Laban
- After 20 years of service, Jacob is finally released from this manipulative person

But upon returning to Canaan, Jacob has to deal with his own past

- Namely, Jacob has to deal with Esau

Twenty years prior, Jacob had cheated Esau out of his father's blessing

- Masquerading as Esau, Jacob deceived his own father and falsely obtained the blessing which was intended for Esau

Esau, of course, was furious

- Furious to the point of killing Jacob

After overhearing word of Esau's plot to kill Jacob, their mother warned Jacob to flee to Haran

- Their plan was for Jacob to spend a few days with Laban
- Then he could return

Well, 20 years have past

- But Jacob doesn't know what state of mind Esau is in

So on his return trip to Canaan, Jacob sends some messengers to Esau to see how he is doing

- Those messengers return with some rather tense-filled words, "**We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him**" (32:6)

Jacob assumes the worst and begins to put a plan into action

- He divides his family and possessions into two groups
- This way, if one group is attacked, the other can survive
- He can avoid a total loss

He then sends Esau a lavish gift of 550 animals

- Jacob's own words tell us his motive in doing this, "**I will appease him with the present that goes before me. Then afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me**" (32:20)
- Jacob fully intended to purchase pardon and forgiveness

This is where we left off last week

- The rest of Genesis 32 will be our focus this morning

The LORD was about to teach Jacob some hard lessons

- The first lesson was that Jacob needed to learn the value of wrestling with God

I. Wrestling with God (32:22-25)

Now he arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ And he took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had.

Jacob has just sent his lavish gift over to Esau

- The events of the latter part of Genesis 32 take place later that night

Moses tells us that Jacob “took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children”

- Let’s notice a few things in passing

Jacob is said to have “his two wives and his two maids”

- But Genesis 30 told us that Jacob married four wives

This passage is insightful into the family of Jacob

- He did have four wives
- However, two of them – Zilpah and Bilhah – were first and foremost maids/servants of Leah and Rachel

They were not considered to be on the same level as Rachel and Leah

- They were just used to produce children for Jacob as an act of spite against the other sister

Nevertheless, they have made the journey to Canaan

- They are still part of the extended family of Jacob

Not only does Jacob have these four wives, but he also has “his eleven children”

- Genesis 30 told us of twelve children

The exception here is probably that of Dinah

- Genesis 30:21 tells us that she was born “afterwards”
- Perhaps she was born after Jacob was already in Canaan

Nevertheless, Jacob’s entire family – all sixteen of them – “crossed the ford of the Jabbok”

- Jacob was now separated by everything that he owned

I will warn you upfront that this passage before us raises more questions than it answers

- This will make more sense as we proceed through the Text

Did Jacob cross the Jabbok, delivering his family safely, then return back to the other side?

- Or did Jacob merely send his family over the Jabbok, never crossing it at that time?

We are not sure

- But that is irrelevant to the truth of verse 24

²⁴ Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.

Jacob’s family had been sent across the Jabbok

- And the first part of verse 24 tells us that “Jacob was left alone”

Did he intend to be alone?

- Was this his plan?

If so, why was he alone?

- Did he want to spend the night in prayer?
- Was he afraid to spend the night with his family, fearful that Esau may come in the night and kill everyone, including himself?
- Once again, we are not given all the answers

But sometime while Jacob was alone, verse 24 tells us, “a man wrestled with him until daybreak”

- What?
- A man *wrestled* with Jacob?

That’s right!

- A literal man literally wrestled with Jacob!

This wrestling match was not a brief one, either

- It lasted “until daybreak”

Who was this “man”?

- Was it Esau?
- Was it one of the 400 men who were with Esau?
- If not, who was he?

There is a difference of opinion on the identity of this “man”

- But there are basically two major choices
 - o He is an angel
 - o He is the angel of the LORD – an appearance of Jesus Christ before His Incarnation

You will notice that both of these options refer to the “man” as an angel

- That is because of what Hosea 12 says
- I would encourage you to hold your finger in Genesis and turn over to the book of Hosea, the first minor prophet

Hosea prophesies against unfaithful Israel

- In so doing, he goes back to this event we are studying in Genesis 32
- Look at verses 3 & 4 where the prophet speaks of Jacob, “In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his maturity he contended with God. ⁴ Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed; he wept and sought His favor” (12:3-4)

The prophet Hosea, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says that Jacob “contended with God”

- Hosea also says that “he wrestled with the angel”

The question, of course, is, “What angel was this?”

- This could have been any angel of God’s choosing
- But I think we can be more certain than this

Throughout the book of Genesis, we have encountered a certain Angel

- He is called “the angel of the LORD” (Gen 16:7, 9-11; 22:11, 15) or “the angel of God” (Gen 21:17; 31:11)

When you examine the contexts of these passages listed above, you will see that this Angel has characteristics of God Himself

- I believe that “the angel of the LORD” and “the angel of God” refer to the same Person
- None other than Jesus Christ before His Incarnation

The rest of the passage will help to unfold the Man’s identity with greater clarity

- Gradually, but clearly, we will see the true identity of this Man¹

¹ Derek Kidner, *The Tyndale OT Commentaries, Genesis*, 169.

But if Jacob is wrestling with Jesus Christ, he doesn't know it

- Remember, this takes place at night
- Jesus' earthly identity and image would have been hidden in the veil of darkness

If Jacob would have known the true identity of his foe, he would have never engaged in the fight

- And God certainly knew this

Why were they wrestling?

- The word for “**wrestling**” is closely related to the Hebrew word for “dust”
- In other words, this wrestling was a hands-on, get-your-hands-dirty kind of wrestling²

And it took place for several hours during the night

- Visibility was limited
- Appearances were concealed

We can fast-forward the tape a few hours into the night

- This must have been a long, hard, drawn-out time of wrestling
- Jacob must have been worn-out!

²⁵ And when he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him.

This passage in Genesis 32 is sometimes hard to understand because of the multiple references to “he” or “him”

- It becomes a little confusing in deciding whether “he” refers to Jacob or the Man

Let's read verse 25 without any pronouns, “**And when the Man saw that Jacob had not prevailed against the Man, the Man touched the socket of Jacob's thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while the Man wrestled with Jacob**”

- A little redundant; however, it clears up the antecedents of the pronouns

At some point during the night, Jesus Christ took action against Jacob

- After struggling for hours on end, Jacob was injured by God

Verse 25 tells us that “**the Man touched the socket of Jacob's thigh**”

- If you have ever watched wrestling, karate, mixed martial arts or other similar sports, you know that your legs are crucial

Your legs provide stability for balancing, attacking, and counter-attacking

- Your legs provide the leverage you need in wrestling
- Your legs provide a firm base

But Jesus “**touched**” Jacob's thigh

- This word can imply a gentle touching, such as when the Lord “**touched**” the lips of Isaiah the prophet (Isa 6:7)
- Or, it can imply a violent touching, such as when Satan asked the Lord to “**touch**” Job's family and possessions (Job 1:11)

² Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing*, 552.

All it took was one “touch” from Jesus, and Jacob was injured

- The power of Jesus was displayed

Let’s be honest

- Jesus Christ is omnipotent God
- He has unlimited power and ability

At any point during this long wrestling match, Jesus Christ could have easily overpowered Jacob

- But that wouldn’t accomplish His purpose for Jacob

Jesus wanted Jacob to wrestle with Him

- Jesus wanted Jacob to struggle...to a point
- Jesus wanted Jacob to prevail...for the time being

After a few hours, Jacob was given an injury

- Verse 25 says that Jacob’s hip socket was “**dislocated**”

Have you ever had a dislocated joint?

- During high school, my shoulder was out of joint several times while playing football

It is painful to have a dislocated joint

- But to have your hip dislocated would cause severe problems
- It would affect the way you walk – if you could walk at all

Jacob has been a wrestler most of his life

- And to be honest, he has a pretty good record

So far, he has 5 wins and no losses

- At his birth, Jacob was holding on to Esau, not wanting him to be the firstborn
- Later in life, Jacob obtained the birthright from Esau in exchange for a cup of stew
- A few years later, Jacob was able to steal the blessing intended for Esau
- You could say that he achieved two victories at this point, since he deceived both Isaac and Esau
- Then, of course, he achieved victory over Laban, despite Laban’s ill-intended efforts

Not a bad record, right?

But Jacob was up against a stronger Foe this time around

- Sure, he might be strong
- But Jesus was stronger

Did you notice in verse 24 that this Man – Jesus Christ – initiated the conflict?

- Jacob didn’t go looking for a fight
- Jesus took the fight to Jacob

For now, realize the need to wrestle with God

- We will expand on this as we go through the Text

Jacob needed to learn the value of wrestling with God

II. Clinging to God (32:26-28)

²⁶ Then he said, “Let me go, for the dawn is breaking.”

Jacob and Jesus have been wrestling for hours and hours

- The fight doesn't seem to lose energy or tenacity

Jesus had even dislocated Jacob's hip in verse 25

- But he didn't give up the fight
- He was a fighter – not a quitter

Verse 26 tells us, “Then he said, ‘Let me go, for the dawn is breaking’”

- Let's get rid of the pronouns, “Then the Man said, ‘Let me go, for the dawn is breaking’”

Do you realize that Jesus is asking Jacob to let Him go?

- Jacob didn't stop wrestling, even though his hip was dislocated!
- He was not quitting

Realize that Jesus is not confessing His inability to stop the match

- Jesus could have stopped it at any time He wanted

But daybreak is arriving and Jesus tells Jacob, “Let me go”

- It is time for the wrestling to be over

Why the concern about “daybreak”?

- Because Jesus' identity would be made known

But he said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”

Jacob responds to Jesus by saying, “I will not let you go unless you bless me”

- This is an unusual expression, isn't it?

Jacob has been wrestling with a Man for hours during the night

- And now Jacob wants this Man to bless him!

Something has changed in Jacob's perception of this opponent

- You would never ask your enemy to bless you, right?
- Of course not!

The Man had told Jacob, “Let me go”

- Jacob responds, “I will not let you go”

Both use the same Hebrew word

- But Jacob uses the strongest negative response to say, “I will not, never let you go”

Jacob wants this Man to bless him

- This is the same word for blessing that we have seen throughout Genesis
 - o Blessing on God's creation
 - o Blessing on the seventh day
 - o Blessing on Noah

- Blessing on Abram
- Blessing on Sarai
- Blessing on Ishmael
- Blessing on Isaac
- Blessing on Jacob

Did you notice a change in Jacob's actions?

- He was wrestling before his injury
- Now he is clinging after his injury

Jacob is slowly changing before our very eyes

- He is resting, not resisting

Jacob is realizing that blessing from God comes about through abandoning all trust in self³

- Listen to Jacob's own words, "**I will not let you go unless you bless me**" (emphasis mine)

Jacob realizes that this only Man can truly bless him

- And Jacob won't settle for anything less

²⁷ So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."

The Man asks Jacob, "**What is your name?**"

- This isn't a question for information
- Jesus knows who Jacob is

The question was intended to elicit a certain response

- Jacob answers the question, "**Jacob**"

You know what the name Jacob means and stands for:

- Heel-grabber
- Deceiver
- Manipulator

In answering the question, Jacob was confessing his own character

- He was admitting to the guilt of having deceived his brother, father, and father-in-law

²⁸ And he said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed."

The Man tells Jacob, "**Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel**"

Jacob isn't the first person to undergo a name change

- Abram was changed to Abraham
- Sarai was changed to Sarah
- Simon was changed to Peter
- Saul was changed to Paul

³ W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, 304.

In each of these cases, the future direction and characteristics of the individuals were altered

- You might say that they underwent a spiritual metamorphosis⁴

This Angel was changing Jacob

- No longer would he be a deceiver and manipulator
- No longer would he be self-reliant

What was the rationale for the name change?

- “for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed”

Jacob – Israel – would have success with mankind because he had had success with God

- His conflict with God qualified him to deal with mankind

No longer would Jacob be a heel-grabber

- Israel would be a God-grabber

Jacob needed to learn a few things

- *The value of wrestling with God*
- *The value of clinging to God*
- *Thirdly...*

III. Rejoicing in God (32:29-32)

²⁹ Then Jacob asked him and said, “Please tell me your name.”

The Man had asked Jacob’s name

- And Jacob had answered

Now Jacob asks the Man, “Please tell me your name”

- Notice that Jacob politely asks, “Please”
- This is yet another indicator that Jacob is speaking to a superior

We are not sure why Jacob wanted to know the name of this Man

But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?”

But the Man counters Jacob’s question with another question of His own, “Why is it that you ask my name?”

That is a rather unusual statement, isn’t it?

- What’s the harm in answering Jacob’s question?
- What’s the harm in giving your name?

But I think the silence of the Man speaks louder than any words could have

- We as the reader are put into the same situation as Jacob

⁴ Victor P. Hamilton, *NICOT, Genesis 18-50*, 333.

This scene is much like that described in Judges 13⁵

- The angel of the LORD appeared to Manoah and his wife – Samson’s parents

As a matter of fact, the Angel appeared to the woman on two occasions

- When Manoah was brought into the presence of the Angel, he wanted to prepare a meal for Him

The Angel responded and told Manoah that He would not eat their food

- But Manoah should offer a burnt offering to the LORD

Manoah then asked the Angel, “**What is your name, so that when your words come to pass, we may honor you?**” (Jdg 13:17)

- The Angel responded, “**Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?**” (Jdg 13:18)

In other words, the name of the Lord is wonderful, awesome, and not to be treated flippantly

- It is to be revered and respected

I ask you, church, is there any doubt as to the Man’s identity?

- Who else can inflict injury with just a touch?
- Who else can wrestle with Jacob for hours on end?
- Who else can bless Jacob?
- Who else can change the name of Jacob to Israel?

I think the Angel refused to acknowledge Jacob’s request because He knew that Jacob already knew who He was

And he blessed him there.

What Jacob wanted so badly is now given freely, “**and he blessed him there**”

- This Man blessed Jacob

Jacob had obtained blessing prior to this through cunning deceit and trickery

- Now he was learning that true blessing comes as a gift of God

³⁰ So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.”

We can safely assume that the Man has left by now

- Jesus Christ, temporarily appearing in His pre-incarnate condition, has now returned to heaven

And Jacob is left alone once again

- Just like he was before this wrestling match began

But this time, Jacob is different

- Jacob is now Israel

As Jacob had done in the past, he does once again

- He names the place as a type of memorial

⁵ Hamilton, 334.

Bethel was God's house

- Mahanaim was God's camp
- Now Peniel is God's face

Jacob calls the place Peniel because he confesses, "I have seen God face to face"

- Do you think there is any doubt as to the identity of this Man?
- Jacob is fully convinced that this Man is none other than God Himself

Jacob also says, "yet my life has been preserved"

- Throughout the Bible, to come into the presence of God is a frightening experience

The LORD told Moses in the book of Exodus, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live" (Ex 33:20)

- Moses was only allowed to see the backside form of God

But here is Jacob

- He was hands-on with God
- He was wrestling with God
 - o *All under the veil of darkness*

³¹ Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh.

The sun has now risen

- The Man is gone
- Jacob is now changed forever

He crosses over the Jabbok to reunite with his family

- But verse 31 says "he was limping on his thigh"

I can't help but smile when I read that

- God gave Israel a lasting reminder of his wrestling that night
- For the rest of his life, his dislocated hip would remind him of the events of that night

³² Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip.

Moses adds that the sons of Israel – those who claimed to be of the seed of Israel – made it a practice not to eat a particular part of the hip of animals

- This is the area around the sciatic nerve
- This is where God inflicted pain and injury for Jacob

God never issued this prohibition

- Rather, the Jews implemented this restriction upon themselves

They wanted to remember this special event in the life of Israel, their spiritual forefather

Let's step back and consider what this message meant for Jacob

- He was on the eve of confronting his brother, Esau
- The brother that he had tricked on two occasions

It is very clear that Jacob feared Esau (32:7, 11)

- He feared what Esau would do

But God was teaching Jacob something else

- Jacob should not have feared Esau – or Laban, for that matter
- Jacob should have feared God

Jacob feared meeting with his brother Esau

- But Jacob didn't think about a far greater need – that of meeting with God Himself⁶

Jacob must meet God before he meets with Esau

- Jacob must be changed before he meets with Esau

Remember, God had initiated this conflict with Jacob

- God literally brought the fight to Jacob's front door
- Jacob couldn't avoid it any longer

This Divine wrestling match was God's plan for removing all self-sufficiency and self-reliance from Jacob

- This was God's means of removing pride from Jacob

I began this message by declaring that the Christian life is oftentimes a paradox

- It goes against the ways and wisdom of the world

Jacob's account with this Man illustrates another paradox

- The way to achieve victory with God is to admit defeat

That's right

- After wrestling with the Man all night and after having his thigh dislocated, Jacob emerged broken and dependent
 - o Broken of his dependence on self
 - o Dependent on God alone

When Jacob reunited with his family, he was new in two ways

- A new name
- A new limp

Jacob's limp would remind him – and others – of the change that God had brought about in this man's life

- His earthly walk was different
- And his spiritual walk was different as well

This wrestling was designed by God to break down Jacob's entire mindset

- Canaan would not be won by cleverness, deception, or self-trust
- Canaan would be obtained by God's grace and favor⁷

Now that Jacob had faced God, he could face anyone else

- That certainly meant Esau

⁶ Griffith Thomas, 300.

⁷ Griffith Thomas, 302.

Of course, the nation of Israel needed to learn this message as well

- How many times do we read in the Old Testament of Israel trusting in something/someone other than the LORD?
- We ask ourselves, “Don’t you realize where the name of Israel came from? Didn’t you learn your lesson?”

In the book of Zechariah, the LORD says these words, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts” (4:6)

Throughout the OT, you will see the nation referred to by both Jacob and Israel

- When the nation was acting independently of God, they would sometimes be called Jacob
- When the nation was trusting in God, they would sometimes be called Israel

But before you shake your head in frustration at the nation of Israel, consider yourself as a Christian

- You have more of God’s revelation than Jacob did
- You have more of God’s revelation than the nation of Israel did

Are you trusting in God more than Jacob did?

- Are you still wrestling with God over some issue in your life?

It is entirely possible for you to come to church and put on a façade, acting like everything is really great

- But deep inside, you are wrestling with God
- You are struggling with God over some issue in your spiritual walk

You think that the struggle will never end

- But it will
- All in God’s timing

You think that God doesn’t care for you

- You ask, “Why did you bring this on, God?”

There are times when you feel like God is your Foe, not your Friend

- Rest assured, beloved, that this wrestling is an act of love

Don’t you realize that this is God’s means of changing you, just like he changed Jacob?

- God is committed to changing us all into greater Christlikeness
- These wrestlings are all part of our sanctification
 - o To make us more like Christ
 - o To remove pride
 - o To remove self-dependence
 - o To instill God-dependence
 - o To instill fear of God

We are very similar to Jacob

- Our old nature needs to be changed
 - o Old habits
 - o Old thoughts
 - o Old theology

- Our new nature needs to be grown
 - o New habits
 - o New thoughts
 - o New theology

At times, God may have to dislocate something in our lives in order to change us

- Perhaps God has to end a relationship that was doomed to end sinfully
- Perhaps God has to decline your health in order to get your attention
- Perhaps God has to say “no” to a job change or marriage proposal

God knows what your crutches are

- And He will wrestle you until you learn to cling to Him instead of those crutches

Jacob wrestled with a Man who is believed to be none other than Jesus Christ

- He was in contact with Him for just a short time

But Jesus would make another appearance, making centuries later

- Jesus Christ came to this Earth
 - o Not to wrestle with one man
 - o But to obtain redemption for mankind

Jacob became Israel

- Israel’s descendants passed on the Seed promise that One would come and redeem mankind from their sin
- Because of the Fall of man, every human being is tainted with the curse of sin

Our only hope is for Someone to come and remove our sin and grant us forgiveness

- That has been accomplished over 2000 years ago when Jesus Christ died on the Cross

This morning, salvation is possible for you, unbelieving friend

- You can’t earn salvation – it has to be a gift
- You can’t pay for salvation – it cannot be purchased by money

You are much like Jacob, who had to learn some hard lessons

- You have to surrender in order to have victory
- You have to humble yourself in order to be exalted
- You have to confess your inability in order to see God’s ability

Church, where are you this morning?

- Are you still wrestling with God?
- Are you clinging to God?
- Are you rejoicing in God?

One step leads to the next

- When God brings you through a trial, I assure you that you will rejoice as you see God change you