

Wrestling with God

Genesis 32:22-32

4/27/08

Intro

From our study last week to this week, twenty years have passed. Jacob was on the run from the mess he had made of his life and was on his way to his uncle Laban in Paddan-aram under the guise of finding a wife, which he did need, by the way. On the way he meets with God and has a dream where God gives him the blessings of Abraham and Isaac and he called that place Bethel – the house of God.

He then meets Rachel and her father Laban, falls in love with Rachel and works seven years for her since he has no dowry. Laban does some conniving of his own however, and puts Leah in Rachel's place on the wedding night! He then works another seven years for Rachel. He then becomes wealthy through a bit more manipulation and cleverness.

Finally, God speaks to him and tells him to go back to the land of his fathers and that God would be with him. But then a problem arises – a very big problem. He had sent word to Esau that he was coming and the servants returned with the news, "Esau is coming to meet you and has 400 men with him."

He sends gifts on ahead, but finally is alone and that night Jacob meets God again and this time they wrestle all night long. And this is where the scripture reveals some powerful insights for our lives as we may find ourselves wrestling with God.

I. We are in the Process of Becoming

- Jacob at this point in his life has been living with the name Jacob a long time and the problems and issues of his life need to be addressed.
- God allows a crisis in his life just for this very purpose.

A. Our problems have great purpose

- God is the one who told Jacob to go back to the land of his fathers, knowing that Esau was still there waiting for him.
- God knew it was time to face the past; it was time to make things right, time to reconcile.
- Jacob sends word to Esau that he is coming and gets word back that Esau is coming with 400 men. It might seem like this is a great problem, but there are still greater troubles to come in Jacob's life.
- **God uses our problems and crises to change us. They are opportunities to get things resolved in our lives, and they are preparing us for greater challenges to come.**

James 1:2-4, Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- One thing is certain is that our problems will be greater in the future.

Illus – When we first had a baby I thought we would never get a full night sleep. I thought parenting was so difficult, little did I know that we would someday have five kids in their teens at the same time!

Jeremiah 12:5, If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out, then how can you compete with

horses? If you fall down in a land of peace, how will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?

Illus – At this point Jacob has 11 boys and they’re all young. The children of Jacob would indeed break his heart in years to come.

B. Pray the promises that God gave you

- Verses 9-12. Jacob then turns to God with a prayer that is an example of using the promises of God as the substance of prayer.
- *O God, he prays, You are the one who directed me and the one who said that you would prosper me, deliver me, I pray...*
- You don’t see Jacob as a man who prays until this point in his life, but he turns to God in the crisis, and calls out to God with the promises that God gave him.
- There is something very right and powerful about using scripture and the promises of God in our prayer.

Illus – George Mueller was a man who believed in the power of trusting God in prayer and relying on God’s promises when he prayed. He had to trust God to take care of the orphans in his care. But he is also man who was changed by the hand of God.

His early life in Prussia was marked by lying, gambling, drinking, and imprisonment for fraud. At age fifteen, he gave his attention to cards and drinking with friends while his mother lay dying.

But God touched his life and he learned to trust God, even for the miraculous. “You promised to give us our daily bread,” he prayed, and then a cart of bread broke down in front of the orphanage.

II Timothy 1:12, I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.

- God is going to answer Jacob’s prayer in a wonderful way, but first there are some things that must be wrestled out of Jacob.

II. Surrender to God

- A man wrestled with Jacob all night long. The scripture makes it clear that he had an encounter with God!
- A. God will let you win
 - Jacob is wrestling with God and they keep wrestling all through the night.
 - The amazing thing is that God doesn’t pin in three seconds. This much is certain, God is bigger than we are.

Illus – When one of my children was having some difficulty obeying, I took him out of bed and set him on the floor of our bedroom and told him to stay there. “This isn’t fair,” he said, “you’re bigger than I am.” That’s exactly the point I said.

Illus – When I was in eighth grade, I was on the JV wrestling team and asked to wrestle the state champion.

I actually got a take down and for a split second thought I had a chance, then I was pinned in a flash.

- God wrestles with us and could destroy us in an instant, but allows us to continue waiting until we come to the point where we say, “God, I surrender.”
- It’s a very bad day for us, however, when God says, “You win.”

Romans 1:21, 24-25, For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God... Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie,

- How does God wrestle? By resisting us and speaking to our hearts with gentleness allowing turmoil in our hearts.

Illus – When I would wrestle the kids I would bring just as much force as needed, but never too much.

- God’s desire is that we would come to the place where our hearts desire to do God’s will.

Psalm 139:23-24, Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.

B. There is purpose in a limp

- As they wrestled through the night, with Jacob refusing to give up, and as the dawn is almost breaking, seeing that Jacob will not stop

contending, he touches him on the hip, the strongest part of the body, and dislocates his hip.

- Thereafter Jacob would walk with a limp; a reminder that he must no longer trust in his own strength.
- In other words, God may give a limp in order to strengthen. He may prune in order to bring forth fruit.

Hebrews 12:11, All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

- In the pocket of a soldier in the Civil war was found this prayer that says it all...

Illus – I asked for strength that I might achieve, He made me weak that I might obey, I asked for health that I might do great things, He gave me grace that I might do better things, I asked for riches that I might be happy, He gave me poverty that I might be wise, I asked for power that I might have the praise of men, he gave me weakness that I might feel the need for God, I asked for all thing that I might enjoy life, He gave me life that I might enjoy all things. I received nothing I asked for, He gave me everything I hoped for.

Luke 9:24-25, “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself.”

C. Be governed by God

- Just before sunrise he said, “Let me go for the dawn is breaking.” But Jacob responded, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”
- Then he asked, “What is your name?” This is perhaps now a difficult question, because the answer reveals who he is, “My name is Jacob – heel snatcher, supplanter of men, deceiver.”
- He then said, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel”
- The name “Israel” has several parts to its meaning. It means ‘prince who is governed by God,’ and “God contends.”
- Remember that this is a blessing that Jacob is being given and so there is a promise of blessing, but it’s interesting because it in essence means...
- Israel – ‘Be governed by God and He will contend for you,’ or ‘God will contend with you.’

App – The promise to Jacob, now Israel, is that God will contend for him when He is governed by God, but God will love him so much that He will contend with him as well.

That is indeed a great blessing, but the worst thing that could happen is that God stop contending and let someone go to their own consequences.

- God gives us a promise that He will be for us and contend for us.

Isaiah 43:1-3, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the Lord your God,”

Romans 8:31-32, What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?