

Wrestling With God

Genesis 32:22-32

March 6, 2005

Introduction

1. It has been said, "Old habits die hard!"
2. There is one habit that many have which is difficult to overcome, that of unbelief.
3. Unbelief bears interesting fruit: manipulation, anger, lying, anxiety, depression, striving.
4. Today, we are going to discover how God confronted unbelief in the patriarch named Jacob.
5. By doing so, we will also find how God wants to strengthen our faith in Him.

READ – Genesis 32:22-32

Context

1. Jacob is now 97 years old.
2. For the last 20 years he has served his uncle, Laban.
3. During that time Jacob acquired two wives, 2 maids, 11 sons, and 1 daughter.
4. For the last 6 years, Jacob became very wealthy. He owned goats, sheep, camels, cattle, donkeys, and servants.
5. But jealousy began to take root in the hearts of Laban and his sons because of Jacob's wealth.
6. So in Genesis 31, God commanded Jacob to move back to the land of his father, Isaac, the land of Canaan.
7. But before God would allow Jacob to enter the land, He had to bring radical change into the life of Jacob.

I. God Creates A Crisis (6-21)

A. Crisis Can Take Many Forms (6)

1. Employment problems
2. Poor health
3. Family issues

ILLUS – Jacob's past problems with Esau

- Grabbed Esau's birthright
- Snatched Esau's blessing
- Jacob had to confront the past he ran from

B. Crisis Makes Our Future Appear Uncertain (7-20)

1. Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed
2. Jacob devised a plan (true to form)
 - a. Divided the camp (7-8)
 - b. Prayed for deliverance (9-12)
 - c. Sent gifts, ~ 550 animals (13-20)
3. Jacob's motivation is stated in **Gen. 32:20**:

"I will appease him with the present that goes before me. Then afterwards I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me."

C. God Will Often Use A Crisis To Bring Change

1. God will **sometimes** change our circumstances

ILLUS – Israel delivered from pharaoh at the Red Sea

2. God will **often** change us

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, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."*

ILLUS – Questions regarding our transition: Were we leaving Dallas because of trials? Not at all! It was through the trials that God changed us and strengthened our faith in Him.

Philippians 4:4, *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"*

II. God Gets Us All Alone (24a)

A. Crisis Often Makes Us Feel Isolated

1. Jacob was all alone
2. Jacob had done all he could do - no more schemes
3. Jacob felt surrounded by the darkness of night
 - a. Unknown future
 - b. Overwhelmed by uncertainty

B. Good News – We're Not Alone

ILLUS – Kristi's complications after Anna's birth

Isaiah 43:2, "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."

III. God Confronts Our Unbelief (24-25)

A. Love Motivates God To Confront

1. God takes the initiative to meet with Jacob
2. Jacob may have thought it was one of Esau's men
3. But Scripture gives us a clear revelation of the opponent's identity, God the Son.

Hosea 12:3-5, "In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his maturity he contended with God. Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed; He wept and sought His favor. He found Him at Bethel, and there He spoke with us, Even the Lord, the God of Hosts; the Lord is His name."

4. God appeared in the form of a man because Jacob was treating God like He was a man:
 - Frail
 - Unfaithful
 - Forgetful
 - Foe

B. But God Is Not A Man

1. God is all-powerful

Jeremiah 32:27, "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?"

2. God is faithful

Numbers 23:19, "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it: Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

2 Timothy 2:13, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself."

3. God never forgets His people

Isaiah 49:14-16, "But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me.' Can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands."

4. God is for us not against us

Romans 8:38-39, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

IV. God Wants Faith To Prevail (26-32)

A. We Are Strong When We Are Weak

1. The Lord touched Jacob's Thigh – Symbol of Strength
2. Jacob's hip was dislocated with a touch not a twist or torque revealing the superiority of the Lord
3. God revealed He was an advocate not an adversary because He could have destroyed Jacob

2 Corinthians 12:9-10, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about

my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

B. We Are Strong When We Cling To God

1. Once Jacob's hip was dislocated, he could no longer flee
2. Once Jacob realized he had met his match, he did not want to wrestle or flee
3. In humility he cried out for a blessing as he held fast to the Lord.

C. The Lord Blesses All Who Cling To Him

1. God Gave Jacob A New Name – Name reveals character
 - a. Jacob – heel grabber, supplants
 - b. Israel – Governed by God, God fights, God's prince

Revelation 2:17, "To him who overcomes,... I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone..."

c. Jacob's new name answered Jacob's question, "What is your name?" God!

2. He Gave Jacob A New Walk – He Limped (31)

2 Corinthians 5:7, "we walk by faith, not by sight."

3. He Gave Jacob A New Day (31)

Conclusion

But what did the Lord mean when He said, "you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed"?

- Not a reference to the wrestling match
- It was a reference to the heart of God for Jacob and all who come to Him by faith
- Faith in God prevails upon the heart of God because God wants to bless His children.
- We don't have to manipulate or strive to get God to bless us
- Simply believe in God and His heart for you. Cling to Him.
- Stand on His promises and He will do it.

Romans 8:32, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

As we have studied the Word today, where are you?

- Crisis
- Alone
- Wrestling
- Limping
- Or Clinging by Faith

Pastor Jon Courson once said, "God declares, Satan denies, and we decide."

God invites us to, "Cease striving and know that I am God;" (Psalm 46:10