

# Genesis Ch32v1-31 - Faith and Fear

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Date: 27 March 2022

Preacher: John Samuel

[ 0 : 00 ] Next. Excellent. Okay. That would be great. Thank you, Johnny. So, I'm Johnny, and this is John.

I met John almost 23, 24 years ago, Kirstie and I, just as we'd finished Bible college, went to serve and work with the church in Dublin.

John was the pastor there, Grosvenor Road Baptist Church. I served under him. He was a mentor and a trainer. So, all that I know, John has taught me most of what I know.

So, very thankful and grateful for that. John now serves in London. He preaches and teaches and pastors in Richmond, in London, Duke Street Baptist Church.

And he's been here this weekend teaching at Munster Bible College. He does have a great love for the church here in Ireland and for the believers and loves to serve the church. So, we're just delighted that you are here today.

[ 1 : 11 ] So, thanks for coming, John. Thank you so much. Johnny. It's a joy to be with you and particularly to see Johnny and Kirstie flourishing. And I'm sure you're grateful for them and are looking after them well.

So, let me encourage you to continue to do that. And let's turn to God's Word together to Genesis 32. Please. It's Genesis chapter 32. It's the book of origins.

Genesis means, as I'm sure you know, origins or beginning. And it's the beginning of God's dealings with his world. And in particular, with Abraham and Abraham's family, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

And we've reached the point in the story, excuse me, where Jacob has, having cheated his brother, 20 years later, is on his way back home.

And in chapter 32, we read, Jacob also went on his way. He's been chased by his father-in-law, but finally made the break. And the angels of God met him.

[ 2 : 25 ] When Jacob saw them, he said, this is the camp of God, or two camps. So he named that place Two Camps, Mahanaim. Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

He instructed them, this is what you are to say to my master Esau. Your servant Jacob says, I've been staying with Laban and have remained there till now.

I've cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, menservants and maidservants. Now I'm sending this message to my Lord that I may find favor in your eyes.

Remember, this is the brother he cheated at the inheritance 20 years ago. When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, we went to your brother Esau and now he's coming to meet you.

And 400 men are with him. In great fear and distress, Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well.

[ 3 : 37 ] He thought if Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape. Then Jacob prayed, O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, go back to your country and your relatives and I'll make you prosper.

I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups.

Jacob said, save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he'll come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children.

But you have said, I will surely make you prosper, and will make your descendants like the sands of the sea, which cannot be counted. Jacob spent the night there, and from what he had with him, he selected a gift for his brother Esau.

In fact, a whole bunch of gifts that he sends on ahead to try and win his brother's favor. Verse 21 we'll jump to. So Jacob's gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp. [ 4 : 57 ] That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he'd sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions.

So Jacob was left alone, and the man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he couldn't overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip, so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.

Then the man said, Let me go, for it is daybreak. But Jacob replied, I will not let you go, unless you bless me. The man asked him, What is your name?

Jacob, he answered. Then the man said to him, Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel.

Because you have, which means God struggles or struggles with God.

Because you have struggled with God, and with men, and have overcome. Jacob said, Please tell me your name.

[ 6 : 12 ] But he replied, Why do you ask my name? Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place, Face of God, Peniel, saying, It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.

The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. Therefore, to this day, the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

Well, let's pray and ask God's help. Father, please, in whatever state of mind or emotion we are in right now, please would you open our eyes and our hearts to see wonderful things in your word.

We ask for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, if God is for us, who can be against us?

I expect you know that expression from, sorry, from Romans 8. But what do you do when it feels that God is against you? Maybe you've been given very difficult parents or relations.

[ 7 : 40 ] Maybe you've lost your job despite acting with integrity, and you wonder, in fact, it's because you acted with integrity that you lost it. Maybe you just struggle economically.

You try to be careful with money, but you never seem to get a job that does more than enable you just to bump along the economic bottom. Maybe you're struggling to find a marriage partner, or you find one but can't have children, or you get given children and one of them, or more than one, proves to be an absolute nightmare.

Maybe serious illness strikes out of the blue, or a life-changing injury. Or you lose a loved one, as they say, before their time. Or war breaks out.

We're spared that at the moment, but imagine what it's like to be a Christian in Ukraine. Maybe it sometimes feels that not only are specific people against you, but God himself is against you.

Well, if that's how you feel or ever feel, then Jacob knew just what that felt like. First it was Esau, then it was God. And yet there had been such clear guidance.

[ 8 : 57 ] If you look back to chapter 31, verse 3, Jacob up north with his father-in-law, his family, hears this word from the Lord, verse 3 of chapter 31.

Then the Lord said to Jacob, Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you. Chapter 32, verse 1, we read, Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. That's a very strange expression, isn't it? The only other time this occurs is in his dream back in chapter 28 when Jacob saw that famous stairway to heaven with the angels, the messengers of God, going up and down, up and down.

Well, he calls it in chapter 32, verse 2, the camp of God, or two camps. And it must surely have been an encouragement to sense that God's army is camped beside you, right?

Or is it? It's God's army, not his. But anyway, Jacob, we read from verse 3, sends messengers, or it's the same word actually as angels, to Esau with the most ingratiating message, say to my lord Esau.

[ 10 : 16 ] Do you see that? Say to my lord Esau. Sorry, my master, it's translated, isn't it, in the NIV. Say to my master Esau, your servant, Jacob, says.

Now, it's as if Jacob is trying to reverse the effects of his earlier theft of the inheritance from his brother. But the intelligence report that he gets back is terrifying.

The messages return, verse 6, to Jacob, and they said, we went to your brother Esau, and now he's coming to meet you. And by the way, he's not alone. He's got 400 men with him. You and whose

army?

Well, there are two sections of what we're going to be looking at this morning. The first is the fear of man, verses 6 to 21 here in chapter 32. The fear of man. Because we see in verse 7 that it's in great fear and distress that Jacob is left when he hears this news.

Because he's surely going to be attacked and destroyed by the brother who for 20 years has been waiting to take vengeance on his kid brother who cheated him out of the inheritance. And what does Jacob do?

[11:30] Well, he does two things here. First, he schemes verses 7 and 8, and we see that played out in verses 13 to 20. He divides his entourage into two camps and divides his five-stage present to try and appease his brother by serial generosity.

His brother's coming down the road with these 400 men and he meets this herd of animals. And who are you and whose are these? Oh, this is a gift from your brother Jacob. And then the next lot. And five times he encounters these generous flocks given to him.

It's a clever plan. And yet, there's a certain ambiguity about it. We're not sure, is this wisdom from God or is this human desperation? And then the second way that, or the second thing that Jacob does in verses 9 to 12 is he prays.

Then, Jacob prayed, verse 9. Oh, God of my father, Abraham. Now, it wasn't his first action.

The first thing he did was the scheme. But it was his best action. And he appeals to God's proven character. You are, verse 9, the God of my father, Abraham, the God of my father, Isaac.

[12:44] He appeals to the clear verbal revelation he has had from God. Oh, Lord, who said to me, go back to your country and your relatives and I'll make you prosper. He's convinced that God means to do him good, not harm.

And he twice quotes God, back to God. In verse 9, we just saw it, and then verse 12. But you have said, Lord, I will surely make you prosper. Lord, that's what you said to me.

If you're a Christian, you'll probably know that wonderful verse in Romans 8, verse 28, that we know that God works all things for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

not for the bad or the harm, but for their good. Jacob here, back in 32.10, is learning a certain humility.

There is a new Jacob here on display. Do you see that in verse 10? I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant.

[13:53] And you know, that is a necessary milestone to reach in every spiritual journey with God. To realise that you are unworthy of the least of all his love and faithfulness.

Do you remember the story Jesus told of the two men who went up to the temple to pray? the strictly religious one who said, looking around at others, I thank you Lord that I am not as bad as others.

And then in the corner by himself, the reject in society who said, Lord have mercy on me the sinner. It's actually the sinner. None of the English translations as far as I can work out have the courage to actually translate it as the sinner. They always say a sinner. But it says very clearly in what Jesus says, I am the sinner.

It's as if all he could do is look to God. He's not looking at other people. He's just looking at God, as it were, and looking at himself and saying, when I look at God and then I look at myself, what do I see? I see the sinner.

[15:02] There's no one else here. It's just God and me. And there's a sense in which that is such an important step to take, such an important position to get to in a spiritual journey, if we're going to come to know God and his blessing, is to realize that I am the sinner.

Do you remember how Jesus at the end of the story is, he tells the story and then says, which of these two do you think went home in right relationship with God? Was it the one who looked around and said, thank you, I'm not like others. There are some people so bad, you know.

Or is it the one who just looked at God and said, I am the sinner, have mercy on me, Lord. Well, Jesus said, it's the second one who went home, right with God, because everyone who exalts themselves will be humbled, but the one who humbles themselves will be exalted.

While Jacob is finally humbling himself, it seems, I am unworthy, verse 10, of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. And he pleads for deliverance, verse 11, save me, I pray, for I am afraid.

He admits his fear. And if you're a believer today, then verse 10 is where we need to stay conscious of our unworthiness, of all the kindness and faithfulness we've been shown by God.

[16:26] And if you're not yet a believer, it's a place you need to arrive and get to, realizing that you're not worthy of God's kindness and faithfulness. But Jacob is this swirling mixture of faith and fear, just like us.

And we sometimes know we try to scheme our way out of a sticky situation rather than pray our way out. So the fear of man. Secondly, the struggle with God.

we learn in the first point that we need to forget the fear of man and find fear of God. Here it comes in this struggle in verses 22 to 32.

Now this is surely one of the strangest episodes in the Bible, isn't it? God's love. Now, I don't think this is about prevailing prayer, as some people try to understand it.

Jacob did not decide to assault the ramparts of heaven to squeeze a blessing out of God. That's not how it's recorded. No, it's about friendly fire.

[17:41] When the God we thought was with us seems to be against us. It's God who takes the initiative. Do you see that? Jacob is just alone, verse 24. And suddenly, out of the blue, without any warning, a man, who, well, a man, wrestled with him.

Didn't just come up and shake his hand or give him a fist pump. He attacked him. Aggressively, it seems, physically, in the dark.

And Jacob discovers through this that it's actually not his brother or even himself that he's been struggling with all his life. It is God. It is God who attacks him.

And this is no dream. Jacob is left with a permanent limp, we read at the end of the story. And yet there is this strange ambiguity.

verse 25. When the man saw that he couldn't overpower him, apparently the attacker cannot prevail against Jacob yet, when he saw that he couldn't overpower him, he just touched the socket of his hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.

[18:57] And this out pops the head of the femur from the hip socket. Jacob, it seems, is crippled for life after just a touch.

Presumably in agony when it happened, at least. And strangely, the attacker does not wish to be seen. So, verse 26, the man said, let me go, it's daybreak.

But Jacob replied, I'll not let you go unless you bless me. The man asked him, what is your name? Jacob, he answered. Now, getting him to say his name is not just an admission of his identity, it's like a confession of guilt.

Remember what his name means, why his name was given. His name means the heel grabber, literally. Or understood by most as the grasping cheat.

Who are you? I am the grasping cheat. Ah, nice to meet you. And in a dramatic turning point, Jacob's name is changed from the cheater of man to the struggler with God.

[20:22] The struggle, which God surprisingly says in verse 28, Jacob has won. Your name will no longer be grasping cheat, cheater of people.

But Israel, struggler with God. Why? Because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome. I'll grant you the victory.

But it's almost like if you challenge a small child to an arm wrestle. Do you want to do an arm wrestle? And their little hand can hardly get halfway up your arm.

So you lower your hand down. Okay, go. You beat me. Really? Interesting. Interesting. And yet, Jacob is the one who begs for the blessing.

Verse 26, I will not let you go unless you bless me. And we know that it's always the greater who blesses the lesser. So Jacob, by asking for the blessing, is admitting that he's up against one who is greater than him.

[21:37] And one of the other ambiguities, interestingly, is that the word Israel could be translated God strives, God struggles. It's almost as if, yes, Jacob is struggling, but God is also struggling with Jacob.

He's a hard to handle man. Well, what is clear is that the man is not going to tell Jacob his name.

No. And yet, Jacob realises by verse 30 that it was because I saw God face to face that I'm calling this face of God and yet my life was spared.

He realises he's been fighting God and he limps away from the encounter, realising two things.

Number one, his life has been spared by one who could have destroyed him. Verse 30, I saw God

face to face yet my life was spared.

And the other thing he realises is he's not only been spared, he's been blessed despite his weakness. And although as we read on, Jacob persists in trying to return the blessing he stole from his brother Esau, that seems to be what is going on here.

[ 22 : 55 ] When he finally meets him, he recognises this double favour, not just that he's found favour in Esau's eyes, verse 10 of chapter 33, no please, if I've found favour in your eyes, accept this gift from me.

For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, face of God, now that you have received me favourably. These 400 men put their weapons down it seems and don't attack.

And then he prays, verse 11, please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me, and I have all I need. Favour with Esau, favour with God.

Now favour, reconciliation, with enemies, if you've ever been in a family breakdown situation where relationships have utterly broken down, it's wonderful when there's reconciliation, it doesn't always happen, but when it does, it's wonderful.

And it may be part of God's blessing for us if that's what we're struggling with. But it's not favour with man that ultimately matters, it's favour with God, to know God's gracious dealings with us, that is the ultimate blessing.

[ 24 : 09 ] but it may mean times when God seems to be against us. We're going to finish by going to 2 Corinthians chapter 12 because this experience of feeling that God is against us is something that the Apostle Paul speaks very eloquently of and experienced in his own life.

2 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 7 having just described some extraordinary experiences he had, he'd had, he says in verse 7 to keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations.

There was given to me a thorn in my flesh. We don't know what it was, it seems to be something physical. A messenger of Satan to torment me.

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me but the Lord said to me my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness.

Therefore says Paul I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why for Christ's sake I delight in weaknesses in insults in hardships in persecutions in difficulties.

[ 25 : 52 ] Why? That's very perverse Paul isn't it? No because when I am weak then I am strong. Do you see how he describes this thorn in the flesh in verse 7?

It's a messenger of Satan. Satan means adversary. This is the one who's against us against all God's people and yet this is clearly something Paul sees as permitted by God.

He asks God to remove it. Three times verse 8 I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. Well why do you plead with the Lord? Well because he's the one who allowed it. Why?

To keep Paul humble. Verse 7 to keep me from becoming conceited. But Paul surely if God really loved you he wouldn't have allowed this thorn in the flesh would he?

He's not for you he's against you. Well our adversary is also the father of lies. One of his lies is that when bad things happen to Christians it's because God is against them and that's not true.

[ 27 : 04 ] And yet when Paul petitions God and pleads with him to take it away three times he says verse 8 I pleaded with the Lord what did the Lord say each time and never it seems changed his mind on this no Paul no no no but Lord what is going on here?

Why are you saying no to me? Well here's why Paul verse 9 the Lord said to me my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in your weakness no Paul you're going to have to live with the thorn in your flesh you're going to have to walk with a limp for the rest of your days and if we're still struggling with this idea that the power can come through weakness think of the Lord Jesus on the cross my God my God why have you forsaken me?

Surely in the cross of Christ the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus nothing is a more powerful picture of weakness and yet as we sang earlier this is the power of the cross this is the power to save us but it's the power of weakness this is the logic of God the power to save the world is in the weakness of the cross and we need to remember that when God seems against us that this is how God works to bring strength and power spiritual strength spiritual power into our lives and that is how we can say with Paul verse 10 that for Christ's sake I delight in weaknesses in insults in hardships in persecutions in difficulties for when I am weak then I am strong we may struggle with the fear of

man but the real struggle we have is with

God the God who may break us but only to bless us the God who may seem against us but only to show us that when we are weak then we are strong let's pray our father we thank you for our lord Jesus Christ above all thank you that in the weakness of the cross which you willingly went to your power was seen supremely to save us from sin and death and judgment how we praise you for that powerful though counterintuitive logic but father we pray that you would help us in our own lives as we struggle with so many things and so many people but also with you when you seem to turn your face against us lord help us to remember that you are always for us wanting to show that in our weakness your power your strength is made complete help us to trust you through the hard times for Jesus sake amen aby with you