

What is the Blessing of God?

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Preacher: John Adams

[0 : 00] If you've been attending our church much at all, you've gotten to know John Adams. He's been in our pulpit several times. Today he is here very officially as the leader, the director, I don't know if he has a title or not, of Rehoboth Ministries.

And our church has been supporting this ministry for many years now. And so he's come to share with us things related to that and then whatever else the Lord puts on his heart.

So, Brother John Adams, come and as the Lord leads you, brother. Good morning.

It's good to be with you this morning. As Pastor Matt said, I am here in an official capacity today. Since the last time I visited you, I have left my teaching job and I have become the director of Rehoboth Ministries.

My parents are going into retirement. And so I'm here to speak to you a little bit about what we do today and then we'll get into the Word. That is a picture of our hometown in Haiti. That is not our church building, unfortunately.

[1 : 13] That's the cathedral downtown. But we're Rehoboth Ministries. If you could go to the next slide. Some of you might not be familiar with what we do.

So one of the things we do is we have four local churches that have been planted. And that's a picture of the biggest church. Pastor Matt visited there in 2018.

He came down and spoke at our Bible school graduation. So churches, church planting is one of the aspects of our ministry. If you want to go to the next slide, we also have three schools that have been started.

Elementary schools. And it's a picture my sister took a long time ago. Beautiful little girl there. And I think the next slide talks about the feeding program. Yeah.

So an organization called Orphans Promise partnered with us in 2009 to help feed these kids, our school kids, one meal a day. So that's a picture of the kids having their daily meal there.

[2 : 14] And in 2015, we started serving a meal in 2009. And Orphans Promise came alongside us out of Virginia Beach and partnered with us to help us feed over 1,000 kids five days a week.

And they started up late this year. Haiti's been going through even more unrest and instability than normal over the past few years. And so they didn't start school this year until October. But the feeding program is back up and running now that school is in session.

If you want to go to the next slide. We also have a Bible college. That's a picture of the most recent graduation this past summer. So we have trained up since 1994, probably somewhere around 100 to 150 young men and women who are serving in all sorts of different capacities today.

If you want to go to the next slide. Bible college scholarships. We raise money every year to help these people go to Bible college. Many of them cannot afford to do so.

And 100% of our students receive financial aid. It's about \$20 a month to put a future pastor or Christian ministry worker through Bible college.

[3 : 28] And so many people have partnered with us to do that. I think some people here have partnered with us to do that. We're appreciative of that. Do you want to go to the next slide, please? Our ministry is in a sort of transition right now.

I'm now directing it. And that's a picture of several different flip charts. In September, I went up to Virginia to sit with a couple of the members of our board.

And together, we kind of filled up several flip charts with ideas and things that we want to work on in the future. So that's kind of a picture of them all layered, one on top of the other.

So there's going to be a lot of change coming. If you want to go to the next slide. Pastor and Mrs. Adams have retired now.

So one of the changes that we're making right away is the Bible college is going to be transitioning over to new leadership. The gentleman in the picture there, Pastor Franz Lisma, a Haitian pastor, will be taking over responsibility for it in 2026.

[4 : 34] We are still currently raising funds for Bible college scholarships because we've committed to paying the professor salaries until 2026. And at which point, it will be completely under Pastor Franz's direction.

Pastor Franz is a like-minded pastor. He actually attended our Bible college for a while. Went on to get his master's from an international university. And he's got a very successful church of his own.

And he's always helped us with legal stuff. And so he's a really good leader to be taking over that. Can we go to the next slide? And one of our major shifts that needs to happen is we are working on helping our pastors and leaders become financially independent, which, as you can imagine, in Haiti, the Kaporis country in the Western Hemisphere, is a daunting task.

But we are currently interested in partnering with other organizations that do micro-lending and in providing seed money to help leaders become bivocational, start small businesses.

And if we can get a model that works and kind of get this up and running, this could become a model for church planting. We could help people kind of move to a new area, and they wouldn't have to depend on outside support or a permanent salary from the ministry.

[5 : 55] But they could be self-sufficient. The picture there is of a brother in our church. He's been attending our church since I was a kid. His name is Brother Ronald. And we provided him with about \$500 to help him buy a pair of solar panels.

He said, if you could just help me buy some solar panels, I could power a freezer out of my house, and I could start selling frozen goods to my local community. And we said, that sounds like a great idea.

So we're glad to give him that money, and we're going to be looking at investing in a lot of other Haitian business people in the near future. Can we go to the next slide?

So I quote this verse everywhere I go and present on Rehoboth, where Paul says, I thank my God always in remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you, making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

And I usually apply it to whoever is in front of me. You guys are partners in the gospel. That's how we see you. You are our partners, you know, helping us to spread the gospel further.

[7 : 03] But now there's kind of a new wrinkle to it in the sense that I feel like we are also partnering with Haitians more and more and helping them become kind of financially independent, kind of helping them come into their own missionary efforts in their own country.

And I love that picture because these guys, these guys are kind of a miracle story. These are twin boys of somebody who works for our Bible college. And when they were babies, they had swollen brains, and the doctors didn't have much hope for them.

We prayed for them, and the Lord came through. They've had no medical problems since they were babies. Now they maybe have too much energy. They enjoyed coming into my office on a regular basis, and we enjoyed discussing what items they were and were not allowed to touch.

And, you know, one time I broke my ankle, and I was on crutches for a while. And these guys, you know, would come around every day, and they saw me limping in and out of the office. And one day I came in, and they actually had made, like, makeshift crutches of their own out of PVC pipe.

And they were, like, you know, emulating me. So they're great kids. If you want to go to the next slide, our website, Rehoboth80.com.

[8 : 26] We post updates there from time to time. You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter there, and we also have a short link to Forgiving if you want to copy that down.

And you can also connect with us on Facebook as well, although, like, I was a middle school teacher, and the kids are telling me more and more that nobody uses Facebook anymore, so maybe we'll have to get on TikTok in the near future. I don't know.

But, all right. I think that's it for our slides, unless there's any more. Just to kind of give a brief summary of who we are, in case you haven't met us before, my parents, Pritchard and Dana Adams, were friends of the Garretts from long ago, back in the 70s, late 70s, when they all got saved.

And they were sent out by their home church in Tarborough in 1983. So I grew up on the mission field. I was born down there. And they, you know, planted churches and started schools and all of this.

And now it's at the point where they're not really able to do that work anymore, and so they're transitioning it over to me. And so we're in the middle of a generational transition.

[9 : 36] And so I would invite you to open your Bibles to Genesis 32, which is a story, or contains a story, about a generational transition.

Yes, sir. I know that our church has been praying for your dad since his stroke. Could you give him a little update? Yes, yes. Thank you for reminding me. Yes, so my dad had to go to the hospital about a week and a half ago.

He started slurring his speech, and so my mom took him to the hospital in Jacksonville, where they live. They put him on a helicopter down to Wilmington. They said his blood pressure was real high. His brain had started bleeding.

And so they were able to get his blood pressure down in the hospital. He's on medication for that now. They initially thought they were going to have to hold him for, like, physical therapy for two weeks, that they were going to have to teach him how to walk again and everything.

But he actually was much more mobile than they expected or appreciated, because he was constantly triggering the bed alarm, getting out of his bed without permission. And he just started kind of, like, ripping down the hallways.

[10 : 34] And they're like, okay, well, I guess we don't need physical therapy then. So he came home on Thursday night. So we're very grateful that he's back to normal. And I knew he was back home because I woke up in the middle of the night again.

He had jacked the heat in the house up to about 80 degrees. My dad has lived in the tropics for too long. His blood, you know, his comfortable level with cold is completely different from mine.

So, you know, that's a good problem to have, though, I suppose, because he's home. So we're in Genesis 32, verses 22 to 32.

And I think this is a story about, in a sense, it's about a generational transition that's happening from Isaac to Jacob.

And it's a story about whether God's covenant blessing will survive that transition from one generation to the next. And in this story, Jacob is going to wrestle with God, literally, seeking the blessing of God.

[11 : 37] And so some of the questions that this passage should raise in your mind is, like, what does the blessing of God look like? How do we know if we have it? And what is our role in obtaining that blessing?

You hear different things if you're in the church long enough. You know, some people will tell you, just let go and let God, right? Just kind of be passive and allow God to have his way. And eventually God will bless you.

And other people have a different view. You know, sometimes you might even hear God helps those who help themselves, which is not in the Bible. But people, some people take a more active view. You have to, you know, lay hold of God in order to get his blessing.

And the story of Jacob answers all of these questions in interesting ways. So before we go any further, let me just pray that the Lord would guide our time. So Lord, I just ask that you would help me to preach your word faithfully.

I ask you, Lord, that you would illumine our understanding so that we would get what you want to tell us out of this passage this morning. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[12 : 42] So Jacob's a fascinating character to me because from birth, even from his mother's womb, it's prophesied that he's going to rule over his older brother, Esau.

You know, Rebecca, their mother, has a rough pregnancy with Esau and Jacob. And, you know, she inquires of the Lord, like, why these twins are wrestling in my womb. And it's told her, like, two nations are in your womb.

And one will be stronger than the other. And the older will serve the younger. And so the two boys are born. And Esau comes out first. And then Jacob comes out holding on to Esau's ankle, holding on to his heel.

And so they name Jacob Yaakov, which in Hebrew literally means heel grabber, which carries kind of a negative connotation with it. He's the supplanter.

He's the usurper. He's the one that will take the place of the older one. But nobody really knows how that's going to happen as they grow up. And so as they grow up, the two parents show favoritism.

[13 : 48] Isaac prefers Esau, the older son. And he, you know, which might mean that Jacob kind of grows up with a sort of inferiority complex.

But Jacob is preferred by his mother, Rebecca. And she and Jacob eventually resort to scheming and manipulation to get Jacob the blessing that God has already said is going to be his.

And so the first thing Jacob does is he finds Esau in a moment of weakness. He's really hungry. He's been out hunting all day. And he kind of cajoles him into selling him his birthright.

Jacob has prepared this delicious pot of stew. And Esau asks him for a bowl. And Jacob's like, sure, I'll give you a bowl of stew in exchange for your birthright. And Esau is so hungry that he doesn't really value the blessing of Yahweh anyway, which we see later in the story by some of his other actions.

He doesn't really care about Yahweh's blessing. And he's like, whatever, I'm so hungry. Just give me a bowl of stew. And so Esau trades the blessing of the Lord for a full belly. But it seems like Jacob still isn't fully confident that he's actually going to get the blessing.

[14 : 58] Because he knows that in order for him to get it, his father Isaac would actually have to bless him to go any further. And so he knows that Isaac's eyesight is really bad.

And so he and his mom come up with this plot where they put hairy skins on Jacob's arms and basically fool Isaac into thinking that it's his older son Esau who's really hairy and manly.

And they pull off the ruse. Isaac blesses Jacob thinking he's Esau. And then Esau comes in later. And Isaac's like, what? I thought I already blessed you earlier. I mean, I can't take it back.

He's already got it. But and so Esau is really, really upset when he finds out he threatens to kill Jacob. And Jacob has to skip town and go live with Uncle Laban on Uncle Laban's farm where he'll spend the next 20 years.

And there's a little bit of an implied judgment on him and Rebekah for the way that they go about this because neither of them ever see each other again. So he gets the blessing of the Lord, at least as a promise.

[16 : 02] But he also comes with a lot of heartache because of the way he goes about it. So then Jacob gets out to Uncle Laban's farm. And that's where he really meets his match because Laban is just as much of a schemer and a con artist as Jacob is.

And Laban cons Jacob into marrying not one of his daughters, but both of them. And then he cons him into working for him for 14 years instead of seven. And during this time in his life, Jacob's life kind of becomes a mixture of blessing and curse.

He's blessed because he's got two wives who end up giving him 12 healthy sons. And so his legacy is assured. But he's also somewhat cursed because his two wives are constantly quarreling and his house is never really at peace.

And even at work, Jacob finds mixed results. Laban cheats and oppresses him, although God gives him ways to prosper in spite of this. He actually ends up prospering so much that it becomes kind of a problem for him.

Laban and his sons are kind of giving him dangerous looks and making life hard for him. And at a certain point, the Lord comes to Jacob and he tells Jacob it's time to go home.

[17 : 15] And Jacob receives the word, but true to Jacob's character, he doesn't quite trust the Lord enough to give him a clean exit from Laban's house.

And so he comes up with a scheme because that's what he does. And so he sneaks off in the dead of the night with his wives and his children and all of his animals and everything. And he tries to get away.

And once Laban catches wind of what's going on, he goes after Jacob, fully intending to do Jacob harm. And instead, the Lord comes to Laban and tells him, you better not harm Jacob because I'm with him.

And so when Laban catches up to Jacob, he basically just kind of mildly rebukes him. And then he makes Jacob make a covenant with him to assure that he won't come back and try to do Laban any harm.

And so there's a real irony in the story because Jacob snuck out of there seeking to avoid being harmed by Laban. But he certainly would have been harmed by Laban if the Lord had not intervened. And so what Jacob fails to get through his own efforts, through his own scheming, the Lord ends up providing to him anyway by grace.

[18 : 23] And so he's finally free from Laban. And now he's heading into an even more difficult encounter because the Lord has told him to go home. And going home means going back and having that long-awaited encounter with Esau, who might still be really upset about the fact that Jacob stole his entire future from him.

And at a certain point, Jacob's going to hear that Esau is on the move towards him with 400 men, which probably means some sort of military, militia-type advance.

And so Jacob gets really scared. And he puts his mind to work. He starts sending gifts ahead of him. You know, every half a mile, there's like a singing telegram of people, you know, who are telling Esau how wonderful he is.

And by the way, Jacob's the one who provided all these wonderful gifts for you. You should really be on good terms with Jacob. And the last thing he does is he sends his wives and his children across the river Jabbok, which is a significant river in the future because that's going to be one of the borders of Israelite territory.

And Jacob stays on the other side, presumably, to pray and probably fret about his future. And the text is really spare.

[19 : 45] It doesn't give us any details. And I want so many details on this text. But the text just says, And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.

I'd love to know how that starts. Like, does this guy sneak up on Jacob and, like, try to put him in a full Nelson? Or, you know, does Jacob sneak up on the guy thinking he's an enemy?

You know, or maybe they're sitting around a campfire trading stories about how strong they were earlier in life, and it just turns into, like, a one-upmanship, and eventually they just start wrestling. I don't know.

The text doesn't say. But the text does say that neither man can really get an advantage. They're both really scrappy, and neither one is willing to give an inch. And so at a certain point, this mysterious figure does something to break the stalemate.

What he actually does is kind of unclear in the original Hebrew. The English Standard Version, I don't know what version you're using, but the English Standard Version words it kind of delicately.

[20 : 45] It says, He touched his hip socket. But some interpreters, like Tim Mackey, who does the Bible Project, actually think the reality of what the angel does here is much more visceral.

Some think that actually what the angel does is he punches Jacob in the groin. He punches him at a certain angle as to where his hip bone kind of pops out, and as a result, he's injured.

And, you know, either way, whether the angel just touches him or whether the angel actually hits him, Jacob shows a lot of grit because he still refuses to let go, even after he's been injured.

And he even tells him, I won't let you go until you bless me, which shows that Jacob has realized by now who he's wrestling with. It's not just a mere human being.

And it's an interesting question. What blessing is Jacob asking for? What is he wrestling for? You know, I used to just think, well, Jacob's wrestling for material well-being.

[21 : 50] He just wants to be assured that he's going to prosper. But if you read the text carefully, Jacob's already quite wealthy by this point in his life. He doesn't really need that. And so it's more likely that what he's wrestling for is the future.

He knows that he's going to meet Esau in the morning, and he wants the assurance from this heavenly being that he's not going to die and that his father will not be left without a faithful heir.

Because Esau doesn't care about God. Esau has married pagan women. Then Esau has basically forsaken the family tradition. And Jacob has not.

And Jacob is wrestling both for himself and for his children and for the entire future of the covenant people of God to be assured that they will survive.

And so when you look at it through that lens, that he's wrestling for the continuation of God's promises to Abraham, I will make you a great nation. I will bless you. You know, you will be a blessing to the entire world.

[22 : 57] It's actually quite noble what he's doing here. What God does next is interesting. He asks Jacob a question, which if you were here several months ago, you know that I'm fascinated about the questions that God asks people in Scripture.

And this question is a very simple question. He just asks Jacob, What's your name? Which is a way of asking, Like, what is your identity? Like, who are you, really, when you boil your essence down?

And Jacob's answer reveals exactly how he sees himself at this point in his life. He says, I'm Yaakov. I'm the heel grabber. I'm the usurper.

I'm the one who, I'm the younger brother who wasn't supposed to be in this position. You know, I'm the one who doesn't deserve to be here. I'm the guy who's always fought for everything because I've never been quite sure that you were on my side.

And in a moment, God changes his identity. God says, No, you're not Jacob anymore. From now on, you're going to be Israel, which literally means, strives with God.

[24 : 05] He says, You're going to be Israel because you've striven with both God and man, and you've prevailed. So it seems like what God is telling him here is, All this time, Jacob, I've heard you.

I've been with you this whole time. And I will be with you and with your descendants forever. And he gives them this new name.

Now, Jacob's name isn't exactly as flattering as some of the other names that people get in Scripture. Jacob's name is not as nice-sounding as Abraham, the friend of God, right?

Or the one whom Jesus loved. Or some of the other names that people inherit in Scripture, like Samuel, God heard him. Jacob's name means he strives with God.

And it doesn't sound quite as nice, but it actually encapsulates the redemptive work of God in his life quite well. Because Jacob's best and his worst qualities are intertwined, which is probably true of all of us.

[25 : 08] His best quality has always been that he has always recognized the most important thing and prioritized it. From an early age, Jacob knows the blessing of Yahweh is more important than anything else, and he's willing to go to any length to get it.

And that's a positive quality. But Jacob's worst quality is tied up with that, which is that he is always willing to go to unscrupulous ends to try to make the blessing of God happen, because he doesn't quite trust the Lord enough to bring it about on his own.

So Jacob's best quality is that he wants what's most important. He's also quite loyal to the work of God and his family. In the ancient world, like if you read a lot of ancient literature, they really put a lot of value on that kind of loyalty.

So I think Jacob is seen positively in Scripture for that reason. Just to give you an example from another culture, the Romans' chief example of piety, like the thing they put on their coins when they're representing the God piety, on one side they'd have like a bust of the God, and on the other side, they'd have a picture of Aeneas.

Aeneas was the kind of founder of Rome and mythology, and Aeneas carried his father out of the burning city of Troy on his shoulders. And that's the Romans' chief example of piety.

[26 : 32] And I think Jacob is kind of doing something similar here by wrestling through the night to ensure that the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac will also be the God of Jacob and the God of the future.

But as we've said, Jacob's worst quality is bound up with this. He always tries to get that blessing in his own strength. And he's so good at getting what he wants that he always ends up getting in God's way.

And God literally has to hit him where it hurts most to get him to stop. For the rest of his life, Jacob will walk with a limp. So Jacob gets the blessing, but he also gets some discipline along with it.

God's blessing and his discipline are mingled. So God changes his name. He will be the one that the nation is named after.

And then he asks God what God's name is, and God essentially tells him, none of your business. God's like, you know, you've prevailed, but don't forget, I let you win.

[27 : 33] So at this point, the text says, a sense of awe steals over Jacob. And he names the place of his encounter Peniel, which means the face of God, where he says, I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.

I managed to see God here and not die. And I love verse 31, because verse 31 says, the sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, literally saying, the sun rose upon him as he passed the face of God, limping because of his hip.

And so the sun is kind of like a symbol of God's glory. And so the author seems to be implying here that the favor of God is rising upon Jacob as he limps off into his future.

So he finds the blessing that he sought. Which brings us back to our initial questions. What does the blessing of God look like? Now in Jacob's case, the blessing of God is not going to be a problem-free life.

He's got plenty of problems that occur to him after this. But it is a providence-full life. Again and again, you're going to see God spare Jacob the worst possible consequences of his actions and his family's actions.

[28 : 48] You're going to see the Lord step in and cover his mistakes when he makes mistakes. And especially in the story of his son Joseph, you're going to see the Lord bring great good out of great evil. So the Lord will help him.

He's going to reconcile with Esau. He softens Esau's heart towards him. He's going to see his family miraculously preserved in Egypt. And he's going to die down in Egypt with reasonable confidence that his family will become the nation that God had promised that they would become.

How do you know that you have God's blessing or not? How did Jacob know that he had God's blessing? I think in two ways. He knew that he had God's blessing because he had a landmark moment. He saw God's face and lived.

And I think for a lot of us, it's the same. How do we know that we have the blessing of God? One of the ways that we know is we have moments of encounter with the Lord where the Lord makes himself real to us.

He reveals himself to us. He reveals his purposes for us, to us. And he does that for Jacob. But there's another aspect to it. He also knows that he has the blessing of the Lord because there's a permanent change in his character.

[29 : 58] He limps for the rest of his life. He's never quite the same man again. He's not the same self-confident, always manipulating kind of man that he was before. And so in our own lives, we know that we have the blessing of the Lord because we have these moments of encounter with the Lord, but also often because the Lord changes us.

He touches us. He gives us a limp in a certain way that makes us a different person than we were before. Last question. Does God bless those who leave everything to him or those who seek to help themselves?

And the answer is kind of both and neither, right? This story is complicated. God disciplines Jacob here for trying to engineer an answer to his own prayers by sinning.

Like over and over, Jacob has kind of put his hands into the middle of the situation and made things worse and the Lord disciplines him for that. Not just in this story, but all throughout the narrative. When Jacob and his mother deceive Isaac, they lose each other permanently.

And in this story, he dislocates Jacob's hip. At the same time, God doesn't reward Jacob for being purely passive either. He actually rewards Jacob when Jacob finally gets his hands out of the situation and puts his hands on the Lord himself, the only one who can actually make a difference.

[31 : 18] So Jacob gets what he wants when he stops trying to give it to himself. And he wrestles with the one who has the power to give it to him. And so I think Jacob in this passage is a great model for us of persistent prayer.

How often have I in my own life, when faced with a difficult situation, my instinct is to put my hands into the situation and start pulling and tugging and trying to manipulate the situation as best I can.

And I end up making a bigger mess. When really like our first instinct when we're faced with difficulty ought to be to go to the Lord and wrestle with the Lord in prayer and ask the Lord to intervene.

So that's kind of the situation we're in right now because we're in a generational transition in our ministry and I'm starting to feel the weight as perhaps Jacob did of, I have all these people who have depended on my parents for a long time and now they're looking to me and I know that I don't have all the answers.

And I don't have, you know, all of the right things to say or the right things to do to help lead into the next generation. But I know that the Lord does. And I know that I have to be, you know, seeking the Lord first and laying hands on the Lord to get an answer for the next generation.

[32 : 33] And Haiti is an incredibly difficult situation right now. You know, I don't know if you know, but the gangs in Haiti are controlling the capital city. You know, our city right now hasn't really been affected by the gangs so far.

But we're faced with this task of trying to help leaders become financially independent at a time when the country is worse than it's ever been. And it just feels like an impossible task.

And it is, apart from the Lord's help. But I want to thank you guys because you guys have been faithful supporters of ours for a long time. And, you know, I got to attend the funeral of Brother Dow yesterday.

Brother Dow was just incredibly generous to us in many different ways. And, you know, we know that ultimately Moncure Baptist isn't our source. Brother Dow isn't our source. The Lord is our source.

But the Lord has used members of this congregation in great ways to partner with us in the gospel and help bring much-needed hope and change to the nation of Haiti.

[33 : 34] So I just, I want to thank you for being part of God's purposes in that nation. I just want to close in prayer. Lord, I just, I thank you that you are the God, not only of Abraham and of Isaac, but of Jacob too.

And you are the God who supervises generational transitions, Lord. And those transitions are never easy, but you are always faithful. And so I just, I thank you, Lord.

I ask for your help. And I thank you for the help that this congregation has been to us in so many different ways through the years. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.