

And There Wrestled a Man with Jacob

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to turn this evening to God's Word in the Old Testament, the book of Genesis and chapter 32.

Genesis and chapter 32. Genesis and chapter 32.

Genesis and chapter 32.

And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are 400 men with him.

Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps, thinking, If Esau comes to one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape.

[1 : 46] And Jacob said, Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children.

But you said, I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude. So he stayed there that night.

So he stayed there that night, and from what he had with him, he took a present for his brother Esau. And he said, He said,

And all who follow the droves. You shall say the same thing to Esau when you find him. And you shall say, Moreover, your servant Jacob is behind us.

For he thought, I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterwards I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me.

[4 : 09] So the present passed on ahead of him. And he himself stayed that night in the camp. The same night he arose and took his two wives and two female servants and his eleven children and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.

He took them and sent them across the stream and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And the man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.

When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket. And Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.

Then he said, Let me go, for the day is broken. But Jacob said, I will not let you go unless you bless me. He said to him, What is your name?

And he said, Jacob. Then he said, Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel. For you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.

[5 : 20] Then Jacob asked him, Please tell me your name. But he said, Why is it that you ask my name? And there he blessed him.

So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered. The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.

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

Amen. And the Lord will add his blessing to that further reading of his own word. Let us then continue praising God in this time in Psalm 102.

This Scottish salt is the second version of that psalm on page 368. And at verse 23. The tune is to be rocking him.

[6 : 32] My strength he weakened in the way. My days of life he shortened. My God, oh, take me not away in midtime of my days, I said.

We sing to the end of the psalm, four stanzas to God's praise. My strength he weakened in the way. My days of life he shortened. My days of life he shortened.

The world thou hast established. The years foundation firm and fast.

Thy mighty hands the heavens have made. They perish on the star-spoken, but thou shalt evermore endure.

[8 : 23] As vestiges thou shalt change them so. And they shall all be changed sure.

But from all changes, Lord, creer. Thy endless years to last for him.

Thy servants and their seed to be. Establish thou before thee stay.

I'd like us to turn once again to Genesis chapter 32 and reading at verse 24.

Genesis 32 and at verse 24. And Jacob was left alone.

[9 : 48] And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. Especially those words in the second half of the verse.

And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. Now, a few weeks ago, we looked at the first half of the verse.

And Jacob was left alone. On that occasion, we saw that this was a turning point in Jacob's life.

From a man who was self-centered. From someone who was very interested in his own life and his own pursuits and his own goals.

Suddenly, he becomes a man of God. Remember, Esau and Jacob were twins.

[10 : 53] They were struggling in the mother's womb. And God told Rebecca that the elder would serve the younger.

And she treasured this knowledge all her days, even as she saw her children growing up. And the firstborn, Esau, was a hunter.

Somebody who was very much a man's man and very much his father's favorite. And so, a close bond was formed there. Jacob, on the other hand, was very much someone who stayed at home. He stayed around the house. He was interested in farming and tending the sheep which were near the house. And he became his mother's favorite.

And so, these children grew up in a house that was really divided in loyalties as to whom they would prefer. And so, Rebecca was told, as I said, at the time when she was pregnant with these twins, that the elder would serve the younger.

[12 : 06] And when she overheard Isaac telling Esau that he was getting old and he wanted to give his son Esau a blessing. And to go and get some venison and prepare for him.

Rebecca hatched a plan whereby she was going to circumvent what Esau planned to do and work out the situation for herself.

Now, as we heard this morning in the sermon, very often we want to run ahead of God. We want to make our own plans. We want to bring our own devices into play outside what God has already stated he would do and bring to pass.

You see, God has already said that the elder would serve the younger. And yet, Rebecca here is deciding that perhaps God's plans need some help and she is going to do it.

In every situation where God makes a promise, he will bring it to pass. Although we can't perhaps see how he's going to do it, we know that he has promised and that he will do it.

[13 : 17] And so, the plan was that Jacob would have to disguise himself as Esau. He would have to try and trick his father as to who he was.

So, dressing up in Esau's clothes, putting skins on his hands or his arms so they would be hairy, he goes in to his old and blind father who would think it was Esau and bless him as Esau.

And that's exactly what happened. Shortly after the blessing had been concluded, Esau comes home and discovers the trick that's been played on him and gets very, very angry.

Jacob already had the birthright. Legitimately. His brother had come in one day from hunting, was very faint.

And he asked for some pottage from Jacob. And Jacob said, what will you give me? Jacob again always looking to satisfy his own needs or his own plans.

[14 : 28] And so, he sold him the birthright. So, the birthright was already Jacob's. But this aspect of the blessing is really a material blessing.

That he would have lands and cattle and servants and he would rule over all his brethren. And so, that blessing also becomes Jacob's.

Now, God would have brought this to pass in his own way. Thus said, Rebecca thought she knew better how to do it. And so, she planned the subterfuge and caused division in the family.

And also brought about a situation whereby she would never see her beloved son, Jacob, anymore. And so, when he went away to her brother's house, Rebecca's brother's house, Laban.

He stayed there for 20 years. And she never again saw her son. And so, when Jacob went to Paddan Aram.

[15 : 32] He took Laban's two daughters. Leah and Rachel. And he married them.

And while he was there, he also served Laban for an inheritance for his family. And so, he served another seven years for the flocks and the cattle that he tended day and night.

And so, after 20 years, God said to him, as you read here, return to your own house and I will do you good. And so, Jacob leaves Laban and his wives.

Or leaves Laban with his wives and his children and his flocks and his cattle. And prepares to make his way home.

But there's one big problem. And that problem, of course, is Esau. At least, that's what he thinks the problem is.

[16 : 33] What's going to happen to Esau? What's going to be done about Esau as he imagines? What sort of feelings Esau must still be harboring against him.

Because of all that he has worked against his brother. And he becomes worried. Worried about all that he has got for himself.

Remember, it says here's a man who is selfish. Here's a man who's worked for the main chance. Here's the man who's now got all he wanted and he's going back home.

A rich man, a prosperous man, hoping to live out the rest of his days in peace and security with plenty of time for himself. But he makes a plan.

Jacob is always making plans. Always somehow to try and outwit the person he's up against. And so, he makes a plan. He knows that Esau is a man who's very fond of cattle and very fond of possessions.

[17 : 37] And so, he makes this plan whereby he is going to divide his flocks. Divide the flocks, the wives, the children, and make groups of them and send them across the river.

And then, as we saw the last time, he is left alone. So, here's Jacob, frightened about what Esau is going to do.

He's heard that Esau is coming to him with 400 men and filled with foreboding. He sees everything that he's worked so hard for being taken from him, stolen from him by Esau.

But in God's providence, as we saw, this was the turning point in Jacob's life. From this point on, Jacob becomes a man of God.

Or, as we would say, Jacob is converted. As the story shows us, to believe in God simply as a God is not enough.

[18 : 49] To leave Canaan for Paddan Aran. On the way, he met with God at Bethel.

And there, he had this very strong impression of who God was and his power. And his development of Esau's or Jacob's personality to become a man of God.

And he sees that God is in control of everything that's happening. And so, he makes this bargain with God on the way. If you bring me back to this place, then I will be your God.

Or, you will be my God and I will be your servant. And so, that's the bargain that God here is working towards. Jacob met with the God of Bethel at Bethel.

And in Paddan Aran, as I said, he becomes prosperous. And he's returning home with his flocks and servants and children. Only to be met with Esau.

[20 : 03] And now, Jacob continues to scheme as to how he's going to win over Esau. With all the plans and preparations he's made.

And, as we saw, Jacob was left alone. Now, Jacob's experience on this occasion is something that, to him, was very, very surprising.

It's the same for all of us when we are brought face to face with God in a saving way. It's a very surprising experience that is totally unexpected.

And so, here's Jacob waiting to meet Esau. And what happens to him is a sudden and unexpected face to face meeting with the God of his fathers.

He'd never have imagined what this night was going to develop into. He thought he was going to meet Esau. He was thinking of what he was going to say to Esau.

[21 : 16] When, in the twinkling of an eye, his whole world is turned upside down. What happened, he certainly didn't expect.

It's the same for all of us. We might have some preconceived ideas of what Christianity is or what a Christian is. Someone who'd been born into the right family.

Someone who's gone to the right church. Someone who's been an heir of people who have been Christians for generations back.

But that whole idea of what a Christian is or what conversion is, is something that is totally incorrect. And so, we see first of all here that this experience of Jacob with the meeting with God is totally unexpected.

[22 : 18] And something he does not see happening to him. And secondly, this Christian experience is always as a result of God's action.

What happened to Jacob that night wasn't anything to do with what Jacob himself did. It was God who came to Jacob. It was God who did certain things to him.

The whole story is about Jacob finding God because of what God did to him.

That's the same for all of us in our experience. We might think we might have to do certain things or to live a certain type of life to somehow to try and induce God to have better feelings towards us.

But it's always God who comes to us. It's always God who comes to us. Who comes into our experience and into our lives and makes a huge and massive change in that life.

[23 : 26] Whereby we are brought to see God for who he is. See, man by searching or man by seeking is never going to find out God.

It's God who has to come to us. And preaching is not an appeal for us to do something to placate God.

It's not something whereby we might try and bring ourselves into a good favour with God. It's a message about what God has done.

Not about what we must try and do for God. But it's a message about what God has already done for us. And that's the great message of the Gospel.

God in Christ Jesus has already accomplished all that's necessary to reconcile us to himself. As we read there in 2 Corinthians, we are ambassadors for God.

[24 : 34] Preaching in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. God has already accomplished the means of reconciliation. All we have to do is accept that reconciliation and bring ourselves to know that reconciliation is for us personally.

It's not for somebody else. It's for us. We've sinned. We've come short of the glory of God. And God is, by Christ, reconciling the world to himself.

The whole message of the Gospel is that God sent forth his Son to be born of a woman, made under the law, to redeem us under that law that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Quite apart from us or anything we've ever done, God has dealt with our sins. He has punished it. He's dealt with his guilt. He's pardoned us and he's forgiven us. And he's done it all through his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

[25 : 52] God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself through his Son. All that we read of in Isaiah 55, he was wounded for our transgressions.

He was bruised for our iniquities. But it was not for himself, it was for us. Always on our behalf. He comes so that we might be saved.

And so God came to Jacob as he must come to you and to me, revealing himself. Revealing what he has done. Encouraging us to know what he's done for ourselves.

And as God spoke to Jacob at Peniel, so he speaks to us by the Holy Spirit and through the preaching of his word.

Now if those first two points declare the essence of the gospel, what are the things which the gospel in fact reveals to us?

[27 : 06] The Christian experience is always something that is very unexpected as we are brought to a saving knowledge of Christ. And the Christian experience is always as a direct result of what God does and not what we engage in.

The problems which cause us so much grief and so much anxiety are not the real problems we have to face in this world.

As Jacob sent his wives and children and possessions across the brook, he thought he had only one problem. And that problem was Esau.

If he solves that, everything else is going to be fine. And so he prays to God. But what does he pray for?

He doesn't pray for God's nearness or God's blessing and God's oversight. He prays, save me from Esau because I am afraid of him. Save me from the hand of my brother for I fear him.

[28 : 14] For you said, I will do you good and multiply you. Now here's a man who's frightened. A man who's terrified and perplexed as to what's going to happen for him.

And each and every one of us in such situations can pray very devout prayers. It was said of those of the last generation and those who knew people in the trenches and in ships.

When danger approached, there were very great prayer meetings and very devout prayers put up. As soon as the danger passed, everything reverted to type and things went on as they were before. And so an intellectual knowledge of who God is and what he's done is of absolutely no use to any of us. It has to be a saving knowledge, a heart knowledge. And that's what God here is trying to show Jacob.

And so what happened to Jacob that night was God showed him that Esau was not his real problem.

[29 : 27] For Jacob, there was no sleep that night. He paces backwards and forwards and all he could think about is Esau. In the same way when we have our sleepless nights. We've all had them.

About whether it's bills or whether it's employment or whether it's plans for the future or something we've done in the past. We've all had sleepless nights and we think that's the real problem.

But as in this situation here, that's not the real problem. Esau was not the real problem. And God wants to show Esau or wants to show Jacob what the real problem is.

Sometimes we can think of nothing else. In the same way Jacob could think of nothing else but Esau. Now the message of the Gospel is to teach us that temporal matters are not the real problems that we face along life's journey.

Outwardly, we can be rich and prosperous and well set in life. But inwardly, we can be filled with doubts and fears and tremblings.

[30 : 40] So what then is the real problem? We saw here, first of all, that the problems that cause us so much grief and anxiety are not the real problem.

So what is the real problem? Well, the Gospel is meant to reveal our real problem. And it reveals it here to Jacob.

It's his relationship to God. That's the first thing that Jacob discovered at Peniel. That his relationship with God was not right.

The minute Jacob sees his problem, his estrangement from God, he forgets all about Esau. He forgets all about the other problems.

And he clings desperately to God. Isn't that the same with us? We might have many problems. Might have worries, money worries or employment worries or marriage worries.

[31 : 42] But as soon as we come into a right relationship with God, we know that God's in control. And all those worries, they just flow away from us. And we find ourselves resting upon God's promises and God's will for us.

It tells us, as Augustine once said, God made us for himself. And our hearts are reckless until we find our rest in him.

The Gospel reminds us that unless we're right with God, we're not going to be right anywhere else in our lives. It's God that must have the preeminence and not things.

And living in a materialistic age such as we live in, things very often get the upper hand in our lives.

And we shift our focus away from God and find ourselves focusing on what this life can give us, what we can get in this life, what we can collect in this life and gather.

And so God very often takes a second place. The hymn writer Cowper says, The dearest idol I have known, whate'er that idol be, I beg thee, tear it from thy throne, so I worship only thee.

[33 : 03] And that's a prayer that each and every one of us should remember and pray often.

Because we all have idols in our lives. We all have things which somehow distract us from a right relationship with God.

Even as here, Esau is distracting Jacob from a right relationship with his God. The gospel shows Jacob and us what we really are.

Is the life now being lived by Jacob and by us what God intended it to be for us?

Jacob had gone off to Paddan Aram, where he's prospered, where he's got wives and children, and he is returning home to enjoy the fruits of his labours.

He would settle down, he would enjoy life, become an upright and immoral man, and so become a pillar of society in which he was going to live.

[34 : 18] But God comes to him and reminds him how futile, how false such a mindset really is.

How futile when it's put before a right relationship with his God. You see, God's plans for us are totally different to the ones we imagine for ourselves in this life.

God's plans for us is that we would know him and his blessings and his fellowship.

And so here he's reminding Jacob that he has the birthright. He also has the blessing that he's stolen from Esau. And God's blessing on his life.

God had lived up to his side of the bargain. And now he wants Jacob to live up to his side of it. God to be his God. God. What God does at Peniel is to call Jacob back to a realisation of his true identity and also his destiny.

[35 : 37] And what God's asked us is, are we living the life God intended for us? Is it a life that's focused on this world and its rewards?

Or is it a life that's focused on Christ and his love and his fellowship and his people? The gospel is meant to shake us out of a comatose state we sometimes get into.

We forget all about God. We go through the life in some sort of dream. And the gospel is meant to shake us out of that sort of state. And to show us the tragedy of living for the here and the now.

And the tragedy of living a life apart from God. And so the gospel then makes us see the real danger for each and every one of us.

Our real problem is our relationship with God. Jacob was afraid Esau might rob him of all that he had worked so hard for.

[36 : 53] 20 years of slavery to Laban. 20 years of slavery to Laban. Esau might even kill him in the process. And as we imagined him pacing backwards and forwards, we can imagine the state of mind.

What's Esau going to do to him? Is he going to take all the stock that he's worked so hard for? Is he going to lose his wives and children, even his own life?

And so he begins to pray feverishly to God. But what does God do? He says, Jacob, your real danger is not Esau, but that you might lose your soul.

And so he begins again, this time to pray frantically to God. But God says to him, your greatest danger is that you might lose your own soul.

Can you not get that through? Can you not understand that? What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? God said to Jacob at Peniel, you're worrying about the wrong things.

[38 : 16] As we so often worry about the wrong things in life. Material things. You're going to have to lose one day. There's a day coming when you're going to die.

And then shall whose these things be? Wives, cattle and possessions, all that you have. God says to us also that is a day coming when we'll die.

And then whose shall these things be? All these things that we have collected and treasured and heaped up for ourselves. Where moth and rust are corrupt and where thieves break through to steal.

The gospel reveals that our worries and cares are really about the wrong problem. We worry in a natural sense about say North Korea or Donald Trump or Brexit or ISIS or all those other problems that face the international situation today.

And all the time we should be concentrating on our relationship with God. Is it well with my soul?

That's the real question we should be asking ourselves. Is it well with my soul?

[39 : 32] In terms of Jacob's future, he's looking at how to protect his investment of time and labour. He's like the rich fool who wanted to pull down barns and build bigger barns so that he could take his life easy and live the rest of his life in peace and tranquility and ease.

But when God met with Jacob, he forgot all about Esau. He forgot all about his wives and children and possessions.

He saw God. And God revealed to him the blessing that he had in store for him. In the same ways as Christ reveals to us the blessing that he has in store for us.

Not just this life. Not just this life. Not just the burdens of this life and the pains of this life and this valley of tears. But the joys and the fellowship and the light and peace that passes all understanding.

That's what Christ wants for us. And so, the blessings that God reveals to Jacob are such that Jacob says, I will let everything go, but I will not let you go.

[40 : 56] Everything else in this life is of no meaning to me, but you are my everything. In the same way God reveals to us what he wants to give us in Christ.

He wants to pardon us, our sins. He wants to forgive us. He wants us, he wants to make us new men and women in Christ Jesus. He wants to remove the fear of death and the grave from us. He wants to give us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. To share his glory. To share his eternity. To share even his throne.

Not to sit on some periphery of that throne, but to sit there in the midst of the throne, where Christ is. Where we shall know the provision that he makes for us.

That fount of living waters. Where he shall lead us. And where he shall feed us. What are earthly treasures to Jacob in comparison to all this?

[42 : 10] What are earthly treasures to us in comparison to all this of God's blessing and God's forgiveness? For Jacob, it's going to be a new name. It's going to be blessings unending.

And those who are Christians are going to live in a new world. Wherein dwells righteousness. Being a Christian just doesn't mean trying to live a better life.

It means that God wants us to be his own children. He wants us to be heirs with God and joint heirs with Christ.

And we have to ask, are we children of grace? Or as 2 Corinthians put it, are we new creations in Christ Jesus? Can we think of anything greater than the assurance of God's love?

Or the peace of conscience that love brings? The joy in the Holy Spirit or increase of grace? The grace of God's grace and even the knowledge that God will never let us go.

[43 : 18] That perseverance to the end. Because nothing shall ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. All things are ours in Christ Jesus.

And all the promises in him are ye and in him are our men. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us then conclude our worship singing to God's praise in Psalm 63.

63rd Psalm. Page 295. June's Weatherby. Lord thee my God I'll early seek.

My soul that thirst for thee. My flesh longs in a dry parched land. Wherein no waters be. We sing down to the end of the verse marked five.

That's five stanzas to God's praise. Lord thee my God I'll early seek.

[44 : 27] My soul that thirst for thee. My soul that thirst for thee. My flesh longs in a dry parched land.

Wherein no waters be. That I thy power may behold.

And brightness of thy face. As I have seen thee here to fall.

Within thy holy place. Since better is thy love of life.

My lips thee praise shall give. I in thy name will lift my hands.

[45 : 51] And bless me while I live. Even as with my love and with heart.

My soul shall fill it be. And shall my heart with joyful lips.

Sing graces unto thee. When I do thee upon my bed.

Remember with delight. And when on thee I meditate.

In watches of the night. Amen. Amen.

[47 : 11] Amen. And now may grace, mercy and peace. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. One God rest on you. And abide in you now and always.

Amen. Amen.