

GENESIS 32 : 22 - 31
COMING TO GRIPS WITH GOD

And he [Jacob] arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. Then Jacob was left alone.

And a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He [the Man] saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He [the Man] said, Let Me go, for the day breaks. But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."

Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell me Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why is it that you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Just as he crossed over Peniel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip.

How clever are you? How resilient are you? How self-sufficient? Everyone answers differently. However, sooner or later each has to come to grips with the fact that help from the Lord is sorely needed.

In the Old Testament, the man Jacob was very clever and ready to take advantage of someone else's vulnerability. His father was Isaac, the son of Abraham's old age. His mother was Rebekah, who bore twins. In the womb, the two boys already struggled. Esau was born first. Jacob followed directly, grasping Esau's heel!—as if ready to trip-up his brother, to overreach, or to supplant him by force or trickery. "Jacob" means the supplanter. Jacob dealt shrewdly and got the birthright-of-the-first-born from Esau. He later tricked his father into giving him the blessing of the firstborn son as well. Esau wanted to kill him. Jacob fled to live with his uncle Laban. Laban was no slouch at deceiving and taking advantage either. Jacob had arranged with Uncle Laban to marry his youngest daughter Rachel. By Laban's deceit Jacob actually married the older daughter Leah! To smooth things over, Laban had him marry both, working seven years for each. Thereafter, Jacob worked six additional years for wages. Laban changed his wages ten times!—always to Laban's advantage. However, the Lord was with Jacob and blessed him immensely. Jacob thought he was helping along by his own maneuvering. At the twenty-year mark, God told Jacob it was time to return home. Jacob realized that Laban was not too fond of him anymore, so he and "all his" stole away secretly, fleeing to Canaan. When Laban caught up with them, it was a rather confrontational meeting. With his words Jacob warded off Laban, but in reality God had told Laban not to harm Jacob. The two parted with a truce to stay apart.

Events were likely rough on Jacob's nerves, but more was about to follow. Jacob would soon meet his brother Esau (who had wanted to kill him). Jacob sent servants ahead. The servants were to address Esau, for Jacob, as "my lord" (small "l") and express Jacob's desire to meet Esau with favor. The servants returned, saying Esau was coming with 400 men! Jacob did not want a confrontation. He sent gifts—five groups of flocks and herds totaling 580 head! He deeply wished to be received without anger by his brother; he was repentant. He divided his family and his herds into two groups; if Esau attacked one, the other could flee.

That night Jacob was alone, surely with his heart very unsettled, and his mind on many worst-case scenarios—worst for himself, his wives, his children, and his "caravan." He was at a loss. He had no more tricks and schemes to get out of this one. He prayed to the Lord earnestly from the very depths of his heart. "Please, please, please, Lord. I have done wrong in dealing with so many people. Please forgive me. Please lead Esau to forgive me." Those exact words are not recorded in the Bible, but that must have been the tone of his prayer. The prayer grew into a mysterious, physical wrestling match with a Man (God) enduring through the night until daybreak. The Lord had brought Jacob and his mistakes around to a point where he could see how helpless and disappointing he really was. He wrestled for mercy and protection. The Lord let Jacob wrestle on, in faith. It was good for Jacob to let go of himself and self-pride, and to grasp on to God by faith—invisible, intangible (cannot be "touched") faith.

How deeply are you besieged by problems and confrontations—partly of your own making? Like Jacob the self-centered sinner, do you allow yourself to be duped by Satan? The Lord works to lead you to the realization that on your own, “I can’t.” All you can do is wrestle with God for mercy and forgiveness! Wrestle with God for help in confrontations in this life, with people, health, past mistakes, etc. Trust His promise of help in Jesus His dear Son, your dear Savior.

That night Lord brought Jacob to the realization that the Lord was everything. God touched the socket of Jacob’s hip; he was crippled. With a bad hip, it’s impossible to wrestle. Jacob could no longer win on his own. He knew he was helpless; he was ready to say “uncle.” But he would not let go. *“I will not let You go unless You bless me!”* He wanted to know he was forgiven, accepted by God, and safe under His wing.

God gave him assurance by changing his name. *Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.*” In other words, God says, You are no longer Jacob, the trickster, the clever heel-grabber looking to trip up brother Esau, uncle Laban, or anyone. You now are one who seeks and contends with God for God’s help and rescue. Your name shall be called “Yis Rah Ayle,” “Israel,” one who wrestles with God—contends with God—to direct what God knows is best, thus prevailing with God and man. This was a massive turning point in Jacob’s life.

You too, give up on yourself. Everything you accomplish is only done with the Lord’s help. The Lord leads you in all your life to the point and to the conclusion of saying: “God, have mercy on me a sinner. For Jesus’ sake, forgive. Please help me.” The ultimate situation for teaching this truth comes when health fails and when death looms. “Lord, help me! I can’t! I can’t beat this sickness, this injury, on my own. Please make me well according to what You know is best. In Jesus, my Savior, I trust.” The Lord in His loving wisdom may answer Yes. But He may be direct you to an even higher plateau. “Lord, help me. I can’t. I am about to die. I know You are ending my life soon. Please forgive me and grant me life after death, rather than eternal separation from You in the pangs of hell. I cling to Jesus who paid for my sin. Please save me!” He will, and heaven awaits.

Jacob named that place Peniel—“face of God” *“For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”* Jacob now had great confidence to forge ahead—the Lord had received him! What happened? Jacob was received in peace by his brother. Jacob was relieved to see Esau’s face looking upon him in favor, not anger. Esau did not want Jacob’s gifts, but Jacob insisted. The two would live apart from one another, but together they would bury their father Isaac, who was yet alive.

In Jesus, God’s face shines upon you. Through faith in Jesus, you are “spiritual Israel.” Give up on yourself. Through Jesus, wrestle with God, and prevail! Whatever obstacles face you—even “Esau”—you are safe. God takes the “dread” out of the things you dread, and leads you in the way of Life!

Jacob walked away, limping. Did the limp last all his life? It doesn’t say. But what a blessed reminder from God. Jacob would yet have many earthly heartaches. He would move into Canaan, and his sons Simeon and Levi would deceive and murder the men of the city of Shechem, because a Shechemite in loved their sister Dinah and had had taken inappropriate freedoms with her. Then Jacob’s beloved wife Rachel would die giving birth to Jacob’s twelfth son, Benjamin. The ten oldest brothers would hate their seventeen year old brother Joseph. He was Dad’s favorite. They would sell him into slavery in Egypt. Jacob would believe their lies and mourn Joseph’s death. However, twenty-two years later He would learn the truth, from his ten oldest sons, that Joseph was alive and was the second highest ruler in Egypt! Jacob’s family moved to Egypt where food was abundant in the famine. Before Jacob died in Egypt, he requested to be buried in Canaan, the land God had promised to his grandfather and father. In Canaan, the Children of “Israel” would live and be the people from whom the Savior would be born. Jesus opened heaven’s doors for Jacob and for us by His blood and resurrection! How safe Jacob really was!

God knows you. He leads your life so that you come to grips with Him, trusting in Him alone for forgiveness and help every day, not in your own wits and schemes. He frees you from the guilt of every sin, and holds you safe, even against the grasp of death. Through Jesus, you are spiritual Israel too!

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach--