

## The Magnificent Defeat Genesis 32:22-32

*The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. 24 And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. 25 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. 26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." 27 And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." 28 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." 29 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. 30 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." 31 The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. 32 Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.*

Jacob escaped from his homeland to escape Esau's hatred and fled to his uncle Laban's home. There, he married two wives, Leah and Rachel, had 11 children and became wealthy. But he fled there also after discovering that his uncle was trying to cheat him out of his wealth. On the way back home, he encounters Esau, whom he fears, still wants to kill him. This passage occurs the night before the two brothers met again for the first time in twenty years.

### **First: God has arranged for Jacob to be alone. 22-24a**

*The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. 24 And Jacob was left alone.*

Jacob is left alone because he heard that Esau is coming to meet with him 400 men (32:6); no welcoming party but an army. In an effort to avoid complete annihilation, he splits his family into two camps and spends a night suffering insomnia.

Jacob was born a twin, had a helicopter mother, moved in with his uncle, married two women and had 11 children. This is first time in Jacob's life that he is really alone.

And, for the first time in his life, Jacob is in a situation that he can't manipulate.

- a) He outfoxed his brother and stole his birthright
- b) He outwitted his uncle and became wealthy

*Jacob* = *supplanter* (someone who takes the place of another person) and that describes Jacob's life.

In Gen 25:26, the Bible says that Esau was born before Jacob, but Jacob came out holding Esau's heel as though he was trying to pull Esau back into the womb and be the firstborn; hence, his name *supplanter*, which also translates as *deceiver*.

Life is a race for Jacob and for most of his life, he's racing to get ahead of Esau, then Laban.

IMP: All of his life, Jacob has been trying to be someone else. In this text, God is going to make him someone else.

V 27 - *And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." 28 Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel,*

(You may get tired of hearing this but...) don't miss that what is happening in Jacob's life is what God is doing in the world...renewing it all, making it new. And in this passage, as in the BIG Bible story, God is reconciling Jacob with his family but making him more and giving him more than when he left home.

But this is the point that I want you to see. God has arranged Jacob's circumstances.

V 28 – *for you have striven with God and with men...*

V 30 - *I have seen God face to face*

Hosea 12:2-4 - *The LORD has an indictment against Judah and will punish Jacob according to his ways; he will repay him according to his deeds. 3 In the womb he took his brother by the heel and in his manhood he strove with God. 4 He strove with the angel and prevailed; he wept and sought his favor.*

The apple of Israel as a nation didn't fall far from the tree of Jacob the person.

Without anyone in his life, Jacob can't supplant anyone. He can't be anyone else because there is no one there to be someone else to. And the angel makes him confess who he is...Jacob, a supplanter, a deceiver.

Being alone is akin to coming to the end of himself. He has no more plans. He has no strategy, no more schemes. He has exhausted his bag of tricks.

As we read through the Bible, we see God repetitively doing this – bringing people to the end of themselves.

Genesis 15:1-6 - *After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." 2 But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." 4 And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." 5 And he brought him outside and said,*

*“Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” 6 And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*

It was at the midnight of Abraham’s life that he could count his offspring.

*At midnight, you can see the stars*

**Second: God wrestled with Jacob for an entire night. 24b**

*And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.*

It is the strangest wrestling match in the history of the world.

It is God whom Jacob is wrestling, but much as in the incarnation, the “man” wrestling him *“did not prevail against Jacob...”* (25a)

God does not end the wrestling match quickly. Jacob was up all night wrestling God. Remember that in last week’s reading, God held Abraham and Sarah in suspense for 25 years.

God is in no hurry.

If you have read the book of Genesis, you know that Jacob has been wrestling with God for most of his life. He has stolen a birthright that God intended to give to him.

In Jacob, we see this principle of God bypassing the firstborn and blessing the second birth.

a) Cain and Able/Seth

*Genesis 4:25 - And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, “God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.”*

b) Ishmael and Isaac

c) Esau and Jacob

In other words, Jacob strove for what God intended to give him as a gift; the blessing of the firstborn.

*Titus 3:5 - he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy...*

*Ephesians 2:8 - For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

But, like Abraham, rather than trusting God, Jacob strove with God for most of his life to become something that God is going to make him in this chapter.

What's wrong with trying to do what only God can and will eventually do? It works. But, ask Jacob: it is laborious and painful.

Thought: We are co-laborers with God in his ministry of reconciliation, and we should be striving for righteousness in the world but we are not going to make this world a paradise. That will require the supernatural intervention of Jesus. Just like we cannot save ourselves personally, we cannot save this world. But one day, God will do what philanthropists have been doing forever and the United Nations has been trying to do for almost a century. Jesus will return and make all things new.

God's wrestling with us is long. Some of you can look back on your pre-Christian life and now clearly see God's grace working to bring you to a point like Jacob, where you had to confess you were a sinner and God miraculously changed your name/nature.

What Jacob thought was terrible – Esau's potential persecution of him – is how God saves him. But...it is not without cost.

### **Third: God breaks Jacob to bless him. 25-26**

*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. 26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."*

I wish it was otherwise and many times you do to. But God breaks us to bless us.

Don't give Jacob credit for saying, *"I will not let you go unless you bless me."* In reality, Jacob couldn't let him go. His hip was broken, and he couldn't stand.

If you're going to give credit to anyone in this passage, give God credit for wrestling with Jacob and for breaking his hip to bless him.

Simply put, God has made him more vulnerable to his worst nightmare; Esau.

But it is God who has pursued Jacob for this wrestling match. God was the initiator. Jacob was stewing in his own anxiety over Esau and his approaching slaughter squad when God showed up. And the wrestling, drew Jacob out of his fearful preoccupation and forced him to focus on God.

Now all Jacob can do is hold on.

The real battle was never between himself and Esau. It was always God. Esau was just the occasion God used to reveal to Jacob who he was when he stole the birthright and who he wasn't when he was afraid of Esau.

Remember, the real battle in Job wasn't between God and Satan. Satan was just an emissary of breaking Job. The real contest was between Job and God. Was God trustworthy? Could Job battle his way to belief?

Look at the cross. It's hard to be broken. Even Jesus prayed for another way. But it is God's way.

*Matthew 12:20 - a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench...*

When you think of all the things God can break – he floods the earth, he drowns Pharaoh's army, he makes mountains quake, etc – it makes what he won't break all the more amazing.

Understand what I am saying: He will break us, but he won't 'break' us. The point of God's breaking is not to ruin but to bless.

*Vs 30-31 - 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." 31 The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.*

Like Abraham before him, where did Jacob see God? In his darkest night. And yet -

(That day, the sun/Son rose on Jacob in more than one way.)

It is not Esau or Laban that Jacob should fear. It is God. It is not Esau or Laban that Jacob should worship but God. Wrestling with Esau and Laban had been bad enough; wrestling with God Himself was a different matter altogether.

When he stole the birthright, he finally beat Esau. He became wealthy by beating Laban. Jacob, strong-willed as he is, has finally found someone whom he can't beat. It's the best thing that ever happened to him.

**Jacob's greatest defeat was (also) his greatest victory.**

It was a magnificent defeat.

### **Conclusion:**

Are you enduring the long dark night of the soul? Are you wrestling with what you perceive to be an enemy?

We need to be careful. In Western culture and even in our churches, we celebrate wealth, power, strength, confidence, prestige, and victory. We despise and fear weakness, failure, and doubt. Although we know that a measure of vulnerability, fear, discouragement, and depression come with normal lives, we tend to view these as signs of failure or even a lack of faith.

God will meet you in your anguish, fear, and uncertainty. But he may not meet you in the way you expect or even desire. When God first began wrestling with Jacob in the middle of the night, he may have first assumed it was Esau. Who else could it be?

1 - Your greatest ally may show up and meet you looking at first like your worst nightmare or most terrible adversary, demanding that you wrestle with him. But it's really God.

2 - Your greatest need may not be a healthy hip even when you are on the precipice of your greatest battle. Your greatest need is God.

But we don't always know this or remember this. And so God wrestles us until we see his face in the light of day.

IMP: A forgotten story after Jacob wrestled with God and was reunited with Esau –

*Genesis 33:18-20 - And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram, and he camped before the city. 19 And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for a hundred pieces of money the piece of land on which he had pitched his tent. 20 There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.*

1 – Who is Israel? Jacob transformed.

2 – And who is his God? Not just any god; “*God, the God of Israel.*”

This is the story of how Jacob became Israel, and this is how God became the God of Israel.

Community Groups:

1 – What do you know about Jacob?

2 - What circumstance surrounds this text?

3 – If you had to choose to bless Jacob or Esau, which one would you choose?

4 – What does God's blessing of Jacob, who stole Esau's birthright, say about God's grace?

6 – Whom is Jacob wrestling?

6 – Why did God ask Jacob his name?

7 – How is Jacob's life a picture of our own salvation?

8 – How is Jacob's life a picture of the Bible's BIG story?

9 – What other people in the Bible can you think of whom God cornered and brought to the end of themselves?

10 – Why would Jacob not let the angel go?

11 – Why did God break Jacob's thigh?

12 – How is Jacob's greatest defeat his greatest victory?

13 – How has this ever happened to you?