

Wrestling with God

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to turn once again to the Word of God in the book of Genesis in chapter 32. Reading once again at verse 24.

Genesis 32 and at verse 24. And Jacob was left alone, and a man rattled with him until the breaking of the day.

And Jacob was left alone, and a man rattled with him until the breaking of the day. I want to look this morning at the second half of that verse because some weeks ago I looked with you at that first portion where it says that Jacob was left alone.

And we saw this experience of Jacob being left on his own became the turning point of Jacob's life. From being a man who was self-centered and scheming, somebody always who wanted his own way and devised his own plans, he becomes a man of God.

[1 : 29] On the previous occasion I was here, we looked at Jacob's relationship with his brother Esau. we saw that Esau and Jacob were twins.

The firstborn was a hunter, very much an outdoor type, someone who was his father's favorite, a man who would do everything to please his father, and so he became his father's favorite.

Jacob was much more someone who stayed at home, very much by his mother's side, and he became his mother's favorite. But there was something else in regard to Rebekah's choice of Jacob because she had been told the elder will serve the younger.

The line of promise was going to be through Jacob, not Esau. The birthright, as we will see shortly, had passed, will pass, because of something that happened in their lives.

But the reason Rebekah thought so highly of Jacob was because he was in the line of promise. And the line of promise is the line through whom the Messiah will come to this earth.

[2 : 50] As I said, Rebekah had been told sometime before that the elder would serve the younger. And so when she overheard Isaac telling Esau to go and get some venison, and when he got it, cook it, and then to come back, and he would give him the blessing.

When she saw that, she thought she would somehow circumvent Isaac's plans and bring her own plan into being. Now all of us know that we sometimes want to do God's work for him.

We think we know better than God and that God is not in the right place, that we know better than him, and we will do our bit to bring things into being. And that's exactly what happens here with Rebekah.

She doesn't trust God to bring his promise to fulfillment. She takes it into her own hands and she decides to engage in some trickery, some subterfuge.

Jacob was going to have to disguise himself as Esau. He was going to have to put on Esau's clothes so he'd smell like Esau, a man of the field.

[4 : 05] He was going to have to put sheepskins on his arms so that he would appear to be hairy to the touch of his father. And so in that way, he was dressed and so made to appear just like his brother Esau.

And his old and his blind father were strict by this act of subterfuge and trickery by Rebekah and Jacob.

Jacob obtained the blessing. Now, if you go back slightly earlier, the birthright was already Jacob's. Esau had valued it so lightly that he came in one day out from hunting, tired and faint, and he said, will you give me some of that mess of pottage as we so often refer to this particular act?

Give me some of that mess of pottage. And he said, what will you give me? Give me a birthright, Esau is asked. And so Jacob receives the birthright and he gives Esau the mess of pottage.

And so the birthright is already Jacob's. But Rebekah also wants the blessing, the material blessing, to pass to Jacob also and not to Esau.

[5 : 35] And so she engages in this subterfuge. Jacob obtains the blessing. And Esau is so incensed that he wants to kill Jacob.

He says, the time of my father's death is at hand. He doesn't know, but his father's going to live for another 30 or so years after this occasion. He is old and he's blind, but he's going to live for another 30 years.

And so no doubt in that time the anger would have dissipated. But at this time he's incensed. He wants to kill Jacob. And so Rebekah sends him away.

And where does she send him? She sends him to her brother Laban in the land of Haran, out of which Abraham and Isaac first came from Ur the Chaldees to Haran and then here into the land of Canaan.

So in Haran, Jacob goes there. You know the story of Rachel and Leah and how Jacob had to spend 14 years for these two women.

[6 : 51] Laban had tricked him into marrying Leah first, although he wanted to marry Rachel, and said to him, you can, if you serve me another seven years, you can also have Rachel. And so he served 14 years for these two women to be his wives.

And then another six years he served with him so that he would raise his cattle. He would still serve Laban during all this time. For so for 20 years, here's Jacob in the land of Haran serving Laban as his shepherd and as his cattle drover.

But then the time comes for him to return. And it's God who takes the initiative. It's God who gives him this promise, return to your land and I will do you good.

That's part of the promise that Jacob pleads to God when he's there on his own and frightened as to what's going to happen next. And so, Jacob leaves that land.

He's prospered, remember. He's now got two wives, two female servants. He's got flocks and cattle and possessions. He's a very prosperous and he's a very rich man.

[8 : 06] And as he goes back to Canaan, he suddenly remembers his brother Esau. And that's what he's worried about.

He's worried about all his possessions and he begins to make preparations as to how he might appease Esau when he comes into the land.

And here again we find him still looking to his own wisdom. Wise in his own conceit thinking that somehow what he's going to do is going to appease his brother.

Not trusting in God. Not holding out his hands to God and say what shall I do? He just becomes wise in his own conceit and deals in the way that he would ordinarily deal it.

And here's the problem for him. Esau. He remembers what he's done to him. And he imagines Esau's feeling. What his feelings must be towards him.

[9 : 11] And he begins to worry. Worries all the way there and worries all the night as well. He becomes worried about his wives his servants his possessions his flocks and so he makes a plan.

And we've just been reading about the plan that he would make. He would divide them into two bands. He would send presents to his brother Esau in some way trying to appease him.

And then eventually he sends everything across the river and he is left alone. Here's Jacob terrified. Terrified about the coming of Esau and what he's going to do. He's heard Esau is coming with 400 men. and he's filled with foreboding as he sees everything he's worked for, everything he's planned for over the past 20 years going to be destroyed as his brother comes and takes vengeance on him. But in God's providence this is the turning point of Jacob's life. From this point on Jacob becomes a man of God.

[10 : 30] what we today would say he became a converted man. I'm not saying he didn't believe in God. I'm not saying he hadn't met with God already at Bethel where he made a stone for his pillow and he saw angels ascending and descending upon the earth.

He had all these experiences and yet he was a mere believer in God, not a man of God. And it needs this particular experience to make this total and utter change in his life.

As the story shows it's not enough for you or for me simply to believe in God. You've been raised in godly homes. You've had the scriptures read.

Perhaps even learned your catechisms and portions of scripture and to do all these things in a natural way is not enough. You believe there's a God. Well the devils also believe in God and they tremble.

Sometimes we live our lives without even a simple tremble about that we're going to have to face the living and true God. And Jacob's by treachery had gained the blessing from Esau.

[11 : 45] He had to leave Canaan and on the way he met God at Bethel in Paddan Aran he became prosperous by God's blessing and returning home with clocks and servants and wives only we met with Esau.

And now Jacob continues to scheme as to how to meet Esau with all the plans and the preparations he made and Jacob is left alone.

I want to try and understand here he's a man who knows about God but he's not a man of God. He's not trusting in God to deliver him he's trusting in his own wits his own wisdom his own schemes to deliver him from the anger of Esau.

Let's look here first of all what Jacob's experience was. It was to say the least surprising unexpected the last thing Jacob thought he was going to experience when he was there on his own was what happened to him.

And he'd never have imagined what this night was going to develop into. He thought he was going to meet Esau. He was thinking about what he was going to say to Esau when he met him.

[13 : 20] He was thinking about what Esau might do to him when they met. And it was all about him and all about Esau. When in the twinkling of an eye his whole world is turned upside down.

And what happens is something he'd have least expected and also we would have least expected in the experience here of Esau. It's the same with all of us.

We have some preconceived notions about what Christianity is about. What being a Christian is about. What being converted is about.

We have all these ideas and we've heard all sorts of rumours and we live our lives according to what we've heard. Not experiences. We've lived in a community which has grown up and developed under God's word and yet we haven't really come to a real understanding and experience of what it is to be a man or a woman of God or to experience what it is to come into a saving relationship with our Lord.

But Christian experience is always the result of God's action. Here's Esau or Jacob making plans, doing work, trying to make bargains with God.

[14 : 45] You said and I would come here I am, will you keep your part of the bargain? What God saying, I've kept my part of the bargain. I want you to keep your side of the bargain.

What happened to Jacob that night wasn't anything to do with what Jacob did. It was everything to do with what God did to him.

It was God who came to Jacob. It was God who did certain things with him. It was God who wrestled with him. The whole story is about Jacob finding God because of what God had done for him and to him.

That's the same with everyone who comes to a saving knowledge of Christ. It's not what we do. It's not what church we belong or what family we belong to or who's prayed for us.

It's what God does for us in our experience. It's a one-to-one relationship. It's a one-to-one interaction between God and us that we come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[15 : 57] Scripture tells us for man by searching cannot find God. God must reveal himself to us. If we go to the New Testament for a moment and think about the time when the Lord is asking the disciples whom do men say that I am?

And the disciples said that people say you're Jeremiah or Elijah or some great promise from the prophet from the past. Someone dead restored to life. And then he asks once again but who do you?

Not the others. Who do you say that I am? And Peter becomes a spokesman and says you are the Christ, the son of the living God. And the Lord says to Peter flesh and blood, God has not revealed the son to you but my father who is in heaven.

Not some innate knowledge, some knowledge, not some knowledge that's been gathered by their association with Christ over two or three years. But God actually revealing to them in a supernatural way here is the Messiah.

Here is the Messiah, the son of God. In the same way, in a supernatural way, he reveals to us our need of Christ. our need of the Christ who is the Messiah of God, the saviour of sinners.

[17 : 16] And we are brought to see that we are sinners and we need Christ. See, preaching is not an appeal for us to do something that will make us Christians.

It's a message about what God has done for us and in us. God sent his son into this world, made of a woman, made under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

What God has done for us and in us, not what we do. And that's why trying to turn over a new leaf, new leaf, make promises of ourselves to God in our own strength, it's never going to be the way to come to a living and new relationship with God.

We will never be good enough to earn ourselves in the situation where God, the Lord Jesus Christ, is our saviour. All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

And God is by Christ, as we read then 2nd Corinthians. God is by Christ reconciling us to himself.

[18 : 38] So the whole message of the gospel is that God sent forth his son to be made of a woman, made under the law and to redeem us that are under that law.

Quite apart from us, God deals with our sins. quite apart from anything we've done or will do, God has dealt with our sins.

He's punished our sins. He's dealt with our guilt. He's pardoned us. He's forgiven us. It's all on God's side. God came to Jacob as he must come to you and to me.

As God spoke to Jacob at Peniel, so he speaks to us by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of God's word. That's why it's so important for all of us to attend on the means of grace.

The reading of the word, but especially the preaching of the word, is the made effectual unto salvation. So as we place ourselves under the authority of God's word, as we place ourselves in the place where God's word is preached, as we place ourselves in submission to God's words and God's demands on us, so we will come more and more to realize our need of him and what he has done for us in Christ Jesus.

[20 : 12] Now the first two points we've been looking at declare the essence of the gospel what are the things which the gospel reveals to us?

The first two points were that the gospel is always unexpected in its revelation to us, in its association with us, in the way it affects us.

And the gospel is always something about what God does to us and in us, not what can we do. But what is then the gospel revealed to us?

It's first that the problems which cause us so much grief and cause us so much anxiety are not the real problems. I'm sure all of us as we've been coming under the saving influence of the Holy Spirit have come to realize that we've had many difficulties and many trials and many things that have kept us awake all night.

And they're not the real problem. The real problem is that we don't know a Lord as our God and as our Saviour. And that's what's happening here to Jacob.

[21 : 32] As Jacob sends his wife's children's possessions across the brook, he thought the only problem he now had was Esau.

All the other problems he'd taken care of, his own wisdom he dealt with them, now just Esau, that's all he had to deal with. If he solves that, everything else is going to be fine, there's going to be no more problems.

And then Jacob prays to God, what for? Once again I want to ask, what is he praying for? He says, please deliver me from the hand of my brother Esau, for I fear him.

The problem is still Esau. It's not himself. The problem is still Esau. When we're afraid, we can all pray very devout prayers.

I'm sure you've all heard many stories of those who have gone through difficulties and those perhaps who were facing even death and their prayers and their devotions were intense.

[22 : 45] Yet when the moment passed, so did the intensity of their prayers and their devotion to God. And that's what's happening here to Esau. But what actually did happen was that God intervened.

God comes and he says, your problem is you still don't know me.

God showed him that Esau wasn't his real problem. And for Jacob, there was no sleep or no peace that night. See this preparation. He's pacing backwards and forwards.

He's having a sleepless night. He's worrying about what on earth he's going to do. If his plans are going to work. That's the same role of us. We have a problem. That's what we do. We look to our own strength, our own wisdom first.

And as he paced about, all he could think of was Esau. Plans not going well.

[23 : 54] Same for us. Perhaps for us plans are not going well. Perhaps unemployment. Perhaps broken relationships. Maybe even broken marriages.

Financial worries. All of them temporal and all of them worries and anxieties that give us sleepless nights. Sometimes he could think of nothing else.

In the same way Jacob could think of nothing else but of his brother Esau. The message of the Gospels that teach us that such temporal matters are not the real problem.

So often we have temporal problems and we go to God as Esau or Jacob here does and he prays for God to deliver him from the problem and God saying that's not your problem.

I am. Outwardly we can be rich, outwardly prosperous, well set in life but inwardly we can still be filled with doubts and fears and all sorts of worries.

[25 : 02] So what is the real problem? and the Gospel is meant to reveal our real problem for Jacob is his relationship with God.

That's the first thing Jacob discovered at Peniel. The minute Jacob sees his problem that his real problem is a stranger from God, he forgets all about Esau.

He forgets all about the 400 men coming and he clings desperately to God. And so isn't that the same for all of us?

We try and solve all our problems, try and solve all the things that are worrying us and all the time it's our relationship to God himself.

We're told that Augustine once said Lord you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless to find our rest in you.

[26 : 09] The Gospel reminds us that unless we're right with God we will never be right anywhere else. It is God that makes us to be at peace and know the joy this life can offer.

Not things we add to ourselves or things we can accumulate. It is God alone. The Gospel shows us and Jacob what we really are.

In this life now being lived we are unworthy of the mercies of God. We have to ask ourselves is the life we are now living unworthy of the God who has brought us into being and for the life God intended us to live.

Are we living the life that God would be pleased with? Are we living a life where we would bring a smile to God's face and he would say well done good and faithful servant. God said to Jacob at Peniel you're worrying about material things that one day you're going to have to lose.

There's a day coming when you're going to die and then who shall these things be? Wives, cattle, possessions.

[27 : 31] Jacob had gone off as I said to Paddan Aran. He prospered there. He got wives and a family and was returning home now to enjoy the fruits of his neighbours.

Not only that, he had the birthright. also the blessing stolen from Esau. And he was just going to carry on in his life enjoying what he'd achieved.

God, as I said, had lived up to his side of the bargain. He prospered him. And now God wants Jacob to keep his side of the bargain. It's the same for all of us. God has prospered us.

God has brought us the situation like where we are just now. But may it not be that we receive our heart's desire and that brings leanness to our souls.

Without God, that's all it does. If we have everything that life can give to us and don't have God, all it does is bring leanness to our souls. We find ourselves wasting away inwardly.

[28 : 38] not only the outward man is perishing, but the inward man is perishing also. And we find ourselves going older and more bitter and more discontented with our lot.

And what God does at Peniel is to call Jacob back to a realisation of his true identity, to his true self, and to his true destiny.

See what the gospel does, it makes us see our real danger, our relationship with God. To Jacob, the real danger was that he feared for his life.

Some of us, perhaps, are getting older, we know the frailty, perhaps the danger we see is a life ending, perhaps without plans coming to fruition, perhaps without things we want to do that haven't been done.

And so, Jacob prays to God feverishly, but God says to him, your greatest danger, it's not the things that's accumulated, but your own soul.

[29 : 49] You may lose your own soul. What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? And God says to us, there's a day coming where we shall also die, and then who

shall these things be?

You know, if we could go back and read some of the book, Ecclesiastes, Giver Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, the richest man that ever lived, the man who had everything going for him, but he sees at the end of his life that what is the chief end of man, but to worship God and to keep his commandments.

That's what it says in the last chapter of Ecclesiastes, all the other things are meaningless without realizing we need to the whole end of man, the whole reason we are brought into this world is to worship God and to keep his commandments.

And that's what Jacob is brought to see, and that's what every converted man or woman is brought to see. God says to us, there's a day coming when we also die.

And then who shall all the things we've gathered together be? All the things we've collected, all that we've treasured, all that we've heaped up, all we've kept in special parcels, who shall all these things be when we are no longer here?

[31 : 21] The gospel reveals that our worries and cares about the wrong problem. In terms of Jacob's future, he's looking as to how to protect his investment.

He has the same sort of mindset as the rich fool did. Remember the story of the parable of the rich fool?

The Lord blessed him, the Lord gave him every advantage, he gave him a great harvest. Instead of using what God had given him to help others and to benefit the community in which he lives, he wants to pull down his own barns and build new barns so that he could spend his life at ease and be rich and be merry for the rest of his days.

And God says to him that very night, your soul this night, your soul is required of you. That's what we sometimes forget and that's what Jacob in this narrative has also forgotten about.

But when God meets Jacob, he forgets all about Esau, he forgets all about the other things in his life, his wives, his possessions, his cattle, what he has. He forgets all about that and all he wants to know is about God.

[32 : 38] He saw God. God revealed the blessing he had in store for Jacob. And Jacob said, I will not let you go, but I will lose everything, but I will not let you go unless you bless me.

What were earthly treasures to Jacob in comparison to God's blessing? Blessings of forgiveness, blessings of a new name, blessings of a life with God and to be called a prince with God.

That's what Jacob is having bestowed on him. And can we think of anything greater than that, perhaps even in our own experience? Enough of those who are recipients of justification, adoption and sanctification, that are benefits that accrue to us, as those who share in these benefits, given to us because of God's love for us and our new relationship with God in Christ.

Assurance of God's love, peace of conscience. Think of all these terms, your own experience and what they mean. Assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Spirit, increase, continued increase of grace and perseverance to the end.

There's nothing, nothing in comparison to those benefits that you'll find anywhere else in this world. Taste and see that God is good, who trusts in him is blessed.

[34 : 26] All are ours in Christ Jesus. All the promises of God are yea and are men in him.

May the Lord then bless these thoughts to us. Let us then conclude our worship, singing to God's praise in Psalm 73 in the Scottish Psalter at verse 23.

Psalm 73 at verse 23. Nevertheless continually, O Lord, I am with thee, and thou dost me hold by my right hand and still upholdest me.

To the end of the psalm, six stanzas to God's praise. gift. Amen. Amen. Not the best Let us pray, O Lord, I am with thee.

Let us be hope, O Lord, I am with thee.

[35 : 47] Lord, I count so while I live, with me on God and guide.

And will thy glory after all receive in thee to the high.

Whom have I ever ever tried, but thee, O Lord, alone.

And in the earth whom I desire, beside thee there is thou.

My flesh and heart doth hate and fail, but God doth save me never.

[37 : 15] For all my strength, for God is the strength and portion forever.

For all they have come from thee forever perish, And let us pray, O Lord, thou hast destroyed all. But surely it is good for me that I grow near to God.

In God I trust that all my work I may declare our cross.
And now may grace and mercy and peace, And in with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One
God, rest on you and abide in you, now and always.
[39 : 00] Amen.