

The Strength to Let Go
Genesis 32:22-32
October 10, 2021

Main point: We see here the power of God to turn our strengths into weaknesses so that our weaknesses truly become our strengths. The Bible shows us again the upside-down nature of the Kingdom of God and the way the Kingdom works in this world.

SI: Jacob, who in this passage is renamed Israel, is another of the Bible's shining examples of what the God of love can do through a messed up person. In other words, he's a lot like all of us. Moralistic good-person religiosity says look at the rules and get them right. The Bible says over and over again, look to a Savior, not yourself. Look to the God of grace, love and mercy who delights in surprising us with His mysterious ways of working goodness in us and through us.

READ PASSAGE

Intro: Jacob in dire straits. He has a big family – and a lot of possessions. After 20 years he and his family are on the way back to Canaan to reunite with Jacob's family. He has deceived and swindled his father-in-law out of valuable livestock. He is on his way to meet his estranged older brother, Esau, whose birthright he stole and has every reason to hate him. So here we are on the night before he is supposed to encounter Esau.

This passage teaches us about Jacob, and about ourselves. About God and His way of bringing His children to humble, joyful, dependence upon Him.
5 things that are common to God's children.

1Resisting - Like most OT names, Jacob was given the name because of its meaning. Jacob means 'May he be at the heels' in the sense of 'May God be your rearguard' or 'May God protect.' But since Jacob came out of the womb grabbing his twin brother's heel, his name had a more hostile sense. Overreaching. Harassing another's steps (Kidner 151). Up to this point, Jacob had fulfilled that sense. Jacob's whole life has been dedicated to his own dependence on his own ability, conniving. Tenaciously looking out for #1.

Jacob's resistance: self-dependence even while praying some great prayers and seeking to depend on the Lord. When push came to shove, he leaned more on his own abilities than on God.

v. 15-16> Jacob on the edge of what he thought could be a massacre of his family. Divided up his livestock into separate droves. Maybe this will appease my brother's wrath.

You can be a Christian and not be fully surrendered to His will and way. You can be a Christian and get a lot of things wrong. Jacob is again evidence of the long arc of God's

way with His people. > Be kind to one another, forgiving one another as the Lord has forgiven you.

God, what are you doing here? Do you remember when you've asked that? What in the world is going on? Especially when you are afraid, as Jacob was here, you can take matters into your own hands. Are you really depending on the Lord? Or on yourself?

Jacob has been resisting God his whole life. This night, he meets his match.>Wrestling

2Wrestling – Met his match in the angel of the Lord –

Didn't know who it was – the text is ambiguous – who is this? What is this? Jacob doesn't really understand that it is God incarnate until v. 29.

All night.

Jacob prevailed – God will let you wrestle with Him. God will give you this gift. Like a parent of a strong-willed child. Children, you know, and so do you parents. Parents will sometimes let you get your tantrum out, and sometimes they will tamp it down to teach you self-control. Here, God lets Jacob wrestle with him all night.

Forrest Gump – Lt. Dan shows up b/c he has nowhere else to go and Forrest has become a shrimp boat captain. A very unsuccessful one. One night a hurricane comes in and Lt. Dan, whose legs have been amputated due to a war wound in Vietnam, stays out on the water in the shrimp boat. And there's of course a horrendous storm and Lt. Dan has strapped himself in to the top of the mast and he's railing at God all night in anger and grief and lament and everyone knows it's about him being an amputee. Forrest later says of Lt. Dan that he made his peace with God that night.

Jacob did plan and pray, with sincerity crying out to the Lord b/c he feared Esau greatly. But also v. 20 -he still has a negotiation mindset that dominates and supersedes his dependence upon the God of grace – So Jacob about to get a lesson in how God really works – by grace, by gift, by undeserved favor.

Jacob, this tenacious grabber, cheater, deceiver, would not have his tenacity taken away, but redirected.

God isn't going to change your personality. Some of you are strong-willed and, like Jacob, you came out of the womb that way. But what God will do is redirect. Chasten your pride and challenge your tenacity. What was Jacob after? What did he want? To conform his world to his way.

Like the strong-willed child needs parents who love enough to challenge and redirect, God does the same with His children. Jacob's willfulness was purged of self-sufficiency. Through the valley of a battle-hardened, literal dark night of the soul surrender, Jacob's tenacious strength is redirected towards love for God in response to God's love for him.

So God renames him. Removes the reproach of the reputation of Jacob as deceiver and gives him a name based on this night. He won't forget his new name.

Someone here is wrestling against God and you haven't yet surrendered. It's still night.

Maybe you're afraid of the limp... of the visible sign of your weakness and dependency... don't let that keep you from the blessing that is only had by way of the surrender. You are surrendering to love. There is no way you can see the other side, only God can. And it is always, always a good future. "You fearful saints, fresh courage take. The clouds you so much dread are big with mercy and will break with blessings on your head."

Only He can overcome your pride and fear. Listen to the stories of your brothers and sisters here... what have you been through? How has God wrestled you down and given back to you your true self? Pastor Alton Hardy of Urban Hope in Fairfield calls it 'being processed' and he can't stop talking about it so that people see what God can do through a broken vessel that has been confronted by the Lion Holiness of God and renamed by God so that from the core of your being you are in awe of God and it oozes out of you that you have been remade.

Reminder of Jacob's history: He so desperately wanted the blessing from his father that he and his mother schemed and lied and deceived in order to get it – and he did get it – remember – he pretended to be Esau and covered his arms so they were hairy and went in to his blind, dying father and got the fatherly blessing. This time, he received the blessing directly from God.

What are you facing that seems insurmountable to you? That you are pouring all the powers of your will and intellect and personality and resources into? Could God be wrestling you down to surrender? Could God be waiting on you to enter into a new level of grasping so tight to him that you won't let go until you are convinced that He alone is the God of grace, kindness, and that His will is good towards you?

Sometimes these wrestlings come at transition points in our lives... what do you want me to do, Lord? I'm afraid. I'm scared to death actually. I need something more powerful than my own anxieties, fears, worries, stressors. I know that I need that but I don't want it. He knows.

And so a wounding happens.

3Wounding – Genius, purpose in God's wounding of us

Wounded with the lightest touch from God – the touch on his hip. What does this tell us? That the wrestling was for Jacob, not for God to prove anything.

How is this common to God's people? B/c especially for strong-willed stubborn or fearful people, God has to take you down until you are unable to get back up. What?

Break you so that your character, the core of your being, can be remade by Him, not yourself.

B/c of early childhood wounds, I was deathly afraid of rejection, abandonment, and loneliness. So what did God do? He wounded me. He took away everything I was depending upon to make my life work. Sometimes the only way to learn that Jesus is all you need is when Jesus is all you have.

Some of you may be in a season where: Uh, Lord, this is NOT anything at all like what I thought this was about, this whole trusting God thing, surrendering to God, giving my life up. He knows. That's why God puts it in His Word in such stark terms: "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in and through me." It's not you.

Principle: God always wounds in order to heal. Wounds our body, our spirit, in order to heal our character. This is James 1:2-5. In order to blow us away at what the God of love can do. And not just Christian heroes that we might hold up as beyond us. You. Ask around. How have you been wounded and what is the genius power that has come out of it?

And this shouldn't surprise us. This is the Resurrection power that we stake our lives on. Life comes out of death. If the Resurrection isn't true, then why does all humanity love and seek after underdog stories? When victory is clawed from the jaws of defeat. When your team comes from way behind to win against all odds. Why are there so many stories of God healing and bringing life where there was death?

ILLUS from Jeff Young who came to Men's Monday this week. Dad left them when he was 6 years old. Mom never remarried. He ended up being a teacher in a Christian school. Told his half sister he was glad it happened. She was at first incredulous. But yes. He wouldn't have had the ministry or the job or the calling that he had for decades as a PE teacher to bring hope to kids from broken homes.

But there is a warning - A wound is a digging out, creates a hole that must be filled - a vacuum cannot stay that way. You will find something to fill it. This is why the Bible gives story after story like this one - b/c Jacob, after wrestling all night, after being wounded he is desperate for something to fill the hole the wound has dug. He cries out for grace, and grace is given. Grace is only given to those who can receive it. If you persist in resisting, there will come a time where grace is unattainable b/c of your pride. Humble yourself in your woundedness. That's what the wound is for.

4Blessing - Jacob very familiar with the necessity of being blessed. In this specific sense, it meant the transfer of goods and authority from the father which went to the firstborn.

Jacob strived after the blessing from his father. With the help of his mother, he connived, schemed, lied, and deceived in order to obtain the blessing.

v. 26 > Jacob would not turn loose until God blessed him – an appeal for grace. A desperation for God's favor. This time he knows he can't make it happen for himself! Do you know that? Really know that? Or are you still thinking deep down that you can figure it out and make it happen?

So Jacob, out of his wounding, cries out.

We see, then, what blessing means: To be blessed is to be released from control.

To be blessed is to have received something that you in no way could or did accomplish for yourself. That's why Jesus, in the Beatitudes, puts his followers back into the reality of what it means to be human – to be restored to life. To be brought into freedom to be dependent instead of independent. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. The blessing of being released from control.

A little different from #Blessed underneath the picture of all my wealth I've acquired.

For Jacob, then, this is the turn, the transformation we have all been waiting for.

Jacob's tenacity turned towards God – to seek Him with all his heart – to hold on and not let go until God blessed him. The grabber became the grasper of God. The schemer finally became the receiver.

God gave him the strength to let go. The strength to surrender fleshly fearful independence and embrace the fear of God.

So, transition> the blessing of limping! This is so counter-intuitive. This in itself reveals how marred the Fall has made us. We think this is ridiculous foolishness.

5Limping – You're human, not divine. Embrace, boast in your weakness. This is what Christians should be talking about! Push back against the resistance we have of talking about our limps.

Push back on this – really? Do you have a weakness that hobbles you? Do you feel like it is holding you back and you wish you could be rid of it? Now if it is a sin, yes, be putting it to death, take drastic measures like cutting off your right hand if it causes you to sin. But if it is a thorn in the flesh, a wound, a limp, a weakness placed there, placed there by God, then boast in it. It is one of the primary ways God makes you strong – in Him. It is the main way He teaches you dependence. Don't run from it, embrace it.

God's kingdom would not expand without His limping followers. He chooses the weak things of the world to shame the strong, and the Church needs renewal in this truth all the time.

Will this limp ever be gone? Not in this life. Hopefully not in this life. The limp is what reminds you of your humanity, your weakness, your poverty. Your limp is not what hobbles you, it's what enables you to see God face to face. It's what enables you to be honest, real, authentic.

CONC:

Chris Renzema has a song called "Jacob" where he says:

"I know there's a cure for this sickness my heart endures, But it's hard to walk naked into the light"

How can he walk into the light, let go of his own control? By being blessed by God. By being covered, assured, rock solid confident that he is secure, safe, and won't be condemned to die.

And neither can you or me. How can we face the ugliness about ourselves? Only and ever by being assured that we are covered.

This is the story of the Bible from God covering Adam and Eve in the garden with animal skins sacrificed for them to the whole sacrificial system to Jesus condemned to die as the substitute for all who will trust in Him.

This is the present, practical value of Christ Jesus bleeding and dying for you, and the present, practical value of His righteousness covering you. And it gets better: He has renamed you.

Part of the blessing is being renamed – Israel – One who strives or wrestles with God. And isn't this all of us? Isn't this all of God's people – people who wrestle with God? Think of all the other biblical language to describe faith in God: to surrender, to submit, to die, to be crucified. The fleshly natural man, woman, boy, or girl is that strong, that resistant.

And this renaming – even if you haven't been literally renamed – I mean my name is still Michael – Jesus has renamed all of us – Rev 2:17 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it."

All for the purpose of humbling our pride, removing our fear, and jolting us into awe at what the God of love can do.

End with "Pensive, Doubting, Fearful Heart"

Bene: Jude 24-25

Kidner: See in the background of this passage how Jacob feared a massacre from Esau. And then in the future, see ch. 35 – God’s promise to him and again renaming him – that God would make kings to come from him and multiply the generations from him. 32 starts out with a vision of angels, and a foreboding that all his deception of Esau is going to come back with a vengeance upon him. Jacob did plan and pray, with sincerity crying out to the Lord b/c he feared Esau greatly

Ross –

Jacob alone

Jacob did not expect this

Attacked in the night by a man – ambiguous who this is at first – then he reveals that he is a supernatural being – God Himself -

Me – To become strong, your self-sufficiency must become weak. Your self-sufficiency must die, it has to be gone

But this is gift – upside-down, nothing to do with rewards that you have accomplished or earned or made happen through your own obedience except the obedience of faith –
2 Cor 1:3-5