

JACOB WRESTLED WITH GOD

TEXT: GENESIS 32:24-32

Introduction:

1. In Genesis 32, we have the interesting story of Jacob wrestling with God.
2. The purpose of this wrestling match was to break Jacob's stubborn will. The Lord wanted Jacob to submit to His will.
3. In order to get Jacob to submit, the Lord had to literally wrestle Jacob to the ground. Only then would Jacob realize what a poor, worthless, helpless man he really was.
4. In the case of Simon Peter, the Lord showed him he could not do anything without God's help. Peter said to the Lord, "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net" (Luke 5:5).
5. "And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake" (Luke 5:6).
6. There were so many fishes that their nets broke, and both boats were full of fish. There were so many fishes that the boats began to sink. Then "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8).
7. Job was broken. God allowed Satan to vex him. "And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life" (Job 2:6).
8. After his terrible ordeal, Job said, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5, 6).
9. Once we see God in this light, we also begin to see ourselves the way God sees us.

I. JACOB WAS BROKEN BY GOD

1. “And Jacob was left alone” (Gen. 32:24). God waited for Jacob to be alone, so they could meet.
2. But this was no ordinary meeting. “And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day” (Gen. 32:24).
3. This was no ordinary man wrestling with Jacob. This was the pre-incarnate Christ, often referred to in the OT as “the angel of the LORD.”
4. Jacob wrestled with God (cf. Gen. 32:30). Theologians refer to this as a theophany, or, specifically a Christophany.
5. The prophet Hosea refers to this wrestling match in Hosea 12:3, 4.
6. The Lord started this wrestling match, and it could have been over very quickly, but the Lord wanted Jacob to prevail. This is important for us to grasp.
7. The Lord wanted the Syrophenician woman to prevail. He wanted Moses to prevail. And he wants you and me to prevail. We must wrestle with God till God breaks us (Gen. 32:24, 25, 31, 32).
8. Jacob was never the same after that wrestling match. He was broken. He halted and limped for the rest of his life (Gen. 32:31).
9. Hebrews 11:21 says, “By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.”
10. Jacob had to lean upon his staff for the rest of his life. And notice, the Scripture says, “and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.” Jacob was broken, and he thanked God for it.
11. The key to victory is brokenness, but many Christians do not want to be broken. They prefer taking a short cut.
12. Evan Roberts (1878-1951) was the recognized leader of the Welsh Revival, though he did not want to be recognized as the leader. He repeatedly said, “This movement is not of me, it is of God. I would not dare direct it...It is the Holy Spirit alone which is leading us.”

13. Roberts was at a meeting, and he heard an evangelist named Seth Joshua close the meeting in prayer. Seth Joshua prayed, “Lord...Bend us.”
14. Evan Roberts went to the front of the church, knelt down, and with great anguish cried, “Lord, bend me.”
15. Looking back to that prayer, Evan Roberts later said that the impact of his commitment had this effect, “I felt ablaze with a desire to go through the length and breadth of Wales to tell of my Savior; and had that been possible, I was willing to pay God for doing so.”
16. Seth Joshua prayed, “Lord...Bend us.” Evan Roberts prayed, “Lord, bend me.” God did bend them, and over 100,000 souls were saved in the little country of Wales.
17. The bending and breaking must come first. God had to first bring Jacob to the place of complete brokenness and dependence.
18. Then the blessing came (Gen. 32:29b).

II. JACOB WAS BLESSED BY GOD (32:29b).

1. The man (the pre-incarnate Christ) wrestling with Jacob said to him, “Let me go” (32:26). Interestingly, Jacob’s name means, “Supplanter” or “Heel-grabber.” His name literally means, “that which grabs, or that which holds.”
2. Jacob was still grabbing and holding, but now, for the first time in his life, he got a hold of the Lord.
3. Prior to this encounter, Jacob grabbed his brother Esau’s birthright. And he grabbed Esau’s blessing. Esau complained to his father Isaac, “Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing” (Gen. 27:36).
4. Later we see Jacob grabbing on to Rachel, along with her sister Leah and several handmaids as well.
5. Genesis 30:43 says Jacob “increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses.”

6. But now, Jacob is face to face wrestling with God. “And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me” (Gen. 32:26b).
7. God had been waiting to hear those words from Jacob. Perhaps He is waiting to hear them from you.
8. The pre-incarnate Christ then asked Jacob for his name (32:27). Of course, He already knew his name. God knows everything.
9. When Adam tried to hide from God, the LORD called unto Adam, and said, “Where art thou?” (Gen. 3:9).
10. God knew exactly where Adam was hiding. He wanted Adam to confess his sin.
11. God wanted Jacob to tell him his name, which meant “supplanter” or “heel-grabber.” Then, God graciously gave him a new name, Israel, which means, “a prince of God” (32:28).
12. Jacob became a prince with God because he finally came to the end of himself. God wanted to bless Jacob, not hurt him. God crippled him in order that he might use him. God had to break him before He could bless him.
13. We must look at brokenness from God’s perspective, not man’s.
14. When Abraham Lincoln’s little son, Willie died, he was broken. He was crushed. He was devastated.
15. At that time in his life, Abraham Lincoln was not a saved man, but he strongly believed in the providence of God.
16. However, he was mixed-up regarding many other things in the Bible, such as the doctrines of salvation and redemption.
17. When his precious little son Willie died, the apple of his eye, Abraham Lincoln was absolutely crushed. He was a broken man.
18. He was so overwhelmed with grief that he set aside every Thursday to mourn his death. After some period of time, when he would see no one on that day, but wept and mourned and lamented the death of his son Willie, Dr. Francis Vinton, pastor of Trinity Church, came down to Washington from New York City.
19. Dr. Vinton was a friend of the Lincoln family, and was allowed in to see the President. The pastor told President Lincoln it was not right to continually mourn over his son. He said, “Your son is alive in paradise with Christ, and you must not continue...Jesus Himself said that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”

20. At first, President Lincoln could not comprehend what the pastor was saying. But soon enough his mind grasped the words that Dr. Vinton had said, and he exclaimed, "Alive! Alive! My boy is alive!"
21. From that day there began a change in President Lincoln, and his religious views began to dramatically change. Many historians believe Lincoln was eventually converted to Biblical Christianity.
22. Brokenness comes first. Then comes the blessing (32:29b).

III. JACOB WAS NOW DEPENDENT UPON GOD

1. One of the great lessons in the Bible is that we are to be totally dependent upon God. Jesus said in John 15:5, "without me ye can do nothing."
2. Jacob had done pretty well for himself. He was a great schemer, a great conniver. He was shrewd and crafty. If Jacob were alive today he would probably be a very successful businessman.
3. But now Jacob was about to meet his twin brother Esau, and he was greatly afraid and distressed. Many years before, Esau had vowed to kill him. And now Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men (Gen. 32:6, 7).
4. Up to this point, Jacob was an example of a man operating in the flesh – he would try and appease Esau with generous gifts (32:13-15).
5. Now it is true that Jacob did pray. Many carnal people pray. They pray only after their own schemes and plans are exhausted. They want God to bless their plans, rather than ask God what His plan is.
6. The key to effectual prayer is a sincere desire for God's will to be done. Our Lord taught us to pray, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).
7. We should never ask God to bless our plans, without first asking God what His plans are.
8. Sometimes Christians are discouraged when certain prayers are not answered the way they think they should. First John 5:14 says, "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us."
9. There is no indication that Jacob was concerned about God's will. All Jacob cared about was protection from Esau so he continue living his life the way he wanted.

10. It is natural for a self-confident, carnal man like Jacob to plan and scheme, and to try and do everything in his own strength.
11. Carnal men like to plan everything, and then they pray and ask God to bless their worldly schemes.
12. Jacob's prayer was answered, but not in the way he anticipated.
13. He would tell everyone what he was to say to Esau (32:17-20).
14. Jacob considered himself very clever and fully capable to order his life without God's direction, but thankfully, God in His grace and love intervened on his behalf (cf. Gen. 32:24).
15. God has His ways of dealing with our self-confidence and self-sufficiency, but to do this He must first bring us to the end of ourselves. He has to break us.
16. The Lord had to make Jacob aware of his utter helplessness. Once Jacob understood that, he became dependant upon God.

CONCLUSION:

1. The store shelves are full of "self help" books. People spend money to attend so-called "self help" seminars.
2. The problem with all of this "self help" business is we cannot help ourselves. And the old adage, "God helps those who help themselves" is unscriptural.
3. Actually, God helps those who cannot help themselves.
4. What is really needed is to meet God face to face (Genesis 32:30).