

**Genesis 32: 22-32; “Jacob Wrestling with Christ”, Sermon #91 in the series – “Beginnings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018, in the Morning Worship Service.**

There are some times in the life of every Christian, when they are distressed, and when they are troubled by the fear of men, that the Lord knows that He must confront them, in order to have very personal dealings with them. The Lord knows that He must confront them before He can bless them, in relation to matters of their greatest concern. This was something that Jacob was unaware was coming. But it was something that he would become keenly aware of; very quickly and very suddenly, as he approached this critical meeting with Esau, when he was on the verge of once again entering the land of promise.

He was going to encounter a Divine Person, a person who he would really and physically wrestle with. This wrestling, I believe, is given to us as a picture of what all Christians at some critical times in their lives have to engage in. I would term it, wrestling with Christ. Sometimes we do not understand, as Christians, that when we are trying to deal with situations of fear and distress in relation to other people, that we are also actually wrestling with Christ. We must understand that it is good for every Christian to have this learning experience of wrestling with Christ.

The outcome of this wrestling will determine whether or not we will receive the blessing of God, and whether we will prevail with Him to help us in our greatest difficulties with people around us. It will determine whether or not we are making progress in regard to our sanctification. It will determine whether we will be able to find peace with people who we need to be reconciled to. So what does it mean for you, the Christian, to wrestle with Christ and to prevail, in order to receive the blessing that you are seeking?

I believe that for you to wrestle with Christ and to prevail, you must learn to think about, and to live out the four godly techniques of wrestling which may be learned from this father of our faith Jacob. The 1<sup>st</sup> Godly Technique is your Mindset – That it is just you and Christ who will wrestle. (verses 22-24) The 2<sup>nd</sup> Godly Technique is your Stance and Moves – You will need to have a good Defense and Offense. (verse 25) The 3<sup>rd</sup> Godly Technique is your Objective – To not let Him Go (verses 26-28) And then the 4<sup>th</sup> Godly Technique is your Attitude in Winning – Joy, Awe, and Humility. (verses 29-32)

**The 1<sup>st</sup> Godly Technique is related to your Mindset – It is just you and Christ who will wrestle.** (verses 22-24)

Humanly speaking, Jacob had taken all the necessary precautions that he could think of, against an attack upon his people by Esau. He had spoken very politely to him, he had divided his relatives and servants into two groups; so that if one group was killed, the other might escape. He had prayed a very fervent and humble prayer in which he had pleaded with the Almighty, the God of his fathers, to deliver him from the hand of Esau because he was afraid of him. He had confessed his unworthiness to receive the least of God's mercies.

He had also prepared a generous present for Esau out of his flocks. It was at least 530 animals; goats and rams, and milk camels with their colts, and some donkeys as well. These he put into a line of droves proceeding on ahead of him, moving towards the place where they would meet Esau coming towards them. He was acting in faith in these things; he was acting very wisely in all his preparations to meet Esau. He is a good example for all of us, when we are in dangerous, or distressing, or difficult circumstances.

We must also do all that we righteously can do, to appease those who are angry with us, if we have formerly committed sins against them. We are to “pursue peace with all men, and the holiness without which no man will see the Lord”. (Hebrews 12: 14) All this Jacob had done, in preparation for the confrontation that was sure to come with his brother Esau. You must

remember, when you come into any distressing or difficult situation, especially with regard to people who you are having trouble getting along with, that really, your being able to have a favorable outcome, the answer to your prayers and hopes, is first of all related to your wrestling through the matter with God. You do this by wrestling in the thoughts of your heart. You do it by prayer to God in your thoughts. You do it in relation to your conscience which should be convicting you of any past sins that you may have committed against other people.

But you must remember most of all, that it is God that you have to deal with, in the first and foremost place. He is One and the only One who Jacob wrestled with after he was converted. It says in verse 24, "Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day." Who was this man anyway? Here in this verse He is simply called "a Man". In Hosea chapter 12, verse 4 He is called an angel. Down in verse 28, this man declares Himself to be God. He says to Jacob, "...for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed".

You notice how this wrestling match, which was with God alone, is linked to Jacob's wrestling with "a man" in verse 28. He was wrestling with the God-Man, the Pre-Incarnate Lord Jesus Christ. (A Theophany as theologians call Him) It was because Jacob prevailed with God (he was wrestling according to God's will and purpose), that when he wrestled with Him, he prevailed also with men (that is with Esau as well). This was a very real physical wrestling match that took place, but it had far reaching spiritual consequences for all of Jacob's life. This is how it is in the living the Christian life, as well.

You remember that back at the beginning of Jacob's life, even before he was born, it says in chapter 25, verse 22, "But the children struggled together within Rebekah's womb..." Jacob and Esau were wrestling with each other even before they were born. And God had told Rebekah when she came to inquire of Him about this, that "two nations were in her womb". "One people would be stronger than the other, and the older would serve the younger." There were bigger issues in the birth of these twins than what Rebekah realized.

These two were to each be the head of a nation which would descend from them. One's descendants would become Israel, the Elect nation of God through whom would come God's Son, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. And the other would be a nation who would not be Elect, indeed, they would become the inveterate enemies of God, whom He would hate. Listen to Malachi 1, verse 2. "I have loved you, says the Lord." "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?'" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" says the Lord." "Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness."

You see, it was God's purpose according to Election that this was so. Will you not realize, dearly beloved child of God, that there are bigger issues than you think, which are involved in the major struggles that you have with other people in your life. Will you not realize that these struggles must be resolved in a way that honors God? And if these struggles must be resolved in a way that honors God, then it will mean that they cannot be resolved in the way of your ordering and doing things, but it will be by God's ordering and His way of doing things, that they will be accomplished? That was the reason for this wrestling match.

You will further remember that Rebekah and Jacob, realizing that this prophecy of the older serving the younger would most certainly come to pass, that they tried to help it along, by deceiving Esau out of the blessing of his father. I have told you in past sermons that this was not the right way to go about things. Jacob whose name means "supplanter" took his brother's birthright and his blessing away from him by unrighteous means.

And so Jacob, since he was one of the elect children of God, he needed to be taught, he needed to be humbled, and he would need to be led to the place where he would not only acknowledged this, but that he would repent of going about to do things in this selfish way entirely. And he would have to learn the righteous way, the godly way, to obtain God's blessing. Jacob had now come to that place. God now knew that Jacob had learned his lesson, but He

would cause him to realize just how much it would cost Jacob, and how much it would cost Him, in the process of time, in the giving of His Son to die on the cross for Jacob's sins. God will do the same with each true Christian in the process of their sanctification.

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> godly Technique which we can learn from Jacob is his Stance and Moves.**

(verse 25)

You need to have a good defense and a good offence. Now I do not mean, that there was any merit spiritually in Jacob that caused him to be able to prevail with God. But I mean to say that Jacob did have natural strength, and cleverness, and the ability to wrestle with God on the human level. He did his utmost, using his natural physical strength to prevail with his antagonist. After all, Jacob did not know Who this "Man" was yet. He thought, perhaps at first, that it was someone who had been sent to him by Esau to "take care of him" once and for all. It could have just been a bandit or a some other cruel wayfaring wanderer.

But after a while, Jacob began to realize that this was no ordinary stranger that he was wrestling with. Jacob's stance, and his moves in the wrestling match, were good. He was a man who had cared for sheep and goats all of his life. Perhaps he had also fought with the "lion and the bear" as David had. He had learned to care for the flocks, and he had also learned how to evaluate people. He had good strength in his thighs and legs, and he took his stance in such a way that this stranger could not throw him down. Jacob wrestled in such a way with this stranger, that it says in verse 25, that "He saw that He did not prevail with Him."

Evidently Jacob was a very strong and good wrestler. God had come to wrestle with him, and yet Jacob prevailed. What was it that was good in Jacob's wrestling? I went to a web-site to seek what it is that wrestlers focus on in order to win. These were the tips that I found. 1. Don't be afraid to lose; have an offensive philosophy going in, and constantly use a proper attack. 2. Make your opponent wrestle your style. Force the match and keep him off balance by attacking first and continuously. 3. If you have reach, speed, or balance on a man, use these to your advantage. Mix them up in your attack, the odds favor you. 4. If you are stronger, overpower him. If you are weaker don't fight his strength but instead concentrate on perfect technique. Technique will win over strength nearly every time. 5. If you are in better shape, set a pace he can't stand but don't do all the work. Make him lift your weight every time possible. 6. Keep a cool head and remain poised and confident.

Never allow calls by the referees or actions by your opponent or the fans to upset your wrestling attitude or technique. Never make the referee mad at you. Never stop wrestling until the whistle blows. This includes not giving up a defensive move until the referee calls the points. Remember creating a stalemate is better than giving up a point." (These wrestling tips and strategies were the thoughts of Bruce Gabrielson, the Head Coach of the Southern Maryland wrestling club.)

Now, Jacob obviously had never read these, but I think that he must have employed at least some of them in his match with this Man-angel. I don't think that Jacob was afraid to lose to this Man. Neither should we be afraid to lose to God in Christ. He is our superior in every way; in wisdom and in strength. Jacob tried to make God wrestle his style, and God in turn wrestled with Jacob according to Jacob's style. He acknowledged Jacob's fleshly abilities, but then, He knew that He had given Jacob all the gifts and abilities that he had.

He would teach Jacob according to these abilities, and He would redirect their energies in the right way, by his own pretending for a time, to be weaker than Jacob. I am sure that Jacob used all the wrestling ability that he had with God in this contest. His reach, his speed and his balance were all good. And so is the Christian who "makes haste to keep all of God's commandments"; the person who is always thinking of God, thinking about him.

Our relationship with God is, in this way, a match of wits. He watches all of our moves. We are no contest for Him obviously, but when we come to have a relationship with Jesus Christ, we

wrestle through the many situations of “what should I do next”? Wrestling in this way, Jacob took the right stance and he developed his moves accordingly. I believe that Jacob’s technique was to get in close to his opponent and try to pin him down, but Christ will refuse to be pinned down by us, every time. We may think that we have stronger reasons than He does, for living and thinking, and doing things the way that we do them. But if there is sin in any of these things, our God and Christ will ferret it out.

Sometimes the things that we are strongest in, in our physical fleshly nature, are a great hindrance to our faith, and our coming to full obedience to Christ. We may be strong, we may be quick, we may have all the right moves but we have not learned the right way to prevail with God. We think that we have to steal the blessings of God or trick other people into giving us what we want, more than what God wants for us, that must change. God knows that something must change in us if we are to be holy.

It is obvious that Jacob was in good physical shape, and he set a good pace with this Man. He made the Lord lift his weight in this contest. Christ indeed loves us enough to lift our weights and bear our burdens because He cares for us. He patiently wrestles through the issues of our life, and our faith, and our obedience to Him, “until the break of day”. He patiently perseveres with us until He is satisfied that His own way and likeness is formed in us. This is how He “lets us” win. Jacob kept a cool head and he didn’t stop wrestling until the whistle blew; that is, until the light of dawn came.

Even so, we must continue to wrestle through the great issues of our obedience and our deliverance from the fear of men, until the light of Christ’s grace and truth convinces us of whether we will receive a blessing from God or not. It is not as though that Jacob was any real match for the Pre-Incarnate Christ. This was evident by the fact that verse 25 says further, “Now when He 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.”

He was showing Jacob that He could have easily defeated him at any time, but He had purposely chosen to wrestle in this very human way with him to show him how much He was really for him, even though he wrestled in this way. I love what Calvin says about this. He says, “For we do not fight against him, except by His own power, and with His own weapons; for He, having challenged us to this contest, at the same time furnishes us with means of resistance, so that He both fights against us and for us.”

“In short, such is His apportioning of this conflict, that, while He assails us with one hand, he defends us with the other; yea, inasmuch as he supplies us with more strength to resist than He employs in opposing us, we may truly and properly say, that He fights against us with his left hand, and for us with His right hand.” “It is true he remains at perfect unity with Himself; but the double method in which He deals with us cannot be otherwise expressed, than that in striking us with a human rod, He does not put forth His full strength in the temptation; but that in granting the victory to our faith, He becomes in us stronger than the power by which he opposes in us.”

A little later he says, “And truly, I confess, that this differs from common conflicts, and requires, beyond all others, a rare, and even heroic strength.” This was Jacob when he wrestled with God.

**Then the 3<sup>rd</sup> godly Technique which Jacob teaches us in wrestling with God is perseverance until we have the Blessing.** (verses 26-28)

“Never stop wrestling until the whistle blows,” says Bruce Gabrielsen. We could say here, “Never stop wrestling until you have obtained the blessing that you seek.” In verse 26 the Pre-Incarnate Christ says to Jacob, “Let me go, for the day breaks.” “But he said, ‘I will not let you go unless You bless me!’” We have to remember that the Lord, when He saw that He did not prevail over Jacob, that He touched the socket of Jacob’s hip and dislocated it. And even though it was

so, and Jacob must have been greatly weakened and in pain, yet he continued to wrestle with the Angel. We receive further revelation of this truth in Hosea chapter 12, verses 3 and 4, if you will turn over there with me. Here we find Israel being reprov'd by the prophet for their increasing their lies, and their own desolation because of their disobedience to God. In verse 2 it says, "The Lord also brings a charge against Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his deeds He will recompense him."

"He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and in his strength he struggled with God." "Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; he wept, and sought favor from Him." "He found Him in Bethel, and there He spoke to us – That is, the Lord God of hosts." "The Lord is His memorable name." "So you, by the help of your God, return; observe mercy and justice, and wait continually on God."

Here we have a little more information given to us about the wrestling of Jacob with the Angel. It says, that "he wept and sought favor from Him". I believe that this is referring to what happened in the wrestling match after the Lord dislocated Jacob's hip. This is what brought Jacob to tears. He realized that all that he could really do to win, was to continue wrestling and change his strategy. He now knew that the Angel could have easily won at any time, but for some reason had chosen not to exert all of his strength.

But now Jacob understood the principle of how he could face his fears of Esau. It would not be by being strong in Himself and in the cleverness of his wrestling techniques. It would be by his seeing that when he was weak in himself, and in his own ability to deal with his difficulties, that he could, by praying, be strong by seeking God's favor. He would hold on to God, and he would not let Him go. It would be God Himself who would help him. It was right that he continued to wrestle through these difficulties, but he knew that he must prevail by prayer.

He would cling to the Lord Jesus, and he would hold on to Him, wrestling with Him in prayer, until he did prevail. He still had enough strength to do that. That was the strength of grace. He was weeping when the Lord said to him, "Let me go, for the dawn breaks." He sought His favor when he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." Sometimes the Lord has to "weaken our strength in the way", before He can bless us with the answer to our prayers about the things that concern us the most.

Why? It is so that we will not trust in ourselves; our own strength and abilities, to resolve these things. We need to realize that it is the issues of our repentance, our being merciful, and our doing the right thing in those difficult circumstances where we are afraid; this is what God is looking for. Jacob did seek Christ's favor. He is the Lord God. The Lord Jesus Christ is His memorial name to us. It is His name that we call upon to save us, and to help us, when we pray. And what was the outcome? You find it there in Hosea 12: 6. "So you, by the help of your God return; observe mercy and justice, and wait on your God continually."

Let us all resolve, therefore, to do this very thing in the times of our distress and difficulty, that we have with other people. With the help of our God we will be able to observe mercy and to do justly. Without Him we can do nothing. We must learn to wait upon Him, to weep before Him, over our own sins; all the while confessing His great ability to forgive us, and to grant us repentance, and bring about our restoration to the very person or persons which we find that we have not been able to get along with, or who are against us.

**And then the 4<sup>th</sup> Godly Technique of Jacob's wrestling that we can emulate relates to our Attitude in Winning – It is an attitude of Joy, Awe, and Humility.**

(verses 28-32)

Jacob was now given a new name because he had persevered in wrestling through the issues of how to obtain God's blessing in relation to Esau and his greatest fears. Now he is to be "knighted in the field" as Thomas Scott says in his commentary. Since Jacob would not let the Pre-Incarnate Christ go until He blessed him, He said to Jacob, "What is your name?" And he

said, “Jacob”. And the Lord said to him, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.” In the margin of my Bible there is a literal translation of the name Israel as being, “a prince with God”. So the sentence would read, “As a prince with God and with men, you have struggled and prevailed.” It was a very princely thing to do; to wrestle with God, as you can see. It is easy, according to our sinful nature to draw back and not to wrestle with God. “What use is it, we think?” “God is stronger than I am anyway.”

But the Lord Jesus Christ struggled through His life, in His obedience to God. He struggled to learn obedience by the things that He suffered, so that He could get to the cross, so that He could suffer for sinful Jacob, so that he could be forgiven of his sins, and learn the way of humble obedience, and be re-named as a Prince of God. This is what God does with all of his true children as they persevere in their faith and learn to overcome their own sinful weaknesses and their sinful actions of the past and present.

Revelation 3: 12 says, “He who overcomes, I will.....write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of my God.” “And I will write on him My new name.” And to Peter, Jesus said that his name would no longer be Cephas but Peter. And Saul’s name was changed to Paul when he was converted and the direction of his life changed. What about you? What is your greatest strength? What are your greatest gifts? Do you use them in a right way, to love and serve God, and other people, and to promote God’s glory? Or do you use them in a selfish way to wrestle with God and men to get what you want out of any given situation? This is why God will come to wrestle with you.

And even though Jacob prevailed with God, you will notice that he most certainly had the right attitude at the end of it. It was one of joy, and awe, and humility. You notice that after the Lord asked him what his name was, and had renamed him Israel; that Jacob asked the Lord what His name was. The Lord said to him – “Why is it that you ask about my name?” Then it says, “And He blessed him there”. This led to Jacob’s humble resolve to ask no more, for he knew that this was God indeed, who he had wrestled with.

He does not name the place of this contest, “I have wrestled with God and prevailed”. That would have been pride in him. He names it, “Peniel”. “For I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved.” That is how we ought to view all the victories that we have obtained by wrestling with God. They should lead us to humble thankfulness. For these victories will cost us something, just as it cost Jacob. “As the sun rose on him, he limped on his hip.” Who had prevailed with who here? It is God who always prevails with us, and He would have us remember it all of our days. But He graciously lets us have the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.