

Genesis 32:22-30

What kind of person are you when you face a hard time? Are you the type of person to ask for help? Do you try to figure it out all on your own? Do you let yourself be overcome with worry until you don't know what to do? This morning we are going to see Jacob facing a real struggle in his life and see how he solves his problem. We will see that those who struggle with God are blessed.

Before we can look at the story for today, we need to look at the context and see the type of person Jacob was. Jacob is the type of person that tries to get out of situations all on his own by any means necessary. Whether this is lying to his father to get a blessing or running away from his angry brother to save his life. Our verses for today come in a part of Jacob's life when he is coming home to Canaan. On his way home he learns that his brother Esau, who was angry enough to want to kill Jacob earlier in his life, is living near by and wants to meet with Jacob. We mentioned earlier that Jacob has gotten out of some bad situations before by using his wit, but what can he do this time? He has nowhere to run and Esau already knows where he is.

It's important to remember that this may be the most scared Jacob had been up to this point in his life. Last time he had to face Esau he was able to run away and live with family in a different country, but this time Jacob recognizes the trouble he's in and sends all he owns away, along with his whole family, just to protect them from the danger he knows is waiting for him.

It's after this that we see the famous scene of Jacob wrestling with God and you can imagine Jacob thinking, "If I can just win this match, God will have to bless me." Because of this God shows Jacob that he cannot get out of this situation on his own. God dislocates Jacob's hip. Up until this point Jacob had been holding his own and maybe even thinking he can win, God shows Jacob that Jacob cannot make it out this by force, but only with God's help. After all of these things happen to Jacob in a very eventful 24 hours Jacob realizes he can do nothing other than hold on to God and beg him to remember his promises. God had promised to make Jacob prosper in the land and now Jacob can do nothing except literally hold God to his promise and beg for a blessing.

There are times when we can really feel like Jacob. We can often feel like we are in a situation that is just inescapable. When things go wrong at work and the blame falls on us, we can feel hopeless, when we must have a difficult conversation with someone we love we can be terrified of how things will change afterwards, when we get sick we get filled with dread and beg the doctors to do whatever they can. Just like Jacob we can live our lives ruled by fear and not by trust in God. We can try to come up with clever solutions to get out of these situations, but sometimes we just can't do anything. It can be so difficult for us to trust God with our problems.

Like Jacob we need to realize that these things are out of our control and turn to God who can do anything. It's hard to let go and to trust in God to take care of us, but we know that in these moments all we can do is ask God to bless us, and we know that God promises to bless us. God says in Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Jacob knew the promises that God made to him, and he asked for a blessing remembering God's promises. In the same way when we face these troubles we can turn to God and hold him to his promises.

In Jacob's situation he struggled with God, both mentally and physically. He physically wrestled with God but also tried to overcome God and force his way out of this because he struggled to believe the truths that God had promised him. Sometimes our prayer life can feel like a struggle. It can feel difficult for us to let go and submit to God and ask for a blessing. It's ok if your prayer feels like a struggle when in these moments because this struggle will ultimately lead you to know that you need God. So, pray diligently knowing that you can't do this on your own, but that you need God and his blessing. And

in your prayers hold God to his promises. We may not be able to do this in the same way Jacob did, but in our prayers, we can ask God to do all the things he has promised us to do.

But what now? We get to a point where we submit to God's will and ask him to bless us according to his promises, but then what? God blesses us.

After wrestling all night and Jacob holds on to God and says he will not let go unless God blesses him, God asks for his name. Jacob tells his name to God and God gives him a new name with a new meaning Israel. At this point God gives Jacob what he asked for and blesses him before disappearing.

One important thing to look at here is the new name Jacob received from God. At this time names were important, people were named based on their characteristics. Up until this point Jacob was his name. This name means heel grabber. This is shown to be a very accurate name because it refers to the fact that Jacob was cunning and will deceive people and force his way out of his problems. After this event Jacob is given a new name, Israel. Israel means contends with God. This is name that was shown to be true that night as he struggled with God until God blest him. This was going to be the thing that Jacob was known for now, not deceiving and conniving, but praying and trusting and holding God to what he said.

We see later that this name, Israel, is not only given to Jacob, but to the whole nation that would come from him. God's holy people are described by their struggles with God and their relying on him. This is a nation that we are a part of by faith. Galatians 3:7 tells us, "Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham." We share the same faith as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This means we also are "sons of Israel." Our struggling with God is part of our identity as Christians and always will be.

After Jacob proves his name to be true, we see that God does in fact bless him. In the same way we can be confident that after our struggles God blesses us. God keeps his promises to us, and he always will. We know that God has already kept the most important promise he ever made to us by sending his son, Jesus, into the world to save us from all our sin. We now have the ultimate blessing from God, eternal life. No matter what happens in this world that blessing is ours and that promise has been fulfilled. Our ultimate fate is secure, and we can have peace in all we do knowing that God has already fulfilled his promise to work everything out for our ultimate good. Knowing this we can also have confidence that God will keep all of his promises, to be with us in times of trouble and to help us no matter what happens. We don't know what God's blessing is always going to look like, but we can have confidence that God does bless us and keep us and makes his face shine on us, and that he works all things into his wonderful plan to help us and not to harm us.

Since by faith we are sons of Israel, struggling with God is part of our identity. It's part of who we are as Christians to struggle with God in prayer and ask for blessing. Knowing this let's follow the example of our father in the faith Jacob and pray boldly. Just as God responded to Jacob with blessing, we know that he will also respond to us with blessing. God has never broken a promise. God promised to prosper Jacob and in this time of trouble God blessed him by having Esau greet him with a hug and not a sword. God kept his promise to us to save us from all evil by giving us Jesus to save our souls and we know that today God still works all things out for good. So, let's pray boldly knowing that God will continue to bless us beyond what we can imagine.

There are times in our lives when praying feels like a struggle and we can be tempted to see that as a bad thing, but don't. Just as God blest Jacob after his struggle with God, God blesses all those who struggle with him, so like Jacob let's pray boldly and hold onto God until he blesses us. Amen.