

## From Brokenness to Blessing: Jacob's Journey

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### Genesis 25:25-27

"The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents."

Have you ever wrestled with God? Some people wrestle with God over matters of salvation. You've heard the gospel every which way you can. You saw the gospel pictured in baptism- the death, the burial, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You've heard over and over again that Christ died for your sins, He was buried, He rose again on the third day. You've heard Jesus say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes to the Father but by Me." You've heard John 3:16 that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him would not perish, but have everlasting life." You've heard the gospel. You've heard the...but you're still wrestling with God. You're still wrestling to say yes to Jesus Christ. And there is a cosmic battle going on for your soul.

Others of us are followers of Jesus Christ. We call ourselves Christians. We can think of that day when we came to faith in Jesus Christ. But maybe there is some area of your life where you're still wrestling with God to give over to Him the full lordship of Jesus Christ. I don't know what area of your life that might be. Maybe you have an area of your life that is not rightly related to God. Maybe, like we'll discover with Jacob, we have a deep character flaw. And God wants to redeem that. He wants to shape and mold that part of our life, and there is a wrestling match with God about that. You're wrestling with Him over whether it's His will or your will.

Frederick Buechner said that Jacob's divine encounter at the Jabbok River he described, he characterized as "the magnificent defeat of the human soul at the hands of God." That's a great description of this first Wrestling at the Jabbok River nearly 4,000 years ago, this cosmic

battle between God and Jacob. Now, based on our last week sermon, Jacob was a cracked pot/broken vessel. He was a cracked pot because he had a character flaw like a lot of us and like others in the Bible. Jacob was a cheater. He was a trickster, a liar, a manipulator. That's kind of how he worked his way through life. Jacob didn't start very well. He didn't live very well, but he ended well. How do we know he ended well? Because, believe it or not, Jacob the cheater ends up in the Hebrews Hall of faith in Hebrews 11.

Go with me to Hebrews 11:21. And here is what the writer of Hebrews says as a summation of Jacob's life. He says, "By faith, Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff." It goes all the way the end of Jacob's life and to that scene where he is finally reunited with his sons. And he is blessing each one of them. Jacob ended well, but Jacob didn't start well.

You remember the story. Back in Genesis you have Abraham and Sarah who finally gave birth to the promised child, Isaac. And then Isaac married Rebecca. They tried to have children. They were 40 years old when they got together. Not until they were 60 years old did Rebecca finally get pregnant and gave birth to twins. Twenty years they waited for a child. And finally, Rebecca gave birth to two boys- Esau and Jacob, twins. Esau came out first. He was the firstborn, and with that came all the blessings and the birthrights of the firstborn. Jacob came second, but the Bible tells us that Jacob, as he was coming out of the womb, was grabbing onto Esau's heel. He's the heel-catcher. And he became a deceiver and a trickster and a liar and a manipulator. And all that his manipulation, reaching for those things that didn't belong to him and tricking people and manipulating people out of things that were rightfully theirs but that he wanted. That was Jacob. Jacob the cheater, the son of Isaac, the grandson of Abraham, and one of the three major patriarchs of the Old Testament. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. We put them on a shelf up here, don't we? We put them in those high categories. These are heroes of the faith. No, he's just a cracked pot/broken vessel. He had flaws just like every one of us, but God chose him. All the covenant promises that first came to Abraham in Genesis 12 and that went to Isaac, the promised child, through Jacob, Jacob's sons, eventually King David, the lion of David, all the way to Messiah. Jesus Christ has in His genealogy a trickster and a cheat named Jacob. If you have any doubts that God can use you, a broken vessel like you are, just take some encouragement that He used Jacob the cheater.

Now, let's just review quickly some of Jacob's cheating ways. It started with Jacob taking advantage of his brother Esau and tricking him out of his birthright. Remember, Esau came back from a hunting trip. And Esau was famished. He was tired. And Jacob was anticipating this. And he and his mama got together, and they cooked up a pot of porridge. Esau comes back, and he's just, "I'm just...I'm dying. Give me some of that porridge." And Jacob says, "Great. Give me your birthright, and I'll give you something to eat." And Esau traded his birthright for a pot of porridge. He traded his blessing and his birthright to satisfy his flesh. Don't miss that.

Next, a little bit later with the birthright in hand, now Jacob had to trick his own father Isaac, who is aging and losing some of his eyesight. However, he could still smell his son Esau, who was a man of the fields. But Jacob got together with his mother, and they tricked Isaac into giving the blessing, the blessing that belonged to the firstborn. Jacob received that from Isaac. And then a little bit later Jacob goes off and meets Rachel. Jacob wants Rachel. So, he says to Laban her father, "I'll work for you, Laban, for seven years, and you give me your daughter Rachel." Seven years came, and now what goes around comes around. You ever heard that? Now Laban tricks Jacob and makes him marry Leah, the eldest daughter. Jacob wanted Rachel but Laban wasn't about to have Rachel get married before Leah. And so, Jacob does another deal with Laban. "I'll work now for another seven years for Rachel." And he does a little trick with Laban and his flocks.

That brings us up to Genesis 31. And Jacob's trickster ways now are starting to catch up with him. His father-in-law, behind him just as mad as a hornet, being tricked out of his flocks and all of that. And then as Jacob is traveling this direction, he learns that his brother Esau, whom he hasn't seen in years, and the last time they were together it wasn't good. But Esau is in front of him coming toward him. And it's all coming against him. And he's caught in the middle here, and he is stressed.

And that brings us to Genesis 32. At the front end, Jacob tried to appease his brother Esau, and he sends his family and all of his flocks and possessions in a series of caravans, gifts to his brother Esau, just to appease him and hope that he might come in peace. And he divests himself of all of his family. He sends them across the River Jabbok and over with all of his possessions, all of his flocks, all of his family. And Jacob is left all alone on this side of the river. And he camps out there for a night. That's the night he wrestles with God.

Have you ever wrestled with God? And if you did, what would it look like? What would that experience be like? Let's learn from Jacob. I read his story, and I say if I'm ever in a wrestling match with God, I'll probably be empty and alone before God. God gets us in a place where we're empty and we're all alone with him. Look at it in verse 32:22. "The same night Jacob arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone." Away from his family, away from his possessions. He's on one side of the river, and he is all by himself.

The times that I've wrestled with the Lord over things, it's been those times when I have felt all alone. Like there is nobody else who can make this decision. And you're just kind of left alone before God. Some people call this the dark night of the soul. Have you ever experienced one of those dark nights of the soul where the Lord has just kind of cornered you in? You feel empty. You feel all alone before Him. And there you are in the middle of the night. And, yes, sometimes even the most dedicated, faithful followers of Jesus experience those dark nights of the soul where you just feel all alone. As much as you try to get connected with community in the body of Christ, it's still...It's that time when you feel all alone and you wrestle with God. That's where Jacob was.

In verse 24, "And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him." The man who wrestled with Jacob as you go further in the story, most Bible teachers and scholars see this as a pre-Bethlehem, preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. But this man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. All night long through the dark of the night they're in this cosmic wrestling match together. And Jacob wouldn't let go. Jacob was a formidable opponent. And the man didn't prevail. So, what did He do? He injured him. Touched the socket of his hip, dislocated his socket. Kind of reminds me of Mike Tyson, who bit his opponents ear off.

You might be a broken vessel here this morning because there is some deep, deep wound in your life. God wants to heal that. He wants to touch it. He doesn't want you to forget it, because out of our woundedness, out of our brokenness, out of our hurt His glory shines and His power shines and flows through us, doesn't it? But when we wrestle with God, when He is sanctifying us in a deeper, deeper kind of way, sometimes He must touch an area of our life,

maybe take away something that has become too precious to us, that has replaced our devotion to Him and Him alone. Some wound in our life. He will use that wound. Sometimes it's a wound that others have inflicted upon us. Sometimes it's God touching us even ever so gently in a place that leaves a reminder there and a wound. Jacob would never forget this night. Every time he took a step with a little hitch, he was reminded of the time he wrestled with God.

Thirdly this is what happens when you wrestle with God, you've got to come to that point where you surrender, but for a blessing. Look at it in verse 26. "Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day has broken.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.'" You know, the problem is too many of us give up too soon. We are clinging to God. We're wrestling with Him. Jacob wouldn't let go, even though the sun began to creep up over the horizon and the man said, "Okay, Jacob, this match is over with." He said, "No, I will not let you go unless you bless me.

And here is the irony in the Christian life. When you surrender, when you surrender that area of your life that you're wrestling with over God, when you're willing to say, "Not my will, but Yours be done," when you surrender, you win. That's the irony of the Christian life. The world may think surrender is a moment of defeat. It's not. It's a moment of victory. When you move through that time of surrender, when you allow Him to touch that area of life that may feel a little wounded, a little broken, then you're ready to walk in your new identity. Look what happens in verse 27 and following. "And he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' Then he said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel.'" First time the Hebrew people were named Israel. Up to this point—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—we never hear any reference in the Genesis record to the God of Israel until after this time. "Your name shall be Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." You see, Jacob's name was more associated with deceiver, trickster, liar, prankster, manipulator, heel-catcher. Israel means "he struggled with God." what victory for Jacob, who now has a name change. "Jacob, you are no longer identified with your past. You're no longer Jacob. You're Israel. You've got a little wound in your hip there, and you'll never forget how you wrestled with God. And through this I sanctified a part of you. Jacob, you're going to go forward from this point. You're not going to be the deceiver and the trickster and the liar and the manipulator you used to be. You are My chosen Israel."

You become a believer in Jesus Christ, the Bible says that old things are passed away. All things have become new. There is a brand new you. Not a new and improved you. Brand new you. You have a new identity in Christ. You're not who you once were. You're not defined by your past, whatever might have defined you. But you are defined by your new relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Maybe there has been some wrestling going on in your heart. Just be honest with yourself. It's a time to be honest with God and to say, "All right, Lord. I've been wrestling with this for long enough. I surrender that means I win. Let the blessing flow, victory come. "Not my will Lord, but Yours be done."