

Genesis 32:22-32 A Painful Grace 8/12/18

The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.²³ He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. ²⁴ And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. ²⁵ 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. 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." ²⁷ And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."²⁸ Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."²⁹ Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. ³⁰ So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." ³¹ The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. ³² Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.

(Pastor prays)

Here we are in Genesis chapter 32 at the nadir, low point, of Jacob's life. Before this episode and leading up to it, Jacob always seems to be able to stay one step ahead of the consequences. But it feels like his luck is finally running out. When we catch up with him in Chapter 32, he is a man on the run.

Since we last talked about it last week, he's become a very rich man. He has 11 children, hundreds of head of cattle, wives and servants. And he's now decided to head back to his hometown. To get home, he has to leave his father-in-law Laban. Remember, that was not a good departure. While Laban tricked him early on, Jacob got the best of him, like he always does.

Now, it's been 20 years since he's heard from his family back home. He left it in a mess but he wants to smooth things over with his hot-tempered brother, so he sent him a mountain of gifts. But in Chapter 32 verse 6, Jacob hears that Esau hasn't received the gifts. In fact, he has a posse of 400 men riding to meet him. In verses 7 - 8, Jacob goes into survival mode. In verses 9 - 12, he even gets desperate enough to pray, something we've never really seen him do. In verses 13 - 21, he sends even more gifts hoping to

appease wild-man Esau. In verse 22, Jacob has a real sense of being overwhelmed and it's more than he can bear.

He has exhausted all of his resources and all we can do is to wait for the worst. All his hard work, all his ingenuity, resources, and determination are not helping. Jacob is like many of you. He's been called a lot of things but he's never been called a quitter. It's a frustrating and scary thing to be someone who's not a quitter and yet not know what to do in your situation. And in verse 22, Jacob is at the river Jabbok at a loss. Some of you are sitting beside your own river Jabbok, and you are at a loss as to what to do next. And today, I'm hoping that you can see that ...

When Life is Overwhelming, God's Grace is Overwhelming Still

This passage is less about Jacob than it is about God. And your issue is less about you than it is about God and His grace. Let's look at the stages of grace in the story.

God's Grace is a Pursuing Grace

All of Jacob's life he's been running from one self-inflicted problem to the next. He knows about God. He believes in God. He has even prayed to God, but he doesn't really *know* God. God pursues him. Some have used this passage, especially verse 24, to preach about prevailing prayer... holding onto God til He blesses you.

It's a great thought, but it's not what it is about. Jacob isn't pursuing *God*. *God* is pursuing *him*. In verses 22 - 23, he is stripped down. The women are gone, the money, the children are gone. All of his hard work over the last 20 years is gone. Look at the first phrase in verse 24; Jacob was left alone. And now he sits and stares into the pitch-black darkness of the terrible unknown.

Have you ever felt like that? Not knowing what's next? Not knowing what to do? Not having anyone to turn to? Loneliness and darkness of your soul is a hard providence used to create a thirst and hunger for God. In verse 24, Jacob, for the first time in his life, has no scheme that will work, no angle he can take and no real hope that things are going to work out.

But that is how it has to be. Jacob had to encounter God alone, without his mother as a crutch or his father as an excuse. Alone - you and God. This is not about anyone else or

anything else. This was the darkest night of Jacob's life and it was his sin that got him there and God's pursuing grace that will get him out of there.

Let me ask you something. How many times in your life has God spared and provided for you? How many times has He loved and cared for you? For you sitting here who are not serving Christ, how many times have you heard the Gospel?

When I say the Gospel, here's what I mean. How many times have you heard that: God is holy and man, you are a sinner separated from God. Your only hope of being reconciled to God is Jesus Christ and His death on the cross. He died in place of sinners. God raised Him from the dead, and the way you can be saved is to repent of your sins and believe in Jesus. How many times have you heard that? Why have you heard that so many times in your life? Because God's grace is a *pursuing* grace.

God's Grace is a Determined Grace

Verse 24 is a terrible verse. Let's read it. *And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.* Let me explain just a little bit about verse 24.

Jacob was left alone, he's sitting there in the darkness, he's wondering where his brother Esau might be and look what happens. A man came to wrestle with him until the breaking of the day. A man. Now we don't know who that is by reading verse 24 but we do know who it is by reading the rest of the passage. This man wrestling with Jacob dislocated his hip just by touching it. Also, Jacob knows that he's got to name the place "the face of God." Why? Because he has been face-to-face with God and lived.

We also know that when Jacob asked, "tell me your name," he wouldn't tell him his name. We also know that the man wrestling him says, "let me go for the dawn is breaking." Why? Because if the sun comes up you'll see God and no man can see God face-to-face and live. So here is Jacob in a wrestling match that verse 24 says goes on all night long. Maybe wrestling for 8 to 10 hours, but just to be conservative, let's make it 6 hours. That has to be terribly exhausting. For you out there who are not inclined to be athletic in any way, you could be having a hard time relating to this. I want you to go home after lunch, go out in your neighborhood and take off running as hard as you can go, just in a full all-out sprint, and see how long you can stay in that sprint. 30 seconds.

60 seconds. Coronary hits. 90 seconds maybe. We get winded going up the steps. So here they are wrestling all night long. Here is this representative of God, maybe a pre-incarnate Christ, maybe an angel of the Lord.

What is God doing here in verse 24? He is wearing him down, stripping away his self-sufficiency, stripping away his pride....Getting victory over his sin. Look, your sin is stubborn. Lust, greed, anger and resentment. Let's just take something as simple as maybe before you became a Christian you had bad language, a bad mouth, but through sanctification growing in the Lord you got control over that. You think you have mastered your foul language until you get in your car and somebody cuts you off! You go back to cussing in such a way that Satan is blushing.

That is what the Puritans called a besetting sin. I would recommend reading everything John Owen has written. It's hard to read, you have to read it slowly, but it would be worth it. John Owen famously said, "Be killing sin or sin will be killing you." But the truth is that so few of us in Christendom actually put up a fight. You might say, "Well I struggle with anger" but are you really actually struggling with it? Have you made it your enemy, have you declared holy war?

In this passage God is grinding down the stubbornness in Jacob. That didn't do the trick, so God took it a step further. Notice in verse 25. God had come to wrestle Jacob into submission physically and spiritually, to take the power from the man, to reduce the man, to even hurt the man with a mere touch.

In verse 25 it says his hip is dislocated. Now all of your power for any contact sport is in your hips. His strength has been taken. Certainly God is the God of our weaknesses. We take our weaknesses to Him and we take our struggles to Him and He walks us through those. He's with us in our weaknesses, but Leonard Ravenhill said that God doesn't just want our weakness; God wants our strength. When God is at work in our lives, there is no instant sanctification, there is no instant spiritual maturity.

Before God would bless Jacob as he asked, He weakened him. Alistair Begg is a great Scottish preacher. He says the reason that we know so little about blessing is that we actually run away from God's crippling. God breaks Jacob in order to bless him. What

pain is God using in your life to turn your heart and eyes and trust to Him? God is a God of pursuing grace and a God of determined grace.

God's Grace is a Transforming Grace

The wrestling match continues although Jacob is hurt. He is clinging to God. He is hurting but he is clinging. Now we've been talking a lot about God; let me just take a look at Jacob just for a moment. He is clinging and says, "I will not let you go." We don't cling to God. We don't cling to His Word, His church, His people. We don't cling to His ways.

We don't cling to the Lord because we cling to so much else. We cling to people, habits, secret sins. We cling to the past, our hurt feelings. Jacob is clinging and asking for a blessing. He doesn't want God yet, but he wants a blessing. He wants a breakthrough. You don't need a *breakthrough*. You need a *breakdown*. You need God to bring you down. Look at the text. Here comes the whole story. In verse 27, "What's your name?" It's the single most moving episode of Jacob's life. Notice what God asks Jacob. God did not ask Jacob, "What have you done, Jacob?" He didn't say, "Jacob, recount for me all of your specific sins." Your actions, foul mouth, lusts, hatred and pride, these aren't the problem. What you do isn't the problem. It's who you are that is the problem.

Richard Owen Roberts has written several books. One book that he has written is entitled *Repentance*. It is not a bestseller and it is not for children. He says repentance is not just turning from what you have done, repentance is recognizing who you are. Like Paul says in Ephesians 2, without Christ, we are children of wrath like the rest of mankind. But God... God calls for the question and Jacob confesses. I'm Jacob, a trickster, cheater, fraud and fake.

This is the bottom of the issue. This is a confession of guilt and an admission of need. This is an end to the running. That's when God works; when you finally see that it's you and your need. That's when God supernaturally changes us. God changes him. You are no longer a cheater. You are now Israel. God prevails. Here is an Old Testament picture of this New Testament truth of how God changes us in Christ. It's not us trying to change ourselves. It's you seeing yourself as a sinner in light of God's holiness and

trusting that Christ's work on the cross alone is enough to save you. And when you turn from your sin and turned to Christ, just like Jacob, your name and nature are changed.

There's one last departing picture of Jacob I think is worth noting how it is written in the Bible. I'd like to close by reading of verse 29 – 30. Jacob is a changed man now. Before I read it, let me remind you of Jacob when he left his home way back in chapter 28. He left his mom and dad and brother in such a mess that the Bible says that when he left there, the sun went down, symbolizing darkness. It's a darkness that he would live in right up to this very moment. But now, he's a changed man.

*So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." ³¹ The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. Look at him there in verse 30 – 31. So Jacob called the name of the place "Peniel" saying, "I have seen God face-to-face and yet my life has been delivered." And the sun rose upon him showing that there is hope and the power of Christ. He's limping and it's what Paul is talking about in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9. *So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."**

God's grace is sufficient for you in Christ. His pursuing grace has been after you all your life. His determined grace will never give up on you regardless of how you fight. And His transforming grace will set you free to love Him in Jesus Christ. His grace is greater than all our sins.

(Pastor prays)