# Audio file

[November 12, 2023 - Genesis 32:22-32, Wrestling.mp3](https://1drv.ms/u/s!AAqnVZE12aJNhphR)

# Transcript

Let's turn our hearts to God in prayer. Father, God, we thank you for this incredible gift of your word. We thank you that your spirit is among us and guides us as we seek out your will in it. And as we are reminded of your incredible gifts, as we see the stories of your people, as we see the teachings of your spirit and of your heart. We ask, Lord, that the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing to you. O Lord, our God, our rock and Redeemer, Amen.

Reading of the Passage:

We're going to turn to Genesis this morning, Genesis chapter 32. We're going to read the story of Jacob crossing the Jabbok River. I still remember how astonished I was in an early college course on how much detail there is in this book. It's incredible how much is in here, and so we're going to look again at the story of Jacob this morning. Let's start reading.

Verse 22. That night, Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maid servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions, so Jacob was left alone, and the man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the men. Then the man said let me go for it is daybreak.

But Jacob replied I will not let you go unless you bless me.

The man asked him what is your name? Jacob, he answered.

Then the man said your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.

Jacob said. Please tell me your name.

But he replied, why do you ask me my name? Then he blessed him there.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying it is because I saw God face to face and yet my life was spared.

The sun rose above him as he passed Pinnell, and he was limping because of his hip. Therefore, to this day, the Israelites do not eat the tendon. Attached to the socket of the hip. Because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

So far, the reading of God's word.

SERMON

In preparing this sermon, I was thinking of a conversation I had several years ago with two guys named Carlos. One of the Carlos’ was originally from Brazil and the other Carlos was originally from Africa. It's really fun on a big job site to run into guys and it doesn't take more than 5 minutes to realize the three of us are all Christians. And so that made a really different day for us.

One of the things that Carlos from Africa said to me, as a new immigrant, he asked, Jim, why don't Canadians pray? I looked at him and He said, “I’m one of thirteen children, if I didn't pray, I didn't get shoes. But if I prayed for shoes, I got shoes.” And I looked at Carlos and I said, “Carlos I think we have it too good.”

A little while later, Carlos says. “Why don't Canadians go to church?” And I gave him the same answer, “Carlos, I think we have it too good.”

I have often thought about that conversation and sometimes I think that's only part of the answer. I think part of the answer is sometimes we think we can do it on our own. So maybe it's a combination of both of those things.

And I thought of that when I started looking at Jacob's life. As we look at this passage this morning, we get a reminder of who Jacob is and what he was up to. You know Jacob's name? It means ‘deceiver’, kind of the ‘schemer’. The one who works it out for himself.

I’m reminded of some of the highlights of his life, some of the things he worked out on his own. When you think about Jacob, you remember that he always had a scheme, always a deception. He worked seven years for one woman and then ended up working another seven years for another. He was trying to work it out for himself, like he could earn his way.

He found a way to steal his brother's birthright with a pot of soup or stew or porridge. He deceived his dad and with the help of his mom, to get the blessing as the oldest child, the birthright. He was not the oldest, he stole the birthright and then had to leave quickly because he knew he was in trouble with his brother.

After working for Laban all of those years for his 2 wives, he starts to work for a wage instead of just for his wives. And what does he do? Through animal husbandry, a little bit of trickery and a little bit of conniving, he figured a way in which he could build up his flocks. He took all the speckled ones, all the ones with stripes, all the ones that weren't pure white and when they were mating, he put up sticks with stripes cut into them in front of the livestock. By doing this, he figured he would get some more striped animals. It was a superstition, a little bit of a fertility god kind of thing, but he was always trying to find a way to make it work for himself.

And then he leaves Laban, and even that is a bit of a conflict, a little bit of a challenge.

And how are they going to work this out together? Take a chance and read through the story? It's only a few chapters. It's a fun story. It's a fun story because you get a picture of this man trying to ‘make it’, trying to ‘get there on his own’.

Then there are all of the pitfalls and all the struggles. Now we come to the part of the story where Jacob takes his family and all of his possessions and sets out to return to his home area, the return to his brother. And what's he do? He sends big gifts to Esau because the last thing Esau said to him was “when I get the chance, you're a dead man”. He knows he's still in trouble with Esau, so he sends parts of his flock as gifts. He sends a part of what he's been blessed with as gifts. He's trying to impress his brother as he works his way towards him, he sends off more and more gifts.

We don't understand households like this, right? He was the head of a big tribe, and he had a lot of possessions. When he was traveling through, the locals didn't like him because with all these flocks and possessions, and people, they're going to make a mess and they're going to impact the farmland that they travel through. They're going to mess up the land. As he approaches his homeland, he sends his wives, he sends his children, he sends his maid servants all on ahead of him. Everyone is across the river and that's where we meet Jacob this morning.

He's by himself. And what happens? Well, all by himself, Jacob meets God. For the rest of this sermon, I want to talk about wrestlers and winners. We read in Verse 22, “so Jacob was left alone, and the man wrestled with him till daybreak”. “the man” Jacob doesn't know who he is exactly but they wrestled for the entire night. Well, I don't know about you, but when I played hockey, I was glad for a 30 second shift. Just imagine being that focused on wrestling with someone for the entire night. It takes everything he’s got. He can’t lose his concentration for a moment. He needs to keep his mind in the game for the entire night. It’s not like when we're sitting in church. Some of you understand. I know how it goes. I listen to sermons. Sometimes your mind wanders and you wonder what you're going to barbecue in the afternoon, right? But for Jacob, there is no chance to be diverted. He had to be focused on only one thing through the whole night. Just imagine how exhausted he must have been. And then at the very end of the night. The Lord says, ‘OK, I have to put an end to this’, and he reaches out and touches Jacob on his hip and wrenches the joint. We know that the 2 wrestlers were never equally matched. God reaches out and touches Jacob and instantly becomes the winner.

But just imagine what he could have done. We've got the all-powerful God wrestling with Jacob. It would been easy for God to have defeated him at any time during that night. And yet there was something that Jacob had to learn in this process. God was teaching Jacob a lesson. When all of a sudden, he can't do it for himself on his own, when he's in pain from an injury, what does Jacob have left? He grabs hold of God and refuses to let go.

This is an Incredible picture. The deceiver, the schemer, the guy who's always got an angle, the guy who's always out there. Many of us have met people who are like this. That’s the guy Jacob is. And we know him and sometimes we're wary of him because we're going to end up on the wrong side of his scheme. We're going to end up on the wrong side of his attempts.

And suddenly, all Jacob can do is hang on? That's all he's got left. I don't want to moralize scripture and say there's a moral in this story, but I think the examples of God's people are given to us to see that honest, broken people still come to God. You and I can still come to God. What is the battle that you're facing? What is the struggle that you have? What is the thing that you need to let go? Jacob, finally, finally, lets go of his own strength and hangs on to God’s strength.

I think it's an incredible picture. When we see that dawn is coming and God puts an end to the night of wrestling, He wins. In all the wrestling, God simply reaches out and he wins. But he wins in two ways. He wins, first of all in the physical sense because there is no beating God in a wrestling match, there is no way that we can do without him. There's no way that he is going to be subdued by us. But also, he wins because in Jacob losing, Jacob also wins. Yeah, look at what he's left with. He's left with hanging on for dear life. And some days that's the best we can do. That's the best we can do when we've got challenges, when we don't know which way to go, when we're not sure what is next, is simply just to hang on for dear life. And that is when God gives Jacob the blessing.

I think it's an incredible picture because when you understand that Jacob actually wins because he finally realizes that he can't do it in his own strength, he can't do it when his focus is on himself. He can't do it with his scheming, God says, ‘I have a better way.’ Jacob stole the blessing….you can’t steal blessing, Jacob. He used trickery to get flocks…..not that way either, Jacob. He tried to earn the blessing as he worked hard and developed his flocks….you can’t earn your way, Jacob. And then when he can no longer stack the odds in his favor no matter what he does, he finally understands what the source of blessing for him is. It's simply a gift and the grace of God.

I think that's the hardest part of the gospel message in a society where we think we can do it all on our own. I once heard a Carpenter say, “the worst thing for the Carpenter and for the carpentry construction industry is Home Depot. Their slogan is: You can do it. We can help” I’m a Carpenter. I've seen people attempt all kinds of things on their own and I know you can't always do it right. But what about the more serious parts of life? More serious of parts of life where we say, “I can do it. Yeah, I can. I can figure that out. I don't really need to worry about that. I can organize my own relationships. I don't need to follow God's guidance. I can organize my own household. It's not hard to do.” What is the thing that you are battling with today? The thing Jacob gave up there during the wrestling match. Because it is in giving up, that we receive. We really don't get it from God until we say, “I can't do it myself”. Another example in scripture is the example of Peter. Peter, who says “I know who you are, Lord”. And what does God say to him? “Get behind me Satan”.

Jesus tells us to “come to me. I will give you rest.” The strong man (Jacob) now limps. But in giving up, he receives blessing. When we're carrying it all on our own, God says “come to me. I will give you rest. Come to me. My burden is not heavy. Come to me and give up.”

I don't want to say that there's nothing left for us to do. I don't think that's true. But I think now we must have the attitude that Jacob had because he realized that all he has is from God. All of the blessings he received were undeserved. He can’t earn it. It's a gift. All the trickery he tried didn’t work. All he had to do was to receive. He couldn’t steal it. He couldn’t earn it. We also can't get it in any other way except to just to say to God, thank you, Jesus. Thank you for the incredible sacrifice you've given.

Like the changing of the seasons, we're reminded of God's faithfulness. He's told us this is how it's going to happen every season again. And we all know winter is coming. We all love the days of fall, but do we occasionally reflect on that it's a gift from God?

Do we reflect on what the incredible riches he's given us are? That's what I reflected on in this example of Jacob this morning, this week, and the last few weeks when I thought about this passage. This is the dominant thing that's waved over me every time. But now it's your turn. Your turn to say, “OK, I no longer want to be the deceiver. I want to be Israel. The one who wrestled with God. And won.” Jacob won because he lost. The whole nation was named as the “wrestlers with God”. And why did they win? Because Jesus came to earth, the ultimate gift, and he came through them and through this, we are now blessed. The wrestler. Lost and won. This is such an incredible picture of God's desire to be in relationship with us as we wrestle, we lose, and yet we win. Thanks be to God,

let's pray. Father God. Each of us has something that we wrestle with. I thank you when we can share in fellowship with each other. I thank you that we can share it and lean on you, Holy Spirit, and I thank you for giving us the confidence to remember that when we give it up, You shine through us. When we give it up, we are blessed. Help us to receive your blessing. Father, help us to be open to the incredible gifts you give us. And thank you for the reminder we have this morning of Jacob. We thank you, Father, son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.