

Genesis (2011) 32B

- If the story of Jacob has a climactic moment, then the end of Chapter 32 must be it
 - Jacob's story is easily the most complex of the three patriarchs
 - Abraham's life was mostly a testimony to faithfulness
 - He was willing to take risks and shoulder the burdens God gave
 - And except for a few times when he succumbed to impatience, he walked a straight line with God
 - Isaac's life was long but largely uneventful
 - Apart from sharing some of Abraham's impatience, he maintained the testimony his father established
 - His notable weakness was in favoring the wrong child for all the wrong reasons
 - Jacob is easily the most complex patriarch in the record of Genesis
 - Probably because of his father's favoritism for his brother, Jacob developed a strong sense of self-determination
 - And as a result, Jacob's life is filled with trials and struggles, both against men and God
 - While Jacob knew and followed the Lord, he also had a troubling tendency to double down on every plan God revealed
 - He schemed, deceived, and manipulated others to obtain the outcomes he preferred
 - Often his schemes were working to the same objective as God, but he complicated God's work unnecessarily and introduced sinful consequences
 - Other times, Jacob would actually work against God's purposes, leading God to step in and short circuit Jacob's efforts

- As Jacob worked in this way, he believed he was working with God's blessing, but in reality he was fighting against God
 - Like one man rowing in the opposite direction of his shipmates, Jacob was working against God
 - And his relationship with the Lord has reached a critical point where he needs to cease working against God
 - So as Jacob prepares to return to the land, God makes an extraordinary appearance to Jacob to teach an important lesson
- Jacob has heard of Esau's arrival to meet him on the occasion of Jacob's return to the land
 - And Jacob fears that Esau intends to hurt him, so he has divided his family into two camps in the hope at least one group survives
 - He expects to encounter Esau tomorrow, so as the day comes to an end, Jacob makes final preparations

[Gen. 32:22](#) Now he arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.

[Gen. 32:23](#) He took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had.

[Gen. 32:24](#) Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.

[Gen. 32:25](#) When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him.

[Gen. 32:26](#) Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

[Gen. 32:27](#) So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."

[Gen. 32:28](#) He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed."

- Jacob is sitting on the east side of the Jordon river in the Gilead region
 - There is a tributary feeding the Jordon river called the Jabbok
 - The name Jabbok means empty, or demoralized or devastated
 - The ford runs east to west through the Gilead, and then it angles southwest until it meets the Jordan
 - Jacob is coming from Haran, so he's headed southwest toward Bethel



- So he's ready to cross from the north to the south side of the Jabbok
- All the while Esau is coming up from the south in Edom to meet Jacob
- The river crossing takes some time and it involves some effort
 - So Jacob helps his family across the river, including all the children, livestock and servants
 - They are headed in Esau's direction, so Jacob doesn't follow his family over the river
 - Perhaps it was too dark for Jacob to cross or perhaps he was too tired to make it across himself
 - But it's likely that Jacob remained on the north side of the river out of fear of Esau
 - The river provided a natural barrier to Esau's army, so Jacob stays behind to protect himself from Esau's attack
- Jacob is all alone in the Gilead
 - He has literally no one but himself and nothing but darkness
 - There is a poetic irony in Jacob's situation

- He has always been a man who relied on his own strength while taking advantage of others
- But now he's got nothing and no one
- He's hidden himself attempting to secure his own safety
- And in the morning, he faces an uncertain and frightening future
- So under these circumstances, God begins to bring Jacob to the end of himself, to teach a lesson
 - The text says that Jacob wrestled a man until daybreak
 - The text brings the news in such an abrupt manner, we're a bit confused over how this situation developed
 - Did the "man" attack Jacob as he slept?
 - Was it an ambush?
 - We don't know, because the text makes no attempt to explain those details
 - They don't matter because the attacker is no ordinary man, as the text will make clear
- They wrestle literally all night
 - The word for wrestle refers to hand-to-hand combat
 - It comes from a Hebrew root that means dust, as in to get dusty on the ground
 - But don't imagine sports wrestling
 - Instead, think a brawl, two men fighting for their lives
 - Who is this man and why has he attacked Jacob?
 - The way Moses narrates the story, he allows us to wonder at first
 - In fact, we might suspect that Esau has found a way to circumvent the river and attack Jacob anyway
 - But this man is not Esau
 - In fact, this is no man at all

- In v.28 we learn that Jacob has been struggling with God Himself
 - That tells us that this is an appearance of the angel of the Lord, Who is the Second Person of the Godhead
 - A physical representation of God, this is a pre-incarnate Christ
 - Notice it was God who engaged Jacob
 - God attacked Jacob leading to this wrestling
 - The Lord wants the confrontation so He can teach Jacob by it
- After a significant period of time has gone by, Moses says the Lord has not prevailed against Jacob
 - How can the Lord fail to prevail over the strength of a mere man?
 - Doesn't God have enough power to win this engagement?
 - Certainly God had the power to win a test of strength, but this wasn't a test of strength
 - This was a test of wills
 - Jacob's will was directed toward defending himself and defeating his enemies
 - Everything Jacob does is calculated to obtaining what he wants and undermining his adversaries
 - The problem is Jacob's life was Jacob's will
 - His will was not submitted to the Lord Who has called him into covenant
 - That prideful, stubborn, deterministic will was the barrier God was determined to penetrate
 - And in a test of wills, God finally resorts to entering into a physical confrontation with Jacob
 - Jacob's will is so unbendable that even after hours of fighting for his life, Jacob hasn't called upon the Lord or sought the Lord's intervention

- Imagine had Jacob called to the Lord at any point in this struggle, he would have discovered the Lord right in his midst
- Instead, Jacob continues to fight in his own power
- And in one of the chief ironies of the entire Bible, Jacob is fighting against the very One with the power to save him from the fight
- So after a time, the Lord decides to increase the pressure on Jacob
 - He touches the thigh of Jacob and sets his hip out of joint
 - The Hebrew for the word touch is *naga* and literally means strike
 - This was a blow to the hip strong enough to knock the femur out of its socket
 - This kind of blow requires strength beyond the ability of a normal man
 - And the effect would have been incredibly painful for Jacob
 - I once dislocated my shoulder wrestling, and the pain remains to this day as one of the most painful injuries I've felt
 - The pain of a dislocated hip is even greater
 - Also, the injury would have completely immobilized Jacob
 - At that point, Jacob would have had no chance of prevailing against an attacker
 - And at that point, the entire nature of the struggle changes
 - Where before Jacob was fighting with the attacker, now Jacob is clinging to him
 - The attacker is trying to get away, but Jacob won't let him go
- Why has Jacob switched from defending himself to holding on to the attacker?
 - Because he has come to recognize that this man is a representative of God
 - Jacob isn't sure who this person is exactly, but he knows he has supernatural powers

- The man set his hip out of socket with a single blow
- And the manner of that blow must have convinced Jacob that this was no ordinary man
 - And as the lights came on in Jacob's head, he begins to sense that this encounter was intended for reasons other than his destruction
- Notice in v.26 when the angel of the Lord demands to be released from Jacob, then Jacob begs for a blessing
 - Once again, could the Lord escape Jacob's clutch had He wanted to leave?
 - Of course, therefore we must conclude that the Lord is playing a part in this encounter to prompt certain responses from Jacob
 - And Jacob is slowly but surely beginning to get the point
 - Jacob now lies wounded, tired and daybreak was coming
 - With daybreak comes his encounter with Esau
 - And in his condition, Jacob is as desperate as any man could be
- But now that he knows he has the Lord in his grasp, he is completely dependent on God for his rescue
 - He isn't going to let the Lord leave without an assurance that the Lord will protect and bless Jacob
 - Finally after an entire night of physical confrontation, followed by a serious injury, only then does Jacob begin to seek the Lord's blessing
- God has given every man physical strength, intellectual abilities, and some degree of wealth and resources
 - These things are ours so that we might enjoy life serving God
 - But they are not replacements for our dependence upon God
 - In fact, we are equally dependent on God regardless of how much strength or how many resources He has given us

- But our resources and physical abilities can become the things we trust in for our protection
 - And even for a man or woman of faith, we may be tempted to believe they are the manifestation of God's power in our life
- The old adage that God helps those who help themselves is a reflection of that mentality
 - I wonder if Jacob would have been a man who might have agreed with that thinking
 - But the Bible teaches that the opposite is true
 - God helps those who recognize their dependence on Him and turn to Him seeking a blessing
 - This is the place God has delivered Jacob
 - All his wealth is gone, all his family, all his servants
 - He is alone and wounded
 - No scheming will solve the problem and he has no hope apart from God
 - And so he calls to God clinging to Him for grace
- The irony is this has always been Jacob's situation, though he didn't see it that way
 - He is a man blessed by a promise given to him by God, and that promise was given to Jacob, Paul reminds us, before Jacob was even born
 - We are also entirely dependent on God's grace for the ability to serve Him and accomplish those things He has decreed
 - Jacob's lesson to us all is that we ought not force God to bring us to the end of ourselves to prove to us that we can't trust in ourselves or our resources
 - God is prepared to bring us to a low point of desperation if necessary in order that we might learn what it means to cling to the Lord
- In response to Jacob's demand, the Lord asks Jacob what is his name?

- Here again, the Lord knew Jacob's name, so the question was intended to provoke a thought in Jacob's head
 - As Jacob answers, he must have remembered the name's meaning
 - Supplanter, deceiver, a man who contends with men to obtain his blessing
- Now the Lord changes Jacob's name
 - No longer would he be called Jacob, but now it would be Israel
 - The name Israel means to strive with God
 - The sense of the word is God fights for Israel
 - Where before Jacob fought with men in his own power, now he will see the Lord fight on his behalf
 - This renaming of Jacob is prophetic of both him individually and for the nation of Israel overall
 - God will defend Jacob as He has been doing all along
 - And God will forever honor His covenant with Abraham's descendants, defending and upholding the nation of Israel
- Remember when Abram saw his name changed to Abraham?
 - It happened in Chapter 17 when Abram took the sign of the covenant, circumcision
 - His new name incorporated a part of God's name, signifying he was now bound to God by God's promises
 - Now we see God doing the same for Jacob
 - Jacob has turned to the Lord and begged for God's mercy and blessing
- And with Jacob's turning to God, God confirms his covenant with Jacob
 - First, God gives Jacob a reminder in his physical body, in the form of a limp caused by the hip injury
 - Secondly, God changes Jacob's name to include reference to God

- Jacob finally asks for the identity of the One blessing him

[Gen. 32:29](#) Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there.

[Gen. 32:30](#) So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved."

[Gen. 32:31](#) Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh.

[Gen. 32:32](#) Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip.

- God answers Jacob by asking why Jacob needed to ask his name
 - God's point was that Jacob already knows the answer
 - Jacob's request for a blessing proved he knew this man had a supernatural origin
 - Others in scripture have had similar encounters with the angel of the Lord and received similar responses
 - Men who encounter God know
- Sure enough, Jacob knew this was God, for he names the place Peniel, which literally means the face of God
 - Jacob explains this was a place he met God face to face
 - Though Jacob didn't literally see God's face, for if he had seen God in that way, he would have died according to scripture
 - But Jacob did have an encounter with God in a special way
 - And Jacob will never be the same Jacob again
- In fact, this change of names will begin a new pattern in the record of Genesis
 - At times, Moses will continue to refer to Jacob as Jacob, while at other times Moses will use his new name, Israel
 - Those times when Moses uses the name Jacob will indicate moments when Jacob is reverting to his old nature, living in his flesh

- And those times when Moses uses the name Israel, it's a sign that he is walking with the Lord in his new nature
- Finally, Jacob limps away to his encounter with Esau
 - Moses mentions a Jewish tradition of not eating the ligaments of the hip, though this tradition has disappeared from Jewish practice