

Fighting for Life

Intro

Gen 32:22-32

The throw-down at Jabbok

- Based on the description we have in verse 24, Jacob's wrestling match may seem to have come out of nowhere. But in reality, this moment was charged with tension. Jacob's past was catching up and, simultaneously, God was closing in.

God Wrestles With Men...

- All Christians know this experientially. It's how the Christian life begins.
- Far from just getting us "started", repentance and faith mark the whole of the Christian life. Fighting against sin and fighting the fight of faith are everyday necessities for our growth in godliness.
 - God wrestles with men to deepen our sense of the sinfulness of sin (repentance) – this hurts.
 - God wrestles with men to strengthen the conviction that He alone satisfies the heart (faith) – this heals and strengthens.

1. Because men need to be humbled

- God is committed to get down to the root idols of our lives, to kill our pride and self-reliance.

"We can have no power from Christ unless we live in a persuasion that we have none of our own." -**John Owen**

"Don't imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call "humble" nowadays: he won't be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who's always telling you that, of course, he's nobody. Probably all you'll think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him, it will be because you feel a bit envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He won't be thinking about himself at all. There I must stop. If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you're not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed."

-**C.S. Lewis**, *Christian Behavior*

▶ Jesus & the hurting and healing of Simon Peter

2. Because growth doesn't happen automatically

- Jacob was a new man with a new identity, but God still had much work to do.
 - Ch 32 – a new limp and a new name
 - Ch 33 – a restored relationship with Esau
 - Ch 34 – a trial and a setback

- God comes after Jacob. He makes Himself known and puts Jacob in places where he can experience grace and be changed.

35:9

- God pursues us and comes to us through the 'means of grace' (Scripture, prayer, preaching, church fellowship) so that we can experience more of Him, grow in faith, be convicted of sin, and be transformed.

“No one can attain any degree of holiness without God working in his life, but just as surely no one will attain it without effort on his own part.” -**Jerry Bridges**

- Repentance is a way of life. Jabbok is where the Christian lives his life – the place of repentance and faith, of being bruised and being strengthened.

3. Because it strengthens faith & faith is our victory

32:26-31

- It's interesting that nothing in this passage gives us the sense that Jacob ever really had the upper hand in the fight.

“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” (**Hebrews 11:6**)

- The NT makes it clear that we are both justified *and* sanctified by faith in Christ. In Galatians, Paul argues strongly against the notion that we are justified by faith, but then sanctified by works.

“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith.” (**1 Jn. 5:4**)

How does God wrestle with us in a way that tests and ultimately strengthens our faith?

- Trials, temptations, losses, and crosses become opportunities for us to give in to unbelief (anger at God or running from God) or embrace the painful and renewing work that takes shape when we stay and wrestle with God, believing His Word over against our feelings and circumstances.
- The only reason Jacob embraced pain that night was because he got an inkling of Whom it was He was wrestling. Jacob was miserable and desperate – so desperate that when the angel said, “Let me go”, Jacob had the audacity (faith) to wrestle back and say “no”. In that moment, Jacob believed the angel had more for him than the angel was letting on. This is why it can be said that Jacob *prevailed*.

“The church too faces testing and struggle. Indeed, we pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” thereby acknowledging that God may allow us to be put in testing situations, but through his grace we may overcome them. So Calvin aptly comments on the parallels between our experience and Jacob’s: ‘What was once exhibited under a visible form to our father Jacob is daily fulfilled in the individual members of the church, namely in their temptations it is necessary for them to wrestle with God. He is said, indeed, to tempt us in a different manner from Satan; but because he alone is the Author of our crosses and afflictions, ... he is said to tempt us when he [tests our faith] He having challenged us to this contest at the same time furnishes us with means of resistance, so that he both fights *against* us and *for* us. In short, such is his apportioning of this conflict that while he assails us with the one hand, he defends us with the other; yea, in as much as he supplies us with more strength to resist than he employs in opposing us, we may truly and properly say, that he fights *against* us with his *left* hand, and *for* us with his *right* hand. For while he lightly opposes us, he supplies invincible strength whereby we overcome.” -**Gordon Wenham**, WBC: Genesis, p. 303

- God grant us to be the kind of men who fight for life – wrestling with God: men marked by repentance and faith, humility and boldness, amazed by grace and growing in godliness.