

Jacob Meets Jesus 10-14-07

Genesis 32

Jacob is about to experience what will be the biggest milestone in his life, so let's look back on the smaller steps that led him here. He was born with a promise that his older brother would serve him. (Genesis 25:23) He bargained with his brother who was in a moment of weakness and obtained his birthright. (Genesis 25:33) Then, at his mother's instigation, he stole the blessing his father meant to give his brother through deceit. (Genesis 27:30) Fleeing to Padan Aram in fear of death threats from his brother, Esau, he had a dream at Bethel. God promised to go with him, multiply his offspring, give him the Promised Land, and return him safely. (Genesis 28:15) He had a twenty-year struggle with his father-in-law uncle, who was nearly as cunning as Jacob. Jacob came out of it with 4 wives, 12 children, and great wealth in livestock and servants. In the last chapter, God kept Laban from taking back Jacob's wages by warning him in a dream that he should not say anything good or bad to Jacob. (Genesis 31:24) Now, 20 years after leaving home, Jacob is about to enter back into the Promised Land and face the one from whom he originally fled, his brother Esau.

Our passage today begins with the sighting of a camp of angels. Not far from Jacob's camp there was a group of angels, so Jacob named the location Double Camp (*Mahanaim*). We aren't told why he was able to see them. They visibly met him in Bethel as he left home and now as he returns, though they were always with him. Angels aren't always manifest in a way that is visible to the human eye. It does tell us that there is about to be a supernatural encounter. He still didn't realize that the angels aren't in a certain geographical location, but wherever he was. The house of God and the camp of God aren't places on a map. They are with the heirs of salvation. (Hebrews 1:14) Wherever you are is *Mahanaim*.

The first line of defense was to send out messengers to not only notify Esau that he was coming, but to see Esau's attitude and strengths. If leaving Laban unannounced set him up for potential disaster, he wasn't about to show up and surprise Esau. Even though Esau was south in Edom, Jacob wasn't taking any chances. He let Esau know where he had been, how God had blessed him with wealth, and asked for Esau's favor in the humblest of terms calling him lord and himself his servant. I see this as a sign of spiritual growth and a desire to repay Esau for the past deceptions. (Luke 19:8)

⁶ When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, "We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him." That wasn't what Jacob wanted to hear. In fact, it set his knees to knocking. 400 men was the common size in that day for a militia. For Esau not having the blessing, he hadn't done too bad for himself. The 400 were not necessarily servants, but were at least close allies.

⁷ In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. ⁸ He thought, "If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape." Jacob immediately went

Commented [notes1]: 23 The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

Commented [notes2]: 33 But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.

Commented [notes3]: 30 After Isaac finished blessing him and Jacob had scarcely left his father's presence, his brother Esau came in from hunting.

Commented [notes4]: 15 I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Commented [notes5]: 24 Then God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream at night and said to him, "Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad."

Commented [notes6]: 14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

Commented [notes7]: 8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

to work planning what to do when attacked. Jacob, Jacob, Jacob! Where is your faith in the promises of God? Didn't you just see God protect you from Laban and the gang only days earlier? Don't you remember the promises of God and how He has been faithful to you these last 20 years? But then, we could say the same thing to ourselves when everything seems to collapse around us. (Proverbs 29:25) Like Jacob, we start figuring out what to do in the worst-case scenario. We so underestimate God and His promises that it is as though we had never seen His goodness in our life before! How is it that we can learn so little from past experiences? (Deuteronomy 24:18) Did Jacob really think that he could get away even if he sacrificed half his people? And did the irony of becoming two camps not remind him of the camp of angels that he just named "two camps". Do we really think we can save ourselves from calamity? Maybe, just maybe, he should have remembered the presence of those angels and prayed first before he jumped headlong into his own plan.

Commented [notes8]: 25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.

Commented [notes9]: 18 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.

He acted first and prayed second. ⁹ Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,' He invoked the God of his fathers, the God who made the promises to them that he is now the heir of, and reminds Him of His word, sort of. I never read that God was going to prosper him. Perhaps that is how Jacob interpreted the promise that God would be with him. (Genesis 31:3)

Commented [notes10]: 3 Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."

I have noticed that when people hear a word from the Lord, they tend to translate it into their cultural setting and even mix in a bit of their own desire. I remember one man who thought the Lord had promised him wealth. I asked him if with godly children, a nice home in a beautiful setting, a loving wife, and relationship with God he wasn't already wealthy? It suddenly dawned on him that he had taken what God spoke to his heart and interpreted it in his own way. I think that is exactly what Jacob has done here. God promised to be with him and give him the land, but never to make him financially wealthy. That was a bonus, but Jacob was claiming it as part of the promise.

He continues the prayer, ¹⁰ I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. He has one thing right. None of us is worthy of the kindness and faithfulness that God has shown us. (Luke 17:10) Although he is still trying to work the situation on his own, he is at least acknowledging that without God, as good a schemer as Jacob is, it still won't amount to much. He realized that it is God that has prospered him. (Proverbs 10:22)

Commented [notes11]: 10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty."

Commented [notes12]: 22 The blessing of the LORD brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it.

¹¹ Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. He acknowledged his fear. We aren't supposed to fear. Perfect love casts out fear. (1John 4:18) But if you are afraid, you can't hide it from God. Acknowledge it and ask God to help you see His authority over your situation. He pleaded to God for his wives and children. It is early in Bible history, but the patriarchs already knew that God has a heart for women and children. He was telling God that he was unworthy but what about the women and children?

Commented [notes13]: 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

¹² *But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.'*" He misquoted God's promise again, but at least he got the last half right. If his children were killed, how could God bring His promise to pass? This kind of prayer is more for us than for God. By recalling the promises of God, we can allay our fears and concerns. We can grip reality as stated in His promises. That forces our fearful thoughts to line up with the truth of God's word. We may not be able to vanquish them, but we can certainly lessen their grip on our life. (Psalm 56:4)

Commented [notes14]: 4 In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?

¹³ *He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau:* Whether out of a desire to compensate for past sins or just plain fear, Jacob sent ahead gifts of livestock, 580 animals. The shepherd of each herd was to say, "*They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind us.*" He thought herd after herd after herd would soften any anger Esau had left. This was a huge peace offering. Those flocks alone would have made any man in that time very well off. If it was the financial end of the blessing that Jacob thought Esau would be upset about, then he would take care of that first. Put it this way. If you were going to kill someone for swindling you out of \$10,000, it would be hard to imagine still wanting to kill him after he gave you a gift of \$20,000. (Luke 16:9)

Commented [notes15]: 9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

²¹ *So Jacob's gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp.* He sent his wives and children and possessions on ahead, but he stayed behind. Then we have one of the strangest passages in Scripture. ²⁴ *So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.* I don't know why Jacob stayed behind. He may have been afraid. He may have been praying. Suddenly, a man encountered him and began to wrestle with him. They wrestled on through the night until dawn. They must have been perfectly matched because neither could prevail over the other.

²⁵ *When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.* Who is this man? He couldn't overpower Jacob, but a simple touch on Jacob's hip could wrench it. I've thought about this passage for many years. The only way I can understand it is to see this man as a preincarnate appearance of Jesus. (Colossians 1:15) In the next few verses Jacob declares that he has seen God. How is it that God could not overcome him? If Jesus manifested himself in a physical form that was the exact match to the physical strength of Jacob, then they could wrestle forever and neither one win. But anytime the Lord should decide to use supernatural power, he could easily win.

Commented [notes16]: 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Why in the world would Jesus do this? What was the point? Many theologians have come up with various answers. It is my humble opinion that God was giving Jacob an illustration of what had been happening all his life. Keep in mind that Hebrews think more in pictures and less analytically than we do.

Jacob has always been trying to help God out. He has received promise after promise from God and yet tried to bring them to pass in his own strength and by his own cunning. In the process, he has only confused the message and testimony. How did

he get the birthright? Was it a gift from God or his cunning? How did he get the blessing? Was it God or deception? How did he get wealthy? Was it those sticks in the troughs or God dealing with Laban's greed? And now that God was fulfilling His word and bringing him back to the Land, was it going to be Jacob's clever bribe or God that kept Esau from taking his life? God and Jacob have been wrestling all of Jacob's life. He has spiritually been in the grip of grace throughout his life, but now he is physically in the grip of grace. We experience that grip of grace throughout our lives as well. (2John 1:3)

Commented [notes17]: 3 Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.

Jacob was crippled in the hip but he was still hanging on and demanding a blessing. He must have realized at that point that this was no ordinary man. At least Jacob now knew that his success came from the blessing of God and he wanted it even if his hip was wrenched. He didn't realize his new handicap was a part of the blessing. It would cause him to depend more on God and less on his own strength. (2Corinthians 12:9) There are those who have godly ministries because the Lord has allowed them to have a handicap that made them completely dependent on God. Without that dependency they would have gone their own way. In that sense, their handicap is their greatest blessing. We should consider how God is using the difficult things in our life to teach us to depend on His strength.

Commented [notes18]: 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." *27 The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered.* The Lord knows his name. He is reminding him of his name and its meaning, Laughter or Deceiver. Jacob was making a confession. "I'm the deceiver." The Hebrews saw their name as their destiny, and God is in the midst of changing Jacob's destiny. Jacob's fear was facing the consequences of his deception in the meeting with Esau. That is why he was afraid. Nevertheless, his encounters with God are transforming him into the person God has called him to be. I hope you can say that is true in your life as well. Are you becoming more God dependent, or remaining independent? Are you desperate for the blessing of God or running around trying to attain it on your own? (Psalm 84:5)

Commented [notes19]: 5 Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.

28 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." *29 Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.* The deceiver is now the overcomer. It is not that he has defeated God. If one touch could cripple a hip, defeating God is certainly not the point of this passage. The message is that he has continued to struggle with God and man until he has been changed into an overcomer. (Romans 8:37) An overcomer is not one who cons his way to the top, but one who continues to endure and learn the lessons God is showing him or her through the trials. Israel literally means "God fights". God has wrestled with Jacob and proclaimed Jacob the overcomer. Jacob was learning that his defense is God. He was learning his blessings are from God.

Commented [notes20]: 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Hosea 12:4a describes this encounter. *4a He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor.* Jacob wasn't proudly demanding a blessing. He was weeping and pleading for God to bless him, even though he was the deceiver.

Jacob was learning that without God, he could only get himself into trouble making enemies everywhere he went. The grace of God had pursued him, caught and wrestled with him, and Jacob had won. He won a changed life. He won a new destiny. He won a crippled dependency on God. The blessing of a new name and the handicap were inseparable. (2Corinthians 5:17)

³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." If you think he had in mind that he was actually stronger than God, this verse sets the record straight. He was just thankful to be alive. He knew an encounter like that should have left him in his arrogance dead.

Peniel means the face of God. Jewish exegetes don't quite know what to make of this, so they call this man who is referred to as God, the Prince of the Countenance. The Rabbi Paul knew what to make of it. He wrote,⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. 2Corinthians 4:6 (NIV) We see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. Jacob met Jesus face to face, wrestled with Him all night, all his life to this point, and received a revelation and a blessing. Every heart longs for the ultimate.

Ravi Zaccarias said that the ultimate for the Hebrew was light (which is revelation of God). For the Greeks the ultimate was knowledge, and for the Romans it was glory. That is why Paul wrote that God gave us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. He is not only the ultimate of what Jacob was seeking, but the ultimate of what every man in every culture throughout time has sought. I'm not speaking of Christ consciousness; I'm speaking of a person, the God-man Christ Jesus, who reveals the love of God to all. (1 Corinthians 1:30)

I have come to appreciate Jacob. He believed the blessing of God is priceless. I appreciate his story because sadly I can relate to the way he tried to go about obtaining fulfillment on his own. I like him because he moved forward spiritually and wouldn't quit but endured. I can relate to his fears at facing the consequences of his sins, his rash statements, and his selfishness. In spite of his humanity, he wanted spiritual reality. Though he failed to be godly and trust God as he should have, he kept on and wouldn't give up. I can relate to God wrestling with me and yet calling me the victor. Most of us can surely relate to Jacob.

We, too, have seen God in the face of Jesus. We have seen His love, patience, compassion and determination to see our lives transformed. We wrestle with God too. Some of us have handicaps as a result and for a blessing, steel plates in your back, afflictions that keep coming back, scarred hearts, difficult relationships, embarrassing pasts to name a few. (Hebrews 11:34) They are all like Jacob's hip, used to keep us on our knees, transforming our life, and making us dependent upon God. Thank God for those handicaps. Consider where you would be without them. Like the Apostle Paul, we pray for God to bless us by taking them away, but He may also be blessing us by letting them remain. (2 Corinthians 12:7-8) You see those physical handicaps steer us away from our most serious handicap, our old nature that would turn us

Commented [notes21]: 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Commented [notes22]: 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

Commented [notes23]: 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

Commented [notes24]: 7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.
8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

away from God. There will be a day when we no longer need them, but for now they come with the blessing of transformed life. (Revelation 7:17)

If you are here this morning, God is probably wrestling with you. A word of advice from the life of Jacob: Endure until God calls you an overcomer, and then keep on until you see Him face to face. (1John 3:2)

Commented [notes25]: 17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Commented [notes26]: 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.