

Genesis 32:1-32
“Life’s struggle”

I.) Intro.

II. Vs. 1-12 Ready to surrender

III. Vs. 13-32 Pinning your “self” down

I.) Intro.

There is perhaps no greater chapter in all the Bible that illustrates the death of the old nature than the one before us. Three times in scripture Paul uses the phrase “**old man**” in reference to our flesh:

- a. Rom. 6:5-6 *“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that **our old man** was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.”*
- b. Eph 4:21-24 *“you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, **the old man** who grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.”*
- c. Col. 3:8-10 *“But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the **old man** with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,”*

Jacob in this story is an “**old man**” of 90 and he is fighting against the Lord but in this chapter he is going to lose and in losing he will win! Jacob’s life has been a battle; his fight is seen in his consistently trying to secure the promises of God in the energy of the flesh. But in this chapter the One whom he has been fighting against for control over his life is going to take on the form of a man. And this Man of God is going to allow Jacob to wrestle and put every effort imaginable to win. Yet God is going to cripple him so that Jacob would gain victory over himself and rule with God.

II. Vs. 1-12 Ready to surrender

Vs. 1-2 When Jacob was 70 years old he left home for the first time as a self-reliant man that had been defeat by his own schemes. Twenty years later he is returning as a wealthy man who has met the Lord twenty years earlier, but he is still a self-reliant man. This is the third time that Jacob will encounter angels:

- a. 28:12 Twenty years ago when he first met the Lord at Bethel.
- b. 31:11 When the Lord spoke to him about going back to the land of promise.
- c. 32:1 Here as Jacob comes back into the land he sees them again.

The common denominator in each of these three encounters is that each time God sends His angels to meet Jacob to confirm the direction in which God has him going.

Vs. 3-6 It is interesting to see Jacob send out his messengers right after God had sent him His. It seems as though Jacob wants to make right the wrong he did 20 years earlier. Several things point to this:

- A. “*Thus, your servant Jacob says*”: Servant? My lord Esau? Twenty years earlier Esau had sworn to kill him and now Jacob humbles himself before his brother. Perhaps Jacob had gained insight from being a victim of Laban’s deceptions and now wanted to make it right.
- B. “*I have dwelt with Laban and stayed there until now. I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants*”: In other words, I’ve done my time and I am not coming back to claim what I stole from you, even though their father had given it to him.

Verse six tells us that the messengers come back with news that say that Esau is coming to meet him with 400 men. It is not difficult to see these words from Jacob’s eyes, Esau was a man of the sword who had gathered 400 men of like mind to settle the score. Jacob had wanted to know if he had “*found favor in Esau’s eyes*” and the thought of 400 men coming with a man that swore to kill him seems to have answered the question. Mom had told him twenty years earlier in 27:45 that she would send word when Esau cooled down and she had not contacted him.

In the context of the angels encamped around Jacob and the assurance of chapter 28:15 where the Lord had promised to never leave him and bring him back into the land of promise; we

have two things that seem to be mutually exclusive and opposite. **God's word and promise,** *which were reinforced with angels encamped around him* and **the fears of past failures seen in circumstances that look bad.** Which one do you believe, **God's Word** or **the situation?** We can be so assured of God and His Word one moment and completely overwhelmed in a situation the next?

Vs. 7-12 The word "***distressed***" here means **to be tightly pressed.** The squeeze was on Jacob, so he decides on a twofold course of action:

1. Vs. 7-8 **He divides his camp:** He splits in half the people and animals. His reasoning is worldly sound, if Esau attacks one camp then the other will have time to escape. It was not wrong to divide the camp, but the motivation was fear not faith, well did Shakespeare say, "*Conscience does make cowards of us all!*" *Many of us Christians are crippled by our past as we don't believe that Jesus has really settled all our accounts.*
2. Vs. 9-12 **He prays:** When all else fails pray seems to be his motto. Instead, it should have been "***Pray, no matter what fails***". He has four parts to his prayer that ought to serve as a model:
 - a. Vs. 9 **He remembers God's Word:** Back in chapters 28:13-15 and 31:3 God had spoken these promises to him and now Jacob recites them back to God holding onto them. *Much of our prayer ought to be scripture as we appropriate what God has already promised towards us. It is because we fail to do this that we are often in a panic over what is already ours in Christ.*
 - b. Vs. 10 **He is thankful:** In chapter 31:42 Jacob had thought that he was blessed based upon his own effort, now he sees himself as not worthy. Literally this reads, "*I have always been too little, and I still am*". **It took a situation greater than himself for Jacob to realize that he had always been little.** Now Jacob is thankful for what God has done instead of thinking it was because of him that it was done. Jacob is approaching God not on his faithfulness but rather upon God's faithfulness.
 - c. Vs. 11 **He is honest:** Jacob's prayer is spoken in honesty as he asks God to deliver him because he is afraid, there is no con, no sugar coating his words just plain honesty and confession. **Why not try telling God the truth when we pray, it's not as if He doesn't know the truth anyway!**
 - d. Vs. 12 **He rests upon God's Word:** The rock in which Jacob makes his stand is the promises God has made to him and his grandfather Abraham. By faith Jacob now appropriated them to himself. George Mueller was once asked what the most important part of prayer was, he answered, "*The 15 minutes after I have said Amen!*" ***No matter how great the prayer you spoke from your heart towards God was, no matter how much you believed it when the words were on your lips.... the truth of the matter is that it is what you do with what you just spoke to God***

after you have stopped praying that indicates if you believed what you said.
Prayer always changes things and the first thing it ought to change is us!

III. Vs. 13-32 Pinning your “self” down

Vs. 13-20 At first glance this appears to be a clever strategy, sending gifts in waves (verses 13-16) to Esau. **No doubt it was to send a message that he was a changed man.** He was NOW a guy that would rather give than receive, serve rather than rule. Jacob wanted to communicate that he wanted to be a blessing and not to come and get blessed.

As true as that was we can also see a lack of trust in the Lord. First off, we have his own words in verse 20, “I will **appease him with the present** that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; **perhaps he will accept me.**” **Jacob’s concern is not with Esau accepting him rather it is in the fear that he won’t.** If Jacob trusted the Lord as he had prayed he would have been, at the head of it or at the end of it.

Vs. 21-23 Jacob sends the presents over in waves then at night sends his wives and children over the river *Jabbok* which means “**wrestler**” which was taken from the event that was about to take place. The river was 25 miles from where they camped and was 30 feet wide and waste deep. So, **Jacob is all-alone with only himself and his fears.**

Vs. 24-25 Here we read that it was a Man that wrestled with Jacob and not the other way around. Well, we are told some key things about this Man:

- a. Vs. 30 “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.” Clearly Jacob believes that **the Man who wrestled with him was God.**
- b. Hosea 12:3-5 clarifies this story further by saying, “He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and in his **strength he struggled with God.** Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; He wept and sought favor from Him. He found Him in Bethel, and there He spoke to us; that is, **the LORD God of hosts. The LORD is His memorable name.**”

The only conclusion we can make is that the Man in whom Jacob wrestled was none other than a preincarnate manifestation of Jesus. **One of the great tragedies in modern Christianity is all the effort we do in the energy of the flesh.** The Church does not pray and trust God to change hearts

instead it tries to outmaneuver the opposition. **God is for us, and He wants us to obtain His victory, but He will not let us obtain it through our fleshly methods.** The Prophet Zechariah spoke saying, “*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, ' Says the LORD of hosts.*” Here in verses 25-26, we see **three ways to obtain spiritual victory:**

1. Vs. 25 **Recognize our own inadequacy:** From Jacob’s perspective he and the Lord were pretty evenly matched but that was in appearance only. **We wonder how Jacob was able to keep up his strength until daybreak but when we consider ourselves many of us have been wrestling with the Lord over areas of our lives for years. It amazes me how at times I act as if I can really contend with God hanging onto my pride and self-will.** When the Lord just touched Jacob’s hip he was completely defeated and helpless. Notice that it says that the Lord “**did not prevail**” and not that He “**could not prevail**”. **That means that God wanted to take the “fight” out of Jacob and get him to quit trying to do things in his own strength. We obtain spiritual victory the moment we are at the end of ourselves when we see the futility of using our own strength to obtain what can only be ours when we trust Him.** Interesting that it was Jacob's hip? When the hip is out of place a person cannot stand. Paul would say in 1 Cor 10:12 “*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*”
2. Vs. 26 **Trust only in what God has promised:** Jacob only asked what the Lord had promised which was to bless him. **It was God’s word that Jacob wanted to claim.**
3. Vs. 26 **Held onto to God:** Jacob had come to the end of himself and was hopeless and helpless. So, he did what we all must do, **cling to the Lord. Jacob was finally totally dependent upon the Lord, and it only took 90 years to get there. It is of the greatest importance that we come to the place where we are conquered and broken by the Lord. Jacob now knew practically what he knew intellectually; God was mightier than he.** Hosea 12:4 tells us that Jacob sought God’s blessing as “**He wept**” **Jacob was defeated and because he had lost he won!**

Vs. 27-32 **God asks Jacob his name which forces him to deal with his own failures. “I’m a con-man, a sneak and a manipulator that’s who I am Lord.” For the first time in his life Jacob saw who his real enemy was, it was not his father or Esau nor was it Laban I was the person who stared back at him in the mirror every day.** Upon that confession God changes his name to

Israel. In Hebrew this is the **combining of two words “rule” and “God”**, in the Hebrew it is “**God rules**”! God changed Jacob’s name from “**Jacob rules**” to “**God rules**”! Jacob “**prevailed**” **as he endured through the struggle until he was thoroughly whipped and in losing he won.** We must never give up until we have lost! Jacob has to memorials one spiritual the other practical:

- a. The river where he was at became his baptism where he died to himself, and it was this death that caused him to know that he had seen the face of God
- b. Then Jacob was given a continual limp so that every step he would take the rest of his life would remind him that he needed to do so in God's strength and not his own!