

Sermon Notes 5/2/21

“Wrestling with God”

How should we respond to Genesis chapter 32?

1. _____ when struggling with fears.

Genesis 32:9-12

1 Peter 5:6-8

Philippians 4:6-7

2. _____ for peace when struggling with family.

Genesis 32:13-20

Matthew 5:23-24

Romans 12:18-19

3. _____ God’s blessing when struggling with faith.

Genesis 32:24-28

Philippians 3:7-8

1 Timothy 6:11-12



“Jacob Wrestles with the Angel” by Gustave Dore 1855

Life Group Discussion Questions

Week 32: May 2-9

Genesis 32

What would you do if God challenged you to a wrestling match? God often works through our struggles to develop our character. This was certainly the case with Jacob. While he was still in his mother's womb, Jacob struggled with his brother Esau (Gen. 25:22). Because of his name and his tricks, he struggled with a bad reputation (Gen. 27:36). When he was working for his uncle Laban, he struggled with injustice and unfair treatment (Gen. 29:25; 31:41). And through all these struggles, God was with Jacob, helping him to grow spiritually. However, Jacob's greatest struggle and his greatest transformation took place in chapter 32 when he wrestled with God. There on the banks of the Jabbok River, God changed Jacob's name to Israel: "he wrestles with God."

Read Genesis 32:1-12

1. Who did Jacob meet after he left his uncle Laban but before he met his brother Esau? (32:1-2)
2. Where did Jacob send his messengers in verse 3?
3. What did Jacob tell his messengers to say to Esau in verses 4-5?
4. What did the messengers report to Jacob in verse 6?
5. How did Jacob feel about his brother coming to meet him? (32:7)

Some have suggested that Jacob's plans indicate his lack of faith. However, planning with wisdom and humility is not a lack of faith. Here, Jacob's plans were not based on deception (27:12), superstition (30:14), or idolatry (31:19), but on his faith in God. Derek Kidner writes,

Jacob's reaction is characteristically energetic: he plans, 7-8, prays, 9-12, plans, 13-21, prays, 22-32, plans, 33:1-3. It is over-facile to condemn his elaborate moves as faithless, for Scripture approves of strategy when it is a tool rather than a substitute for God (cf. Josh. 8:1c, 2c; Neh. 4:9ff.). Jacob's prayers show where his confidence lay.¹

¹ Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 179.

6. Why did Jacob divide his people and possessions into two groups? (32:8)

7. What command and promise did Jacob remember in his prayer in verse 9?

8. How much did Jacob have when he first crossed the Jordan back in Genesis 28? (32:10)

9. What was Jacob's prayer request in verse 11?

10. What promise did Jacob remember in verse 12?

Kent Hughes observes,

Jacob's prayer in verses 9-12 is the first recorded prayer of Jacob and represents an advance in his spiritual growth. He includes within this prayer elements of invocation, confession, and petition and references to God's word at the beginning and end. His passionate confession of his unworthiness and lowliness...had not been characteristic of Jacob earlier.²

Read Genesis 32:13-21

11. What was the total number of animals that Jacob selected as a gift for his brother Esau? (32:13-15)

12. How did Jacob organize the delivery of the animals to Esau? (32:16)

13. What did Jacob tell each servant to say to Esau when they delivered their animals? Why? (32:17-20)

14. What did Jacob do that night after the servants took the animals to Esau? (32:21)

Read Genesis 32:22-32

15. Where did Jacob send his family and the rest of his possessions in the middle of the night? (32:22-23)

16. What happened to Jacob when he was left alone on the north side of the Jabbok River? (32:24-25)

² R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 399.

We know from verse 28 and Hosea 12:3-5 that this was a theophany, a physical manifestation of God. In this case, God appeared in the form of a man. God initiated this wrestling match with Jacob to teach Jacob something about his spiritual journey and the person God is calling him to be. However, this event would also serve as a lesson for the nation of Israel. God would continue to wrestle with the children of Israel throughout the Old Testament. And for Christians, this event points us to the gospel. Paul Kissling notes,

Christians may well see here an anticipation of the end of the Bible's story. God accepted defeat of his son through human crucifixion. But the thought of that "defeat" has been the very thing that has brought countless people humbly seeking forgiveness. Jacob's victory in his wrestling match with God left him humbled and broken. But that very humility and brokenness prepares him to face Esau.³

17. What did the man say to Jacob at daybreak? (32:26)

18. How did the man bless Jacob? Why? (32:27-28)

James Smith writes,

Jacob turned to fervent prayer and tears (Hosea 12:4). The purpose of the angel had now been accomplished. Jacob was now begging for spiritual strength with which to face the dangers of the next day. Here was the second indication of transformation: an all-consuming hunger for God. Above all else Jacob wanted the blessing of God.⁴

19. What did Jacob ask the man in verse 29? How did the man respond?

20. What did Jacob name that place? Why? (32:30)

21. What Jewish tradition developed from this event? (32:31-32)

22. How does God give people a new identity and a fresh start?

23. How can you help to reconcile a broken or damaged relationship?

³ Paul Kissling, *The College Press NIV Commentary: Genesis Volume 2* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2009), 359.

⁴ James Smith, *The Pentateuch* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996), 199.