

Jesus the Wrestler – Gen. 32

Some of y'all that have been around here forever will remember that we moved our church from Runaway Bay to Lake Bridgeport on December 2, 2012. The weeks and months leading up to that move were some of the most scary and anxious times I can remember. We couldn't see where God was leading us but we knew we couldn't afford to stay in that pretty building and so we prayed and prayed and – imagine that – God opened up a door for us in Lake Bridgeport. When we left Runaway Bay, we gathered up some little rocks from the parking lot sort of like what Joshua did in **Joshua chapter 4** where it says, *“Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, ⁵ and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, ⁶ to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ ⁷ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.”*

We have those same stones here on the pulpit to remind us. Then the same thing happened to us again when we rented that building out. We thought our problems and tests were over but the church that was renting from us had to leave and then we, again, couldn't see what God was going to do. It seemed like we were back to square one. How on earth was God going to get us out of this predicament? We couldn't see the answer. But then – imagine that – God opened up another door and we were able to give that building back to the bank and walk away without any penalties or problems. So, we gathered up another twelve little rocks from the parking lot and we put those on the pulpit to remind us of what God had done.

We stayed in Lake Bridgeport for about ten years and then, as most of you know, we had to leave that place as well. We didn't know what we were going to do. Where would we go? Would God allow us to continue being a church or was this the end of it for Christ Fellowship? We couldn't see what to do. We couldn't see which way to go. It's hard not to be anxious at times like that, isn't it? But – imagine that – God made another way for us to “cross the Jordan” one more time and He provided this building for us to rent and we have been here since September 18, 2022. So, we took another twelve rocks from that old parking lot and made another stack and put them on the pulpit as well to help us remember that even when we can't see what is going to happen next, we can have faith that God is in control and He loves us and will provide for us. Some of you might not have known why these three stacks of rocks are up here. They are a memorial for us just like the Israelites had their stones for a memorial.

It's all about faith with God. As I always say, we can't prove that God even exists mathematically or scientifically. We just have faith. It's not blind faith though. We have seen Him do things like what these rocks represent but we have also seen what He has done in our lives personally. We have seen Him take drug addicts and make them preachers of the Gospel, like Billy who is in a prison right now doing just that. We have seen marriages on the brink of divorce that He brought back. We have seen physical healings that could only be attributed to Him. Right Belinda? We have seen Him at work mentally and physically and spiritually in our lives and in the lives of others so our faith is strengthened a little more every time.

But think about what hinders the growth of a person or church's faith. The very worst hindrance to faith is pride. Think about Job. Job was a good man and a righteous man and God had blessed him coming and going. He was wealthy. He had a wife and ten kids and everything a man could want...until he didn't. Until God allowed Satan to take everything from him and then he had nothing. And yet, do you remember what Job said? In **Job chapter 29**, Job says, *“How I long for the months gone by, for the days when God watched over me, “When I went to the gate of the city and took my seat in the public square, the young men saw me and stepped aside and the old men rose to their*

feet;⁹ the chief men refrained from speaking and covered their mouths with their hands; ¹⁰ the voices of the nobles were hushed, Whoever heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me commended me, ¹² because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist them. Do you see what is happening? Job has lost everything. He is covered in sores from head to toe. He is literally sitting in ashes with only a nagging wife and some clueless friends and he is saying, “Look at me! I am king of the dunghill!!!” He was still proud. It was all, “I, I, me, me.” So, when Satan had done all that God would allow him to do, then God Himself spoke to Job and they went a few rounds, if you will. And at the end of the sparring match, Job had no more pride and said in great humility, “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.” (42:5) He didn’t have to see God with physical eyes to know that he knew God was there. God was in control and God wanted to bless Job. He just had to wring all the pride out of him first.

Okay, so all of that is just the setup for the passage we are going to read in **Genesis chapter 32** this morning. And as you turn to **Genesis 32**, let me remind you of the characters we are dealing with here. The main character is Jacob. You remember Jacob. Jacob was born a twin with Esau and was holding onto the heel of his brother at birth but since Esau came out first, he was considered the oldest and as such was entitled to the family birthright and blessing. But Jacob, whose name means heel-grabber or supplanter had been living his life living up to his name. He had deceived Esau and his father both out of Esau’s blessing and birthright and then left the area. He moved in with his uncle Laban and was still living rather deceptively but had done pretty well in life. At this point in **chapter 32**, we believe Jacob to be well into his nineties and I have an idea Jacob looked around and thought, “You know, this is working out pretty well. I’m doing pretty good. I’ve got this. I can do this. That blessing and birthright have definitely been in my favor so why should I change?”

But God wanted to bless Jacob. God wanted Jacob to be the father of a great nation. He was coming from a blessed bloodline with Isaac as his father and Abraham as his grandfather. But God wanted to bless Jacob but couldn’t because there was that horrible attitude of self-reliance in Jacob. Self-reliance is the opposite of faith in God. It’s very much like pride. Self-reliance says, “I can do this. I got this.” God wanted to hear Jacob say, “God, you can do this. You got this.” So, we are going to pick up in **chapter 32, verse 22** and see that God the Father sends Jesus to go a few rounds with Jacob. We are continuing our study of finding Jesus in the Old Testament and here we see Jesus only being referred to as “a man” but we will understand through this that it is obviously the preincarnate Jesus and not just some guy. Let’s read **Genesis 32:22-32**.

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. ²⁴ So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 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. 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. ²⁸ Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans 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. ³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.” ³¹ The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. ³² Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob’s hip was touched near the tendon.

You know what would make my job as a preacher a lot easier? It would be a lot easier if the entire Bible were written in modern English. And when I say that, you may be thinking, “Well, Todd, why don’t you just learn Hebrew?” And, yes, it would help if I knew Hebrew but honestly, not so much with this passage because the way it is written people that can speak Hebrew fluently today are not quite sure what some of the words are or what they

mean. There is great debate about several different parts of this story. Not the least of which is, who is the man wrestling with Jacob? I've already told you it was Jesus but we will talk more about that in a minute. There is more debate about where it says **he could not overpower him**. Also, which part of Jacob did the man actually touch? There are questions about the words used for "blessing" and "saw God face to face" and some others. There are lots of things that we are not certain about here but there are some things we can take to the bank. So, we will focus on those.

I remember reading this as a kid and wondering what in the world was going on. Then I read it again lately and I asked myself, "*What in the world is going on?*" It's funny, I remember years ago telling my mother I was going to preach on this and she said, "*I have always wondered what in the world was going on in that story.*" Maybe you are thinking the same thing. Well, I'll be honest. I still have some questions about this passage. I read every commentary and several other sermons and none of them explained this very well. Thankfully, we don't have to understand everything about this to glean some wisdom from it. The reason I believe this is Jesus in the flesh is mainly because of His power. He just touched Jacob and his hip was wrenched. Also, the man didn't give His name but gave Jacob a new name and Jacob accepted it. Only God gives a grown man a new name and Jacob wouldn't have accepted a new name from some guy wandering the desert. And Jacob asks for a blessing from the man. Why ask some crazy homeless guy for a blessing? That's something Jacob would only ask from God. So, I'm convinced it's Jesus. But what Jesus did for Jacob is the important thing. You've heard it said that names were way more important back then than they are now. The name Jacob meant one who deceives, and it had defined this man for nearly one hundred years. It's how he had lived since he was born. Can you imagine the burden of having to try to figure out your every move and trying to figure out the move of the guy you just deceived? All day, every day, Jacob was conniving and scheming and trying to remember what he said to who and what he expected to happen next so he could be prepared for it. That must have been exhausting.

Thomas Edison was concerned about the way visitors to his office helped themselves to his expensive Havana cigars. Since he wouldn't lock them up, his secretary suggested he have cigars made from cabbage leaves and substitute them for the Havanas. Edison agreed, then forgot about it, and only remembered later when the Havanas started vanishing again. When he asked his secretary why the bogus cigars hadn't arrived, she told him they had arrived and had been given to his manager -- who, not knowing they were fakes, had packed them for Edison to take on a trip. "**And do you know,**" Edison laughed, "**I smoked every one of those cigars myself!**" (*Today in the Word*, December 16, 1992.)

Deception is what happens when people are self-sufficient. You deceive yourself first. Then you deceive others and you try to deceive God. And none of that lasts very long. It's an easy way to burn some bridges. Thankfully, God is patient with us like He was with Jacob and promises to give us new names as well when we get to Heaven. But because God was patient and God was wanting to bless Jacob, He gave him a new name. The name Israel means to wrestle with God or God contends. And that name was where Jesus started in the blessing process. And just to prove to Jacob that He (Jesus) was real and that his new name was real and that his new attitude was to be real, Jesus touched him hard enough to make him limp the next day and maybe forever. We don't know. But Jesus gave Jacob a lasting memory of his time wrestling with God.

Maybe you are wrestling with God today. Maybe you have been for a while. In fact, I bet there is somebody out there that thinks they have wrestled with God about this problem or that problem for so long that surely God is done with them and that He is not going to help you. Well, remember, Jacob struggled with his problem for nearly a hundred years and it wasn't until Jacob said, "*I'm not going to let you go until you bless me*" that God finally blessed him. And it wasn't because God didn't want to. It was that Jacob wasn't mentally, physically or spiritually in the place God wanted him to be for the blessing. How about you? Are you really ready this time for God's blessing on your life

and on your church? Do you remember what Joshua told the Israelites before they crossed over the Jordan. I've read this passage several times in the life of this church. In **Joshua chapter 3** it says, "*Joshua told the people, 'Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.'*" Consecrate yourselves. It means to make yourselves holy. Separate yourselves from the rest of the world. And when you do that God will do amazing things among you. We have seen God do amazing things in the life of this church. But I want more. I want to see Him do more amazing things and for Him to get all the amazing glory for it. How about you? Are you ready to be in the place God wants you and this church to be mentally, physically and spiritually? God wants to bless us. But we have to consecrate ourselves and wrestle with God until He blesses us. Are you ready to do that? I hope so. Because you will get that opportunity in the next sixty days or so.

I told you in the Friday email that I have some exciting news to share with you and I do. And it is exciting. It's also a little bit scary. If wrestling with God isn't a little bit scary then you are doing it wrong or not at all. But I got a phone call from our church landlord Wednesday. As most of you know, we don't own this building. We just rent it every month and after the horrible time we had with the last so-called landlords at Lake Bridgeport, we asked this landlord to please give us at least sixty days if he ever sold the building. Well, he called me Wednesday and very nicely and very apologetically told me we have sixty days to find another building to worship in. He told us when we moved in that what we pay wasn't close to what he owed every month on his mortgage for this place but he hoped to rent it out as an even center to make up the difference. In two years, there hasn't been one month when he has even broken even, much less made money. So, I don't blame him at all. He is a good, Christian man and he waited as long as he could but he said the insurance and the taxes have gone up and he can't continue to lose that much money every week.

So, we don't know what is going to happen. We can't see what God is going to do yet. We can't see where the next building is going to be. We can't see it with our physical eyes but if anybody should have faith that God will provide, it should be us. You know, most churches never move one time in the whole life of the church. This will be our fourth. And every time God provides. Every time Christ Fellowship consecrates ourselves and God does amazing things amongst us. I have no reason to believe that He won't this fourth time either. But the ball is in our court to consecrate ourselves. And then we can just get another twelve rocks out of this parking lot and add them to our stash.

Just so you know, we have a couple of options already. There is a building we can rent just south of the blinking light that is now used as an auction house. It will work at least temporarily. There are other buildings around Chico especially that we are looking at. But we are open to going wherever God wants us to go. We know God is in control and He loves us and I believe He is giving us one more opportunity to squeeze every last drop of anything unholy out of us so He can bless us. He has blessed us and He wants to bless us again. Let's start by wrestling with God in prayer until He does. Let's do that starting right now.

music

Prayer

With your heads still bowed, I want to give you the invitation to come down here to the front and accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior or to pray for wisdom or any other need that you have. I would love to pray with you right now.