

Christophany – Genesis 32

Find the Book of Hebrews in your Bibles please. You have to see this. Find chapter 11. Let your eye go down to verse 21. **Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 21.** I heard that one time **Mohammad Ali** was on an airplane, and the stewardess came through and said, “*Sir, buckle your seatbelt. We’re getting ready to take off.*” He said, “*Superman don’t need no seat belt.*” She said, “*Yes, and Superman don’t need no airplane either.*” Many of us think that self-sufficiency is a virtue. The truth of the matter is that self-sufficiency is not a virtue; spiritually, it is a vice. ([2396-Learning-to-Lean-PTR-Apr2022.pdf](#))

Look at our Scripture here, **Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 21**, “*By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.*” Worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff. Do you know why he was leaning on his staff? He was leaning on it because years before, **Jesus** taught him a lesson about self-sufficiency. Yes, yes, I hear ya. I know Jesus didn’t show up in the scriptures until the New Testament. And Jacob was one of the Old Testament saints. So, what’s up with that? Why would I say that Jesus taught Jacob a lesson? Jacob never heard the name Jesus in his whole life so how could he learn anything from Him?

Well, I invite you to turn back to the Old Testament, way to the very front, the book of Genesis and let’s just see how this worked out. We continue to look at the Old Testament heroes and saints and we started out in the book of Genesis with Jacob’s grandfather, Abraham. We saw he was a great man of faith. Then we moved to Exodus and looked at Moses then Joshua, Shamgar, Samson and Saul. Then Elijah, Nehemiah, Job (twice), and then last week was Isaiah. And do you know what all those cool, old stories have in common? They are all pointing forward. They are all encouraging you to look ahead at what is to come. Look for the fulfillment of all the prophecies. Follow all the signs that point to the One who is the main topic and theme of all scripture, the One that all the Bible, Old and New, is about. Be watching for Jesus. That’s why I always encourage people that have never read the Bible to start in the New Testament because when you know who Jesus is, you will see Him even in the Old Testament.

But did you know that there are a few times in the Old Testament when Jesus cheats? He does. He shows up. Have you ever been watching a movie and some big-name star makes a cameo? He shows up in sort of a minor role and he gets no billing, no recognition for it? It’s just kind of for fun. That’s sort of like what Jesus does in the Old Testament a few times except they don’t call it a cameo. Scholars call it a “Christophany.” The term comes from Greek: *Christos* (Christ) + *phanein* (to appear). The name of Jesus is never used in the Old Testament and sometimes it’s unclear if it is Jesus or maybe it’s an angel or somebody else. But there are a few times when I believe it is clear that it is Jesus. Our passage in **Genesis 32** is one of 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, years ago I told my mother I was going to preach on this and she said, “*Oh, good! 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. Let’s start by reading **Genesis 32, verses 22-32**. While you are turning there, I will give you the Cliff’s Notes version of what is going on. Jacob is going home. He doesn’t really want to but God has told him to go. The reason Jacob doesn’t want to go back is because his brother, Esau, is back there and all his life, Jacob was a con man. He conned his brother. He conned his uncle. He conned his dad. It was just his way. And it had worked out pretty well for him for all these years. He had learned from an

early age how to be self-sufficient, not depending on anybody but himself. Well, God was about to teach Jacob that self-sufficiency is not God's will. Let's read **Genesis 32, verses 22-32**.

²² 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.

No, it does not say that the man in this story is Jesus. Jacob never uses that name. He never heard that name his whole life, but I guarantee you when Jacob got to Heaven and saw Jesus, he said, "Hey, I know you. You're the guy I wrestled with that night. My hip still hurts because of you! Every time I walk, I think of you." And I bet Jesus said, "Exactly!" There are several times when Jesus showed up in the flesh in the Old Testament. Some of them are more obvious than others but one thing to notice and one thing that differentiates Jesus from any other heavenly being or angel is that when He comes, people are saved and changed, one way or another. They might be saved from the fire like the Hebrew boys in the book of **Daniel** or changed like Abraham and Sarah in **Genesis 18** who thought they were too old to have kids. For Jacob here in **Genesis 32**, he was saved and changed and you will be too if you ever have a real encounter with Jesus Christ.

Do you remember when you fell in love and got married (hopefully to the same person)? Do you remember thinking how much you loved that person and how perfect they were...except for that one little thing? But you knew you would be able to change that person. It shouldn't be too hard, right? It was just a small thing. Well, how did that work out for ya? One of the hardest things to overcome in a marriage is thinking you are going to change that other person into who you think they ought to be. A happy marriage is accepting the fact that your partner is flawed and choosing to love them anyway. Going into a marriage expecting the other person to change is just asking for trouble. But God's relationship with us is not like this. All through scripture the church is referred to as the Bride of Christ but Jesus loves us too much to leave us as we are. I know that is how some people think about their spouses but it just doesn't work for us. With God, it doesn't work any other way. If you claim to be a Christian, a disciple of Jesus, part of Christ's bride, then you will be changed - constantly and forever.

Look at this story of Jacob. He is worried sick. He has good reason to believe that his brother is going to come and kill him and probably kill his whole family for revenge. That's why he split his family up, just hoping that when Esau attacked, at least some might get out alive. I can appreciate Jacob wanting to spend the night alone, away from anybody else so he could spend some time in prayer out in the middle of nowhere. There is nothing better when you wrestle with God. Have you ever wrestled with God? Well, let me ask you something. What do you desire most? What is the one thing you want more than anything? If it is something physical, let me advise you to rethink it. Stuff breaks. Things wear out. Even people don't last very long. What God wants most for you is change. So that ought to be what we want most. We should want what God wants even if it makes us uncomfortable or even brings pain because it is change that makes us most like Jesus. Well, sometimes we have to wrestle with God to get the change we want. If you want to overcome addiction, it will require wrestling with God in prayer. If you want to save

your marriage, it will require wrestling with God in prayer. If you want to see your loved ones come to have a relationship with Jesus, it will require wrestling with God in prayer. If you want anything big, know this, that Satan does not want that change in your life and he will fight you so we first have to wrestle with God in prayer.

It's not that God is trying to be difficult. He's just asking, *"How bad do you really want it?"* Jacob really wanted to live and not have Esau and his 400 men cut him into ribbons so he started praying. I want you to see that the first thing God did for Jacob and what He will do for you is to **change your mind**. He changed Jacob's mind by putting him in this position and God often does similar things to us. In **verse 9**, before the wrestling match, it says, *"Then Jacob prayed."* God allowed him to be in this position, maybe even caused him to be in this position to change his mind and cause him to realize that he can't get through this life on his own. Literally since Jacob was born, he was trying to get something over on somebody else. He was a trickster and a fraud. His very name means, "supplanter" or "heel-grabber" which is trying to get something that is not his. And so far, it was working out okay but God changed his mind by allowing him to be in a position that he couldn't handle on his own.

I hear well-meaning people say all the time that God will never give you more than you can handle. That sounds good and sweet and nice but it is not true. God often times gives us more than we can handle just to show us that **He can** handle it. That is the very meaning of **Philippians 4:13**, *"I can do all things through Christ Who gives me strength."* Without God there is not much that we can handle. I don't want to try to get out of bed and make it downstairs without God's protection, provision and grace, much less face this world and the prince of this world, Satan. I can't handle that and I have proven it by all the mistakes I've made.

But it's when I make those mistakes that God changes my mind and makes me understand that He is in control and He loves me. I don't have to handle it. I don't have to be strong enough or smart enough. Good grief, thank you, Lord! Sometimes I think I can handle what's going on but, just like He did for Jacob, God changes my mind and oftentimes it takes allowing me to be in a position of helplessness like it was for Jacob.

So, God first changed Jacob's mind but the next thing He did was **change Jacob's name**. Did you see that in **verse 28**? *"Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel."* If you're ever on the island of Anglesey, Wales, be sure and visit a town with one of the longest names in the English language. It's the quaint little village named Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogoch. No joke. (The short form is Llanfairpwllgwyngyll). The name means: "The Church of St. Mary in a hollow of white hazel, near to the rapid whirlpool, and to St. Tisilio Church, near to a red cave." It's a long name but it is very descriptive.

In **Revelation 2:17 and 3:12**, it says that when we get to Heaven we will get new, more descriptive names. But, when you come to have a relationship with God through His Son Jesus, we are given a new name right then. We are now Children of the One, True King and do you know what Children of the One, True King do? **THEY ACT LIKE IT!** They act like their lives have been changed because they have been changed.

Children of the One, True King don't act like the rest of the world. They look different. They talk different. They don't go to the same places. They don't watch the same movies or listen to the same music. You don't have to be a snob like royalty and look down on the rest of the peasants. You act like your Father acts. You act like Jesus acts. When people see you, they should see love and wisdom and purity because we come from a family that is loving, wise and pure.

Children of the One, True King don't worry. What is there to worry about when your Father is the sovereign King, in control of everything and in love with you? Children of the One, True King don't use coarse language. That would

make the Father look bad and shame the Bride of Christ. But, Children of the One, True King are forgiving when other people do that because we have been forgiven much more.

Jacob was completely different after his wrestling match with Jesus. He thought different because **his mind** had been changed. He acted different because **his name** had been changed and he walked different because...**his future** had been changed.

I told you I don't understand everything about this passage. I don't know why Jesus wrestled with Jacob or why Jesus couldn't take him down sooner. Jacob was nearly a hundred years old. That would be about like wrestling with Lonnie so I don't understand why they had to wrestle until daybreak. But in this wrestling match, Jesus evidently popped Jacob's thigh out of joint or something equally as painful and it made Jacob limp.

The commentaries are full of ideas about why it happened just like it did but I think Jesus wanted to give Jacob a reminder that his future had changed. He no longer had to worry about Esau. He no longer had to try to do everything himself. He no longer had to be tough enough or strong enough or clever enough because he wasn't any of those things and Jesus wanted to remind him of that and now, every time he stood up, sat down or walked there was a constant reminder.

I don't know how people do it that don't have a relationship with God through His Son Jesus. How do you go through life without the Holy Spirit of God living inside you giving you wisdom? How do you get by without a church family to support you? That's how Jacob had been all of his life and now Jesus has changed his mind, his name and his future and Jesus wants him to remember that he has this new source of power and peace and so Jesus gives him a permanent reminder.

God wanted Jacob to have a constant reminder that his future had been changed and so He made Jacob limp. He wants us to have a constant reminder that our future has been changed and so we keep these silly little rocks on the pulpit to remind us. He wants you to remember that your future has been changed too because Satan loves to attack us by making us question what really happened.

He did it to Eve in the garden when he asked, *"Did God really say that?"* and he has been using that method of attack ever since. He loves to say, *"Hey, come on. Let's go do that thing we like to do."* And when you resist, Satan says, *"Did God really say it was wrong?"* So, you have to know what scripture says.

He loves to make you think you have never been saved so you need to write the date and time and place down in your Bible so that when Satan comes at you with that lie, you have a permanent reminder. The other way that Satan attacks is by making you think that you are a Christian when you really aren't. I hear people say all the time, *"I've just always been a Christian"* and immediately a red flag goes up for me.

Your testimony ought to include a definite time in your life when you submitted your will to God like Jacob did. You might not know the exact time and place but that decision ought to be concrete in your mind. Was there ever a time in your life when you were like Jacob and felt scared and alone and **then one day** Jesus came along and changed your mind, changed your name and changed your future?

If you don't know for sure that your future includes Heaven for eternity, I need to pray with you right now. Ask God to forgive you of your sins. Repent of that lifestyle and allow God to change you today and every day to come to be more like Him. This relationship with God through His Son Jesus will not solve all your problems or remove the consequences from your bad decisions but your future will be changed and it includes peace and joy in this life and Heaven in the next life. Make that decision right now as the music plays.