

## Prevailing Grace: A Troubled Struggle with God

Pre-Introduction: Continuing the story of Jacob and all his troubles, conflict with his brother, his uncle, his brothers-in-law, his wives (plural), and his children; yet he lived a prosperity version of the American Dream, from a mere staff walking stick, to 12 children from 4 mothers and much wealth in livestock. From what we've seen of him so far, do you like Jacob? Would you trust him with your retirement portfolio? Would you like to be Jacob? And what do you think of his contract-with-God faith: *If You take care of me and bless me, You will be my God?*

**Read Text:** Gen. 32:1-32

What can we learn about Jacob and his God from the Threat at the Border and the Night of Wrestling?

### The Threat at the Border (1-23)

- The threat of Laban passed, yet exposing Jacob's anger and self-righteousness.
  - Playing victim of Laban's mistreatment
  - Claiming innocence but without knowing Rachel stole the idols
  - Not measuring up to faith of father and grandfather who prayed for the barren wife, Jacob was angry with Rachel, *Am I in the place of God who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?*
- The coming threat of Esau: Jacob's messengers returned with news Esau coming with 400 men!
  - Mahanaim: What about those two camps of angels? Seems Jacob ignores, rather . . .
  - Jacob takes action to put servants and stock in front, with family in rear (for escape).
  - **Crisis Prayer:** Promise—Confession—Specific Request—Promise
    - *God, You said You would prosper me, and I am unworthy (9-10).*
    - *Deliver me from my brother's hand ... and my children (11).*
    - *For You said, "I will prosper you (12).*
  - More Strategy: The impressive gift of appeasement; even dividing family into favored groups.
- Application: What do you notice about Jacob's faith at this point?
  - It is good that he relies on the Promise of God, that he appeals to God for help.
  - He is humble in his predicament, yet he still relies heavily on his own strength.
  - It is faith, but faith-for-me, and faith-plus my efforts. That night would challenge that faith.

### The Night of Wrestling (23-32) Note: Who starts this match? [A man, a touch, a name]

- A Man: His identity not given, but at first just a man, later revealed to be something more.
  - Wrestling through the night with neither prevailing shows Jacob's strength and tenacity.
  - Not just the idea of wrestling, not even a dream as before, but very incarnational.
- A Touch dislocates Jacob's thigh rendering him virtually helpless.
  - Reveals divine presence of his Foe. [e.g. The Hound of Heaven, the Divine Inquisitor]
  - But Jacob won't let go; he can't win but hangs on, asking first, for a blessing.
- A Name: What is your name? *Jacob* (truth this time), the one who strives, who grabs by the heel.
  - *Your name shall no longer be Jacob but Israel, for you have striven with God and men and have prevailed (28).*
  - Unsurprisingly, Jacob pushes for more, *Please tell me your name...why do you ask mine?*
  - No answer but He blessed him there. Jacob's response: *I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.* Who was that Man? An angel in God's name? Jesus!

**Prevailing Grace?** Jacob's story is not about a man who was a saint, a paragon of faith, but one grabbing for himself.

- The Lord had His hand on Jacob throughout. It was not because of Jacob's worthiness but despite his grabbing, contentious character. That's grace, unmerited favor from God and for God's own glory.
  - It took physical pain and immobility for Jacob to surrender fully.
  - But the surrendered soul also hangs on to the One who wounds us, for *When I am weak I am strong.*
- Why would the Lord wound His chosen instrument? To show mercy to self-centered folks like us.
  - *Jesus wrestled in agony in Gethsemane, pleading with the Father, and all for us.*
  - Jesus surrendered Himself to the ultimate weakness, to death, in doing securing our salvation and life.

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for you  
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend

Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.  
I, like an usurped town, to another due,  
Labor to admit you, but O, to no end;

Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
but is captived, and proves weak or untrue.  
yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,  
But am betrothed unto your enemy.  
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again;

Take me to you, imprison me, for I,  
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor even chaste, except you ravish me.

“Batter my heart,” 17th Century John Donne

