

# Genesis: From Creation to New Creation

## Genesis 32:1-32

"Wrestling with God"— June 25, 2023



### **Introduction**

We celebrate strength not weakness. We spend hours in the gym to get strong physically and long hours at work to develop financial strength. We study hard to gain intellectual strength. Strength provides self-reliance.

Jacob wanted to be first from the day he was born. It marked the trajectory of his life. He would do whatever it took to get what he wanted. He was very self-reliant, and from what we have already studied, he was pretty good at it. As we've watched his life unfold, we see evidence of his trust in God. Yet, the engine of his heart is never fully turned over to God. He is entrenched in self-reliance.

He is now just on the outskirts of the Promised Land. In order for Jacob to enter the Promised Land, he must forsake his self-reliance. To enter the kingdom of God, we must be God-reliant, not self-reliant. Is real change possible after a lifetime of self-reliance?

### **Sermon Outline**

1. Beware of lingering self-reliance. Vs. 1-21
2. Boast in weakness that leads to God-reliance. Vs. 22-32

### **Read & Discuss**

#### **1. Read vs. 1-21**

On the verge of returning to the Promised Land, the "angels of God" met Jacob. The only other time this phrase occurs in the Bible is in Genesis 28 ([28:10-17](#)) in Jacob's vision of the ladder. God was reminding Jacob that whatever he needed, God would provide. God reassured Jacob of His protection, provision, and blessing. Jacob should have been the most fearless and confident man on earth. God has promised us the same thing - He will never leave us or forsake us. ([Hebrews 13:5-6](#)) What causes you to fear and forget God's promise? How have you been reminded of God's promises lately?

The last time Jacob saw Esau, Esau was so upset over being tricked that he wanted to kill his brother. When Jacob heard that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men, he was distressed. It sounded like an army was coming for revenge. Jacob cried out to God. ([Vs. 9-12](#)) This prayer was informed by what God had already said to him. He prayed the promises of God, confessed his weakness, and prayed for deliverance. This is how we should pray. God's word is a template for what and how we should pray. Going to God in prayer is how we should respond to any trial. The Psalms are a good template for our prayers in distress, fear, loneliness, pain, and sorrow. Is there a particular Psalm or other scripture you have prayed in times of trial?

Even though Jacob prayed this beautiful prayer, his faith was tarnished by his attempt to appease Esau. He had lingering self-reliance. Jacob had become a very wealthy man, and we see a glimpse of this in the gift that he put together for Esau. He wanted to appease Esau therefore saving his own skin. He was turning to schemes again, trying to buy off Esau's anger.

In [Matthew 19:16-30](#), Jesus offers a warning to the rich who tend to be self-reliant. Sometimes the greatest threat to our faith is not poverty but prosperity. Jacob's panic was understandable because he knew he had done wrong. It seemed that Esau was Jacob's biggest threat, but it wasn't. Self-reliance was his biggest threat. Can you identify with Jacob? Are there ways you have been self-reliant?

#### **2. Read vs. 22-32**

After sending all the droves of animals across the river, Jacob was still panicked. He couldn't sleep. He sent everyone across the river and stayed by himself, left to ponder his meeting with Esau. Then suddenly, out of the darkness, he was attacked. [Verse 24](#) tells us that it is "a man." We do not know his identity and neither did Jacob. He may have thought that this was Esau, so he fought for his life all night. [Hosea 12:4](#) gives us a commentary on this scene. The man wrestling with Jacob was God.

Jacob possessed an enemy in Laban. He anticipated an enemy in Esau. However, Jacob didn't think God was an enemy. The wrestling match was over when Jacob's hip was put out of joint with a simple touch.

Unable to move and in pain from the dislocated hip, Jacob realized that he was really wrestling with God. All of his scheming, trickery and grabbing had been his way of trying to wrestle control from God.

What is the biggest problem in your life right now? What keeps you up at night, fearful and pacing? Is there more "Jacob" in your life than you care to admit? Has your life ever been put out of joint by God? Have your grand plans ever been dislocated? Not every trial is a result of failure. The pain of disappointment, job loss, sickness or failure can be heartbreaking. God wants us to trust Him. In the moment of decision, Jacob clung to God. ([vs. 26](#)) All his life, Jacob was trying to use God to get what he wanted. Now, God himself became the thing that Jacob really wanted. God was not the means; He was the end. God was the blessing.

Our desire to avoid pain is normal. But don't we accept pain throughout our life if it means that it leads to something better? We endure a tight budget to pay for a grand vacation. We exercise hard and eat the right food to be healthy. We endure surgery to fix our sick and/or broken body. Are you willing to surrender all to God if it means knowing God and experiencing His presence? If you have tasted and seen God's goodness, surrendering makes sense. On the other side is complete joy and contentment. ([Philippians 3:8](#)) Having Jesus is a better treasure.

How can we know that this God, who dislocates hips, is good? In asking Jacob what his name was, God was giving Jacob a chance to "come clean." Jacob, in Hebrew, means "cheat, liar, heel grabber." He **had** lied, cheated, and put himself first. In this moment of confession, God changed him, making him a new creation with a new identity. "Israel" means "strives **WITH** God," while in the past as "Jacob," he wrestled **against** God.

Like the Apostle Paul related in the book of Philippians and Jacob in our text today, we must see the infinite value of knowing God in Christ. We must read God's Word and pray. Do you have a plan to do just that? What is your plan to read God's word and pray? Is there someone with whom you can read the Bible and discuss it?

Jesus, a descendant of Jacob, came in the flesh, voluntarily limiting His strength. In His humanity, He came in weakness to die for sinners. Jesus won our salvation by losing. His resurrection confirmed His victory. Do you see God's heart for you in this text? Jacob's limp would be a visible sign of God's grace. May God open our eyes to taste and see the goodness of God whose power is made perfect in our weakness. ([Psalm 34:8](#); [2 Corinthians 12:9](#)) We enter God's kingdom by being God-reliant. The choice is ours: will you rely on self or on God?

### **Prayer of Response**

1) After hearing God's Word, what sin do I need to confess? From what do I need to repent?

2) How should my life be lived this week based on what I have heard? What should I *understand, believe, desire, or do*?

Spend time praying together in response to God's word asking for His help and greater faith to follow Him in the week to come. If you missed the sermon on Sunday or would like to listen again, visit our website at [fbcum.org](http://fbcum.org)

<b>Next week's sermon text:</b> we turn to <a href="#">Galatians 2:11-21</a> "Living in Light of the Gospel"
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