

Title: “God Blesses Through the Struggle”

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Gen. 32:22–30

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Service Readings: Gen. 32:22–30, 2 Tim. 3:14–4:5, Luke 18:1–8

God blesses His people not by removing the struggle, but by meeting them in it.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

²⁴ And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. ²⁵ When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶ Then he said, “Let me go, for the day has broken.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” ²⁷ And he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” ²⁸ Then he said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.” ²⁹ Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him. ³⁰ So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.”

The preincarnate Christ came down and *physically* wrestled with Jacob. It was not a dream, it was not some mystical vision, it was real. The Word became flesh and through him God was approachable. And through him God *approached*. He approached Jacob – whose name implies heel-grabber. Jacob, who deceived his father to steal the blessing rightfully owed to his older brother. Jacob – the one who lived a life of trickery, bargaining, and struggle. Jacob, who found himself on the banks of this river only because God told him to return to Canaan where he would face Esau, his brother. And Esau was preparing to meet him, coming with 400 men. And so, that night, Jacob, utterly alone struggles once again. He will come face to face with his brother. What will be his fate?

But the weight of that encounter is set aside for the night as he comes face to face... with God. In that moment he recalls every sin for he knows who his God is and what his God demands. And he knows that he has fallen short. And yet, despite of his sin, *because* of his sin, God comes near. And God comes near to this sinner, not to proclaim rightful judgement... but to bless. It is *through* the struggle that Jacob receives God's blessing. And it is a blessing that is given; given by God, not a blessing that he earns.

Can you recognize the foreshadow of Jesus in this account? The world, corrupted by sin, populated with man who is equally corrupted. It is through man that sin entered the world, and it is through sin that man rebels against God and his desire. And what is that desire? That we would be obedient to him, so that *through* this obedience we would experience the greatness of his love. But in the garden man rebelled and the struggle began.

But God didn't reject us; he didn't flee from us. Instead he came to us. In the flesh. As one of us. Fully human, but he never surrendering his divinity. Clothed in the flesh of man he approached and made himself known – not to the righteous but to us sinners. And he came, not to judge but to

struggle. And not to struggle *with* us but *for* us. He entered *into* our struggle, not on the side of God but on the side of *us*. He took on the sins of the world – your sins and mine. And in this way he became Jacob, he become Israel. *He* was the one who struggled with God so that we would not have to. And he was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. It was the will of the Lord to crush him, and to do it for our sake. And on the cross he was left utterly alone. And unlike Jacob, God left him there, alone, abandoned.

But it was through this struggle that a blessing was given to all mankind. Jesus, the true wrestler endured the struggle, suffered the wound and became the source of this blessing and reconciliation. And what is this blessing? That though Jesus, God in the flesh, he has made himself known and has come to us. And that through his death on the cross he has reconciled us to the Father. And that through his resurrection we have the promise of everlasting life.

That night Jacob came to the river fearful of his brother's wrath, but he left marked by the grace of God. His limp was not a sign of defeat but of blessing – proof that God had claimed him and renamed him. In the same way, the cross of Christ marks us. The wounds of Jesus become the place where God claims us as his own – not to leave us where we *were* but to give us a new name, a new identity, and root us where we *are* – in the death and resurrection of Jesus, where all striving and struggle ends and where all blessings are secured. In our baptism he makes us his own child – he names us, claims us. And at his table he continues to meet us, to make himself known through the very body and blood of the son who wrestled with Jacob and wrestled with the Father.

Jacob walked away from the river limping, but alive. And he carried the blessing of God as well as a new name. So too we walk through this world, wounded and weary, but also marked by Christ's victory. Where we struggle, he struggled for us. Where we are broken, he was broken and pierced for us. In baptism he claims us. At his table he meets us. Christ endured it all so that he could secure the blessing for us. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Please pray with me.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for meeting us in our struggles and for not leaving us to face them alone. Thank you for sending your son, Jesus Christ, who wrestled for us, was wounded for our sins, and blessed us with life through his death and resurrection. Grant us faith to cling to him in every trial, to receive his blessings, and to live as your children, renewed and named by your grace. Strengthen us by your Spirit, that we may walk in the newness of life, rejoicing in your promises, now and forever.
Amen.