



Sermon – 08/06/2023
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered

Genesis 32

2 Corinthians 12:9

Let me invite you to open your Bibles with me to Genesis chapter 32. Genesis 32. And as you're turning there, if you're a guest with us, maybe you're here for the first time this morning, welcome home. This is a perfect Sunday to step into our space because it's our Life Group Kickoff Sunday. We've not been in life groups for the last month, but now we're back. And if you've never tried one before, this is the perfect Sunday to go give it a shot after the service. In addition to that, I want to remind you that just two weeks from now will be our next New Member Workshop and we want to invite you to unite with our faith family in that way if the Lord is stirring in your heart to do so.

Now, here we are in Genesis 32. We've seen Jacob come through so much and now God has called him to go back home, to go back to his homeland. And he stands here at a crossroads. Behind him are the problems and the dangers he faced from Laban. Within him and his family, we saw last time the dangers they faced from idolatry. And now before him, what he sees is not a land of promise but a land of problems. He knows that if he goes back to Canaan where God has called him that his brother Esau is there. The one who who's birthright he stole. The one who's blessing he took. The one who he knows longs to kill him. There's no safety all around. And as he stands at this crossroads, you can't help but wonder how Jacob is going to wrestle with this situation. And as we see this text unfold, as Jacob wrestles with this crossroads, I want to challenge you to think about the crossroads that you're facing in your life right now. Because if we can get a sense for how God works in the middle of Jacob's crossroads, perhaps He can transform the way that we handle those crossroads in our lives today. So, let's pick up now. We're going to start in Genesis 32 down in verse 1 where the text says this.

¹Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. ²And when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" So he called the name of that place Mahanaim. ³And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, ⁴instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. ⁵I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in

your sight.” ⁶And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him.” ⁷Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps, ⁸thinking, “If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape.” ⁹And Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,’ ¹⁰I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. ¹¹Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. ¹²But you said, ‘I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’”

Our family was at a crossroads just a few years ago. Literally, we were leaving a camp vacation in South Carolina. We're about to drive back to our home at the time in Nashville. And when you exited the camp, you could go one of two ways. You had a choice where you could go to the left on the broad way that led to Atlanta and all the highways and high speeds and smooth sailing as long as the traffic wasn't bad. Or you could head to the right. And the right was the narrow way. It was the way that took you up into the Smoky Mountains through all the winding roads and scenic views to take a more memorable route. And we had gone that narrow way the year before and half the family loved it and half of them hated it, driving through those mountains. And I had committed before we went to camp that I was going to go on the broad way. But something happened when I pulled up to this crossroads. I looked left and then I looked right and then I looked left again and I turned the wheel to the narrow way. I don't know if what was heading through my brain was what the Scripture says about how broad is the way of destruction. And while that might be true spiritually, it turned out it wasn't true on this trip. It was, in fact, the narrow way that led to the disaster. Because we rolled into the mountains and these majestic views I was expecting to see were covered by dense fog. These narrow roads were slick and dangerous because of the storm. And as we reached the highest point of the Smokies, the place where I'd hope to stop and take that perfect picture for social media, we stopped for a different reason. Because those windy roads created some car sickness in one of the boys and we had to clean up in the back of the van. And let me tell you, I've heard it said before that misery makes memories and we made a lot of memories that trip.

Is that one of the fears we face when we encounter crossroads of any kind in our life is we're worried we're going to end up with a wrong decision that leads to a moment just like that. Where we stand there, we look to see where it is that we should go and we finally make that choice. And it doesn't just go bad for us, it goes terribly for those that we love. So, we fret, we fear, we wring our hands in uncertainty. I don't know what crossroads you find yourself at this morning. Maybe it's a financial crossroads where that unexpected bill is resulting in a way that you don't know how you're going to make it financially. Or maybe you, you find yourself at a relational crossroads with that unexpected tension with the a roommate or a spouse leads you to wonder how you're going to make it towards reconciliation. Or maybe it's a personal crossroads where you're facing an unexpected crisis and you don't know how you're going to make it through. Maybe it's a professional crossroads where a new boss or a new opportunity has you wondering which way we

should turn. Or perhaps hardest of all, a spiritual crossroads. You sense that doubt creeping in that dryness withering your soul. Maybe it was from the church hurt that you recently experienced or some besetting sin that you're trapped in. And in each one of those moments, here's the root issue. Difficult circumstances, develop deep questions that feed off of dark doubts in our heart. And what we find this morning in Genesis 32 is Jacob is facing just that type of crossroad moment. He sees the difficult circumstances all around him. He's wrestling with the deep questions. He is battling with those dark doubts. And as a result of that, we get a window here in Genesis 32 into how God often works when we're wrestling the crossroads of life and here's what we're going to find.

What we'll see in Genesis 32 is that when we are wrestling with those crossroad moments in our life, we are also called to wrestle with God. So, let's see how this plays out in two different steps. We'll notice first in the portion of the passage we've already read that Genesis 32 shows us how we should wrestle with our crossroads. So, back here in verse 1, we know that we can put ourselves Jacob's mind. He's convinced that Esau is out to get him. That he'll destroy him. That there's danger ahead of him and that puts him in this difficult crossroads. How can I follow God's call to go back home if it may cost me everything? What am I to do? And in this moment, we see him wrestling with this situation in four different ways. Three of them, if they're on their own, can be dangerous at the crossroads. But the last one can give us a kind of breakthrough that we're hoping for. So, notice the first way he tries to handle the crossroads. We see first that we can wrestle with our crossroads through a forward-facing plan. That's what we see in verses 1 to 5. See, Jacob is traveling along the road and the angels of the Lord appeared to him. And where they appear, the presence of God is with the people of God. But in that moment, what we find is at the beginning, Jacob is not putting his hope in God's presence but in his plan and how do we see that? Look back at verse 5. He encounters God's messengers, these angels, but then he sends his own messengers out to Esau and here's what they say. He says to them, tell Esau, I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, males, servants, and female servants and I have sent to tell my Lord in order that I may have favor in your sight. So, what does Jacob do? He says, he tells these messengers, go to Esau and show him my resume. Let him see my accomplishments. Let him see my possessions. Perhaps, that will engender favor. Perhaps that will put fear in him. I'm not sure what the motive is but he's got this forward-facing plan. He thinks if we can just execute this well, then, perhaps, this crossroads that I'm facing will succeed. And here's the deal, what I'm not saying is that making a plan for your future is wrong. The problem for Jacob in this moment is he's putting a greater hope in his plan than he is in God's promise. He's depending on himself rather than God.

And that leads to the second way we see Jacob try to handle it that might show up in our lives too. Notice down beginning in verse 6, we can wrestle with our crossroads through an inward-facing panic. And we see that panic show up. The messengers go. They give the report to Jacob, and then they come back and they say, "Hey, Jacob, we just want you to know, Esau told us, he's on the way. And not only is he on the way, he's bringing 400 men with him." And you can just imagine Jacob's reaction in this moment. When he knows that this one who's likely out to get him is bringing hundreds of men perhaps to take him captive or even worse to kill him. And notice what happens in response. Look at Verse 7. It says,

⁷Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps,

Do you see what happens? He turns inward in panic. In fact, if you were to look at these words in the original language, they convey this sense of abundant fear, this type of fear that is so great it feels as if the walls are closing in all around you. As if there's no way forward. You see this advancing adversity drives him to an anxiety that overwhelms him. It turns him inward. And what does he do? He divides the camp. He's hoping to manage his risk. If Esau takes that one, perhaps the other will survive. That's what happens when anxiety grips our hearts at the crossroads. We wonder if our plan will work and so we begin to panic and we manage the risk because we're not sure what happens. We have this uncertain future that leads to an uneasy heart. But notice what happens down in verse 13. Let's pick up in a part of the passage that we haven't yet read because you'll see a third way that Jacob responds here. We can wrestle with our crossroads, third, through outward facing persuasion. So, let's see what happens when he encounters Esau and his people, or he prepares for that. So, verse 13 says,

¹³So he stayed there that night, and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau, ¹⁴two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, ¹⁵thirty milking camels and their calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. ¹⁶These he handed over to his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass on ahead of me and put a space between drove and drove." ¹⁷He instructed the first, "When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, 'To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these ahead of you?' ¹⁸then you shall say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a present sent to my lord Esau. And moreover, he is behind us.'" ¹⁹He likewise instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, "You shall say the same thing to Esau when you find him, ²⁰and you shall say, 'Moreover, your servant Jacob is behind us.'" For he thought, "I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterward I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me." ²¹So the present passed on ahead of him, and he himself stayed that night in the camp.

So what happens? After Jacob turns inward in panic, he turns outward in persuasion. After he is gripped by anxiety, he longs to receive Esau's approval. And so what he does is he prepares these gifts for him. These gift baskets full of goats and cows and camels. Maybe he went down to HEB and picked up some bluebell along the way. He wants to impress him. He wants to earn his favor. He wants to receive his approval. In other words, Jacob thinks what's the most effective thing that I can do to solve the problem, to figure out what to do in this crossroads situation. And notice the reason why. Look back at the second half of verse 20. It says, for he thought I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me. And afterward, I shall see his face. Perhaps, he will accept me. And see what happens here is he's longing for Esau's favor, for his approval. And what happens is he gets to the point in his life where he's more interested in appeasing men than he is in pleasing God. That's a dangerous place to be when we face our crossroads that pull towards outward facing persuasion, that pulled towards approval that grips Jacob can also grip us today. We want to do things to earn that favor, to appease others, and that is not the path that the Lord is calling us to when it comes to facing the crossroad moments of our life.

We see three different ways that Jacob misses the mark in his response but there might be one that you overlooked so far back in verse 9. There's a fourth path and this path marks a turning point in his life. And what we see in this fourth way is that we can wrestle with our crossroads through an upward facing prayer. So, notice what happens here buried in the middle of this passage after

Jacob comes to grips with the despair, the discouragement, the fear that comes along with that report of the hundreds coming. There is this powerful prayer. A prayer unlike anyone he is echoed so far to God. In the past, we have seen him rely on himself. We've seen his relationship with God focus on himself. But now, it's different. Now, he is looking to God for deliverance rather than himself. Now, he's looking to God for his hope and not in himself. And the way that he prays revolves around three different things that should shape our prayers when we face the crossroads in our life. You'll see to begin with that Jacob celebrates. So, look back at verse 9. It says,

⁹And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do good to you,'

Now, look down in verse 12, you'll see more of that sense of celebration. It says,

¹²But you said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'"

So, Jacob celebrates who God is and what He's promised. He remembers that He's the God of his fathers. He remembers His promise of making his offspring as numerous as the sand of the seashore. He remembers what God has done. What He said He will do. He comes to God in celebration. But then you'll see a second piece. There in verse 10, after celebration is confession. So, look at the way he confesses in verse 10.

¹⁰I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps.

After he lifts God high in celebration, he brings himself low in confession. He acknowledges that he's not worthy. That he doesn't deserve these things. That it is not on the basis of his merit or status or standing. He doesn't just have a right view of God. He has a right view of himself. And then coming out of that celebration and that confession, the third piece of this prayer that should shape how we pray in the crossroad moments of our life is it culminates in commitment. And look at the things he commits to the Lord in prayer in verse 11. He pleads with them. Please deliver me from the hand of my brother. From the hand of Esau. For I fear him that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. And so finally at last, Jacob's not just focused on himself. His heart is centered on all his people. And for their protection, he he cries out to God. He knows he can't do it on his own and he prays with specificity. He prays with desperation. He prays for deliverance. That right there is how we wrestle with the crossroads in our life. When we find ourselves tempted to look forward in planning or to turn inward and panic or to turn outward in persuasion. Instead, Jacob is showing us that the way forward in the crossroads of life is to start by turning upward in prayer. By celebrating God for who He is, by confessing who we are, by committing to our plans, our problems, our cares to Him. So, what's that crossroads that's been stirring on your heart ever since I asked you at the start of this message? The one where you're longing for breakthrough, the one where you are asking for guidance and wisdom. Whatever that is, this passage is calling us to seek the Lord. This is the one that no matter how deep the valley it is that you face right now, we follow a God that goes into the valley and makes dry bones live. No matter how great the waters are swirling all around you. We follow a God who can part the seas, who can walk on waters, who can speak to the waves, and tell them to be still. And no matter how

great the mountain is in front of you, we follow a God who can make the mountains move. He can make a way for you and me. And if He loved us so much at the crossroads of our deepest need, that need of salvation, that need of deliverance of sin, that He sent His only Son to for us, then, we can trust Him in whatever crossroad we face today.

But there's another piece of the passage. It picks up down here in verse 22. This passage doesn't just show us how to wrestle with our crossroads, it also shows us, second, how to wrestle with our God. And so notice the wrestling that we see begin to take place here in verse 22. It says this,

²²The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. ²⁴And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.

Now, if you want to know me and to know about my childhood as a child of the nineties, you have to understand that WWE wrestling was a big part of it. I know some of you are going to judge me for that and I'm okay. But I think about my childhood watching Hulk Hogan and Andre the Giant and playing with Stone Cold Steve Austin, the action figures, and trying to practice the people's eyebrow with the rock. I still don't have it down at this point. And some of you might have loved wrestling just like me. But for others of you, you were always skeptical. You know those matches aren't real, right? You know, you know they prearranged the outcomes when it happens. You know, it's all just a show. It's basically like a soap opera for men. You're not wrong about that, okay? Let's be honest. But in this passage, we see a different type of wrestling going on. A wrestling not in man to man combat has been pre-orchestrated by some executives who are making a bunch of money off of people watching it on a screen. Instead, we see this wrestling happen between Jacob and this stranger. This one we'd least expect. If we thought that Jacob was going to be wrestling with somebody in this passage, we would assume it was going to be Esau. And yet we find as the text goes on, it's someone different. It's someone new. But wrestling is not new to Jacob's life. In fact, he's been wrestling from the very beginning back in the womb. It tells us that Jacob and Esau were wrestling in the womb when he was born. And now as he is born again, he is wrestling one more time. In this turning point moment. As he makes his faith his own. As he encounters the presence of God in a transforming way. And if we want to wrestle with God in those crossroads moments of our life, Jacob is showing us how to do it. You'll see first that when we wrestle with God, His presence is made manifest in our worries. So, Jacob's on the move. He's just like all those thousands of Aggie and Blinn students that are loading up the U-Haul and squeezing one more monogrammed towel into their belongings to take and decorate their apartment. They load up the U-Haul. They cross the Jabbok, he brings his people across. But the text tells us back in verse 24 that now he's alone. Perhaps, you could say he's at his lowest moment. He has everything you could want in the world and yet there is this sense of loneliness, of emptiness, of uncertainty because his panic has overtaken his possessions. He's unsure of what to do. But in that time, that's the moment where God manifest His presence in the midst of his panic. That he experiences the presence of God in the midst of his worries. So, you'll notice back there in verse 24, what it tells us, he's left alone and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. What we need to understand in this day and age now is our circumstances, while they might be different, are similar in this way. That often it takes us reaching that lowest moment, that sense of greatest isolation and loneliness and uncertainty, that's the point we finally turn to wrestle with God and His presence meets us in our weakness. He has to bring us to the end of ourselves before

we can truly experience the beginning of Him. But notice what happens as he wrestles. You'll see a second thing here. When he, when we wrestle with God, His power is made perfect in our weakness. So, notice what it says in verse 25.

²⁵When 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. ²⁶Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." ²⁷And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."

So, what happens? Jacob wrestles with the stranger not just for a moment but for the whole night. And at the culmination of this point, this stranger bust out his finishing move. It's not the tombstone. It's not the people's elbow. It's not in the attitude adjustment. What does he do? He touches the socket of his hip. And with that one touch, it changes everything for Jacob. He's already felt weak personally. He's unsure of what's going to happen. He's unsure of what to do but now he feels that weakness physically. He's now injured. The one who had it all, who was trying to project strength to Esau is now at his weakest moment. And why does that happen? Because God is showing that His power is made perfect in his weakness. And how do we know that? It's because that God doesn't just give him a new weakness, He gives him a new identity through a new name. And what is that name? Look back at the end of verse 28. He calls his name Israel. Why? Verse 28 says, for you have striven with God and with men and you have prevailed. So, with that new name, comes a new identity that reminds Jacob that God's power is made perfect in his weakness. He's putting in front of him his own limitations so that he can embrace all that God has for him. It's as if the old man is dying here before he crosses the river and a new man is being raised to life to walk across on dry ground into the promised land. Power in the midst of weakness. And what we know is this name Israel isn't just for Jacob. It's the name that will be used for the people of God moving forward through the Old Testament. That the people of God weren't formed in a moment of strength and power and superiority. Instead, they were formed in a moment of weakness and inferiority. Reminding them not to depend on themselves but on their God in heaven. You just think about that crossroads that you're at at right now in your life. We want the blessing on the other side of the crossroads but what we forget is that often the blessing doesn't come without the battle. The favor doesn't come without the fight. Often, what God has to do is refine us before He can redefine us. To give us the breakthrough that we're looking for. That's what we see here in Jacob. That's what He does in us. He brings us to the end of our own strength. He allows us to experience our weakness so that we will put our hope in the strength of the Lord our God.

But there's one more thing you need to see here before the passage ends. It's a third way to wrestle with God in our crossroads moments. We see that when we wrestle with God, His purpose is made clear in our world. Let at that purpose laid out from verse 29 down to the end of the chapter when it says,

²⁹Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. ³⁰So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel,^l saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." ³¹The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. ³²Therefore to this day the

people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.

So, what the text is showing us here is finally, at the end of this wrestling match, it's gone all night. Finally, after he's been injured in his hip, Jacob realizes who he's been wrestling with all along. You see, Jacob thought he was wrestling with Laban. He thought he was wrestling with household gods. He thought he was about to be wrestling with Esau when in fact, all this time, he's been wrestling with God. And once he comes to that realization and God bestows on him a blessing, he gives this place a new name, Peniel. This place that means face to face because he has encountered the face of God and yet he's lived. And we should remember as this happens, the way this is an echo of Eden. That there before the fall of Adam and Eve, they wandered with God in the cool of the day. They experienced him face to face. But in their sin, in our sin, the face of God has been separated from us. We don't see it. We don't encounter it. But in this moment, we get this small glimpse of God's purpose. It's a purpose of restoring Eden. Of bringing us back to his design that he had in mind all along. Face to face. And what Jacob encounters here in this moment is pointing ahead to what this means for you and for me. So, think again about those crossroads you find yourself in. What are they? What's that turning point? What's that difficult decision you're wrestling with that's even you're distracting your thoughts here this morning as you try to worship and receive God's word through preaching. What's causing you to cry out with the Psalmist? How long oh Lord? Jacob is showing us the way forward when we're wrestling with God. He's showing us exactly what the apostle Paul echoes centuries later. 2 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 9. Notice what Paul says to us.

⁹But God said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest in me.

God's power made perfect in our weakness. We boast in the weakness. We boast in the wrestling because that is when we make Jesus great in our lives. What we need to recognize is that just like Jacob, we're not just wrestling with our future; we're wrestling with our father. And this passage doesn't just show us the way forward on how to deal with those crossroads moments in our life today. More importantly, it is pointing forward to one who has to come through the line of Jacob as a new and better Israel to fulfill everything that this passage prefigures. So, just think about Jesus. The son of Jacob. The true and better Israel. Just like Jacob, Jesus is separated from His people to wrestle with God. Just like Jacob, Jesus comes face to face with God's judgment. Just like Jacob, Jesus is pierced in the side right by that hip socket where Jacob was harmed in order to give His life for you and me. Just like Jesus, just like Jacob, Jesus bears the marks from wrestling with God. Not a limp that he'll walk with for the rest of his life but nail pierced hands and feet marked by scars. Just like Jacob, Jesus wrestles with God until He receives the blessing. And just like Jacob, Jesus is given a new name. In fact, He's given a name that is above every name. Because He's wrestled with God and just like Genesis 32:28 tells us, he has prevailed. He's conquered satan, sin, and death through His cross and through His resurrection. He's made a way for you to finally be set free of that shame and that guilt and that sin that has ravaged you. He's made the payment that you were supposed to pay. He died the death that you deserved so that at last, you could be wrestling with God and be made right in salvation. So that in these moments as you're wrestling with God in the crossroads of your life, you can find a way forward. So, what does this passage mean for us this morning, Central family? It shows us that the blessing is on the

other side of the battle. That the favor is on the other side of the fight. That the crossroads is on the other side of the cross. And that the pathway is on the other side of our problems. And we can wrestle with God all the way through it.

So, let's pray to Him now as we wrestle in this moment with Him in prayer.

Father, we come to You just like Jacob this morning. We celebrate You for who You are. High and lifted up. The King of the universe. Without rival or equal. The one who isn't just above the heavens but sent Your Son down to bring about the new covenant of His blood to set us free from our sin and to set our hope in You alone. And just like Jacob, Lord, we don't just celebrate, we confess You this morning that we don't deserve it. That on our own, our righteousness is like filthy rags. That we need You every hour. And Lord, like him, we're committing to You this morning the cares of life, the worries, the longings for approval, the crossroads we find ourselves in this morning, this morning, God. We're praying that You would meet us in this moment and guide us in the way of your Son, Jesus. Even now, as we ready our hearts for the Lord's Supper, would You prepare us towards that end, Father? That as we taste and see that You are good, we'll be reminded of the way that Jesus has made a way for us. We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.