

“Wrestling With God!”

Genesis 32:22-32

Intro. – I’m not much up on wrestling. I never went out for it in High School and as a result only toyed around with it... This much I do know – it is a physically demanding sport.

A good friend of mine in college had wrestled throughout high school. Ron Harland was his name. Ron was several inches shorter than me and weighed right at the same weight – 140-145. Ron had proven himself a real wrestler. I watched him toke on several in the dorm. He really knew the moves even when over matched...

One day, we were talking all about this in the lunch line. The school-cook (Terry A. Godfrey aka TAG) heard us talking. He jokingly said, “Harland you couldn’t wrestle your way out of a paper sack.” Now at that time TAG weighed well over 300. He enjoyed athletics, but wasn’t able to do much. Well, I heard the challenge and the wheels in my head began to turn. I said, “TAG, I wouldn’t bet on that. I really believe Harland can take you on!” “No way, no way...” Well, right then and there I got a commitment out of both of them.

Friday night of that same week, those who were left on campus and were out on a date gathered in the basement of the boys’ dorm. We really built this event up. It was David vs. Goliath all over again... Only rule, no illegal holds and wrestle till someone is pinned. I’ll never forget how Harland went after TAG in this wrestle match of the Century!

Our text deals with another great wrestling match. It was when Jacob, a mere man, took on God! Up to this point, Jacob had been a disappointment – to himself and others. This is not to say he was altogether bad – just like you and me...not all bad. As with most of us, there was much good in ole’ Jacob. He was a man of great potential. Yet, Jacob persisted in his shifty, crafty ways until a real crisis hit. You see, he is about to meet up with Esau... Jacob takes measures – sends gifts..., divides family into two groups..., send them across the river Jabbok... It was then, while Jacob was by himself, he took God on in a wrestling match.

In looking at this, we see though quite successful as a sinner, Jacob’s crisis and this divine wrestling match transformed him... Does this mean a serious crisis must come before you and I give heed to our Lord? Does God ever get totally exasperated at our struggling with Him? These are the things we want to discover together as we examine this text this morning.

Purpose: to reaffirm in our minds how significant it is to do God’s bidding

I Jacob Had a GOOD SIDE

A. A Man of Rugged Strength

1. Jacob had to be a man of physical strength... worked outdoors... managed live stock etc.
2. He also was a man of “steel will” – like a pit bull dog we knew about in our first located ministry. The dog’s name was BO... bit the tongue of a cow... would not let go... shot the cow...
 - a. persistent and not subject to fainting spells was a trait Jacob held.
 - b. he had strong will and tenacity of purpose... this entitles him to our respect don’t you think?

B. A Man of Loving Commitment

1. Any man who loves as Jacob loved can’t be altogether bad.
2. He could fall in love and stay in love through tough times:
 - a. fact he fell in love is no big deal... Anyone can do that...
 - b. key = Jacob could stay in love – case in point: worked for Rachel for 7 yrs. Day of the wedding it was Leah...
 - c. disappointed is an understatement – Jacob worked another 7 yrs for Rachel, “*but they seemed but 7 days for the love he had for her.*”

C. A Man of Religious Convictions

1. Compared to Esau, Jacob had higher spiritual values:
 - a. Hebrews 12:16 where Esau is called *godless* = sensualist = lived only in physical realm...
 - b. not that Esau hated spiritual living, he just was not interested...; instead, he was interested in hunting, shooting, fishing and little else.
 - c. birthright (privilege be religious leader family) meant little to nothing if anything...

2. Jacob however was spiritual... not saying had beautiful beliefs and practices. He didn't (e.g. thought God as a power to be used for selfish ends...)
 - a. faulty as it was, Jacob's beliefs led him to prayer and even the need to become a tither.
 - b. like ourselves, Jacob spiritual even though his beliefs and practices were imperfect at best...

Jacob did have a good side...

II Jacob Had a BAD SIDE

A. Man of Intense Selfishness

1. Had little regard for anybody's rights or well being...
2. Illus. – happy go lucky Esau didn't appreciate his birthright. Jacob decided to win hook or by crook. And so he did, remember? Esau came in from hunting famished... Jacob, like cunning spider, prepared his web...
3. We have contempt for Esau's choices. What a clod! We also feel indignation for Jacob's selfishness!

B. A Man of Success

1. Jacob at his worst was a thorough going rascal who took pride living by his wits
 - a. Esau missed out on Isaac's blessing and his own birthright.
 - b. Laban – chip off the ole' block. Laban draws first blood, but, Jacob gets even and holds final victory!...
 - c. but in his hour of crisis, Jacob came with conviction the shortest distance between 2 points is a crooked line...
2. Jacob, simply put, was a successful prankster:
 - a. such put him in a peculiar danger:
 - Illus. – success of any kind can be dangerous. Most do not know how to handle true success as is evident in the Hollywood scene.
 - b. success in general is dangerous, imagine the danger behind success in wrongdoing! = successful sinner!
 - c. such become morally colorblind – come to believe the law of sowing and reaping may be true to stupid folk, but not for sharp people like themselves.
 - 1) Illus. – Nathaniel Hawthorn *The Scarlet Letter* (1845) – Story about Arthur Dimmedsdale (unfaithful puritan preacher) and Hester Prynne (unfaithful wife). Both sinned and suffered greatly. Hester's sin became apparent because a baby resulted from her sin with Dimmedsdale. Hester was made to stand on a pedestal of shame with her baby (whom she named Pearl because she was bought with a great price) and made to wear a Scarlet Letter "A" on her clothing... Nobody suspected Arthur Dimmedsdale; yet, the scarlet letter he wore inwardly for seven years of tortures guilt ridden torture...
 - 2) point: there's nothing more dangerous than being a successful sinner!

III Jacob Had a CHANGED SIDE

- in spite of the odds against him, Jacob the successful sinner, became a new man. How?:

A. God the First Factor

1. 32:24 *"Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak."*
2. However early or late we seek God, He has/will always begins earlier to seek us.
 - a. 2 Chronicles 16:9a *"For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His."*
 - b. God is on an endless quest for YOU and ME – He truly is the "Good Shepherd"
3. Fact that God wrestled with Jacob indicates Jacob's resistance to God... God was trying to get Jacob to go one direction and Jacob is going another!...
4. Note: view Jacob's resistance we see our own:
 - a. God seeks to make us strong... we cling to that which makes us weak...
 - b. God seeks to give us inward peace... we cling to that which brings turmoil...

- c. God seeks to make us more beautiful... we cling to how we look outwardly...
- d. God seeks to make us useful... we cling to that which makes us useless...
- e. God seeks to make us loving... we cling and resist just like Jacob...

B. Jacob the Second Factor

1. God was bringing home to Jacob that Jacob needed Him above everything and everyone!
 - a. finally came to Jacob that when he is physically hurting, he couldn't get along without God
 - b. has such come home to us? There is no help/hope for any of us apart from God...
2. Jacob Began to Cling
 - a. vv 26-27 = the kind of answer in which God delights = "*Bless me!*"
 - b. such a wise choice will always bring about good results unto the honor of God first
3. Jacob acknowledged His sin
 - a. friendly "foe" asked "What is your name?"
 - b. names you know, among Jews stood for character.
 - c. what God was asking = "What kind of a man are you?"
 - d. Jacob answered truthfully – "My name is Jacob" i.e. "supplanter, tricksters, slippery as an eel, though spiritual, I'm a religious rascal... in shame and heartache he acknowledged his sin and inability to handle it.
4. What happened? That which always happens when sin is acknowledged and grace is embraced = new name = new man!

Conclusion: Remember Ron Harland and Terry A. Godfrey...? The outcome of their match. Harland had TAG pinned, but, then he slipped on the mat and that was all she wrote. TAG rolled over and Harland was pinned!

We have no chance wrestling against God.. We have good side, bad side and we all need a changed side!

- 1) Realize God seeks us...!
- 2) Cease to resist...
- 3) Cling for help...
- 4) Acknowledge our sin and seek His gift of grace...!

Let's quit wrestling with God... and start living for Him!!