



EXPLORE THE BIBLE.

Genesis Sermon Series

Supports Session 7: Wrestled

Sermon Title: "From Struggle to Surrender" (Genesis 32:22-32)

Connection to Session 7

Jacob's struggle with a heavenly messenger changed his life for the better. Likewise, God often has to "struggle" with us before we are willing to let Him change us.

Introduction/Opening

I grew up in Memphis, and one of the popular forms of entertainment was professional wrestling. It came on TV every Saturday morning, and I often watched it. As I got older, I watched Olympic wrestling on television, and I quickly realized it was very different from the "wrestling" that aired on Saturday morning! The wrestling matches on Saturday morning were more like street fights, and of course, it was all an act. Olympic wrestling was real, and it required a lot of skill, strength, and pure determination. In this text, Jacob had a similar struggle with a stranger, but he soon realized that he was dealing with no ordinary man! In the end, he realized he had been struggling with God. This outward struggle paralleled his inward spiritual struggle.

Outline

1. A peculiar contest (vv. 22-25).

- a) Jacob was preparing for a potentially deadly encounter with his brother, Esau.
 - i. He had been told Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men (v. 6).
 - ii. He sent the rest of his company across the Jabbok River ahead of him.
- b) During the night, a stranger wrestled with him until dawn.
 - i. The Bible doesn't tell us how the struggle started, but it lasted until daybreak.
 - ii. The stranger "struck" (v. 25) Jacob's hip and put it out of joint. This suggests the stranger could have prevailed against Jacob had he chosen to do so.

2. A peculiar conversation (vv. 26-29).

- a) The stranger asked Jacob to release him.
 - i. Since dawn was breaking, Jacob would soon be able to see the stranger's face.
 - ii. Strangely, Jacob refused to release the stranger until the stranger blessed him. He evidently realized that the stranger was no ordinary person.
- b) The stranger then told Jacob his name would no longer be Jacob, but Israel.
 - i. The name "Jacob" means "grasps the heel," which was a euphemism for deceit (Gen. 27:36). "Israel" means "God strives" and also "One who struggles with God."

- ii. When Jacob asked for the stranger's name, the stranger refused to tell him. This further indicates the stranger was supernatural.
- c) This exchange reminds us of some important truths.
 - i. God is gracious. He could have struck Jacob dead any time He chose, but He allowed Jacob to prevail.
 - ii. God is generous. Jacob did not deserve to be blessed, but God blessed him anyway. We don't deserve God's blessings any more than Jacob did.

3. A peculiar conclusion (vv. 30-32).

- a) Jacob named the place Peniel, which means "face of God."
 - i. He recognized that God had graciously spared his life.
 - ii. His limp was a permanent reminder of his encounter with God.
- b) How did this encounter affect him spiritually?
 - i. He knew God was with him, so he did not need to fear Esau.
 - ii. He recognized that his wealth and his family were gifts from God.
- c) Our encounters with God are not usually as dramatic as Jacob's, but they are still profound and life changing.
 - i. His grace humbles us, just as it humbled Jacob.
 - ii. We're reminded that everything we have comes from Him (Jas. 1:17).

Conclusion

I remember sitting in a seminary class one day, and my professor was talking about some of the cliches we use in church. He said he never liked such phrases as "surrendering to preach" or "surrendering to the ministry." He said, "That suggests there was some kind of battle going on, and that wasn't the case with me." The student sitting next to me whispered, "It was with me!" I replied, "Me, too!" I wasn't one of those who graciously submitted to God's call. I fought it tooth and nail for a long time. Even after I surrendered, I was still hesitant about it. Over time, though, I came to realize that obedience to God brings joyful blessings. The blessings may not always come immediately, and there may be some hardships in the meantime, but the blessings do come. If you want God to bless you, don't wrestle with Him. Listen to Him and obey!

Ken Jones has been pastor of Worsham Baptist Church in Farmville, Virginia, since 2007. He has a B.S. in History from the University of Tennessee at Martin, and an MDiv. from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. His wife, Celia, is an associate professor of Political Science at Hampden-Sydney College.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible, Copyright 2020 by Holman Bible Publishers.