

Wrestling with God

Introduction: In Genesis 32 we find a rather odd story. Jacob wrestles with a man all night long and eventually ends up with a blessing and a new name. While this story may seem to be a random encounter, I believe this is a necessary point of development in the character of Jacob. There are some important lessons for us to consider as we learn about Jacob wrestling with this man.

I. Jacob:

- A. Throughout his life Jacob is known for living up to his name. His name means supplanter or take by the heel. This is what Jacob does literally in the womb and it goes on to be his character, constantly scheming for advantage.
 1. Jacob takes advantage of his brother by taking his birthright for a pot of stew.
 2. Jacob deceived his father to receive the blessing that was intended for his brother.
- B. Jacob taking the blessing of Esau caused Esau's anger to burn against him to the point of wanting to kill Jacob. Thus, Jacob flees to Haran to find a wife and ends up working there around 20 years.
- C. As Jacob prepares to return to Canaan, he fears that Esau may try to kill him so he sends trains of gifts ahead in an attempt to appease Esau.
- D. Before meeting with Esau, Jacob finds himself at the ford of Jabbok. Here we read of a man wrestling with Jacob until the dawn.
 1. Jacob wrestles until dawn when the man touches the socket of Jacob's hip and dislocates it.
 2. On the surface, it appeared to be a pretty even fight, neither one prevailing against the other, however, it is settled when the man touches the socket of Jacob's hip. I think this is an indication that Jacob was overmatched from the beginning.
 3. The man asks Jacob to let him go but Jacob refuses unless he blesses him.
- E. Hosea gives us a few more details of this encounter: Hosea 12:3-4
 1. The man is identified as an angel so this was not an ordinary man but an angel of God.
 2. Jacob is said to have wept and sought favor from the angel. While in Genesis it may appear that Jacob is making an angry demand for a blessing, Hosea shows that it is more of a desperate plea of one who has already lost. In a way it is an admission of defeat, 'I need your blessing.'
- F. A transformation in the life of Jacob.
 1. The man asks Jacob his name. It is not that the man did not know who Jacob was, but Jacob had to admit to who he was, and therefore what he had done to Esau.
 2. The man then changes his name to Israel, for he has struggled with God and prevailed.
 3. I'm sure we are aware that names mean something in the Bible. Jacob was named supplanter but that's not who he will be anymore. God changes his name and we see a different Jacob from this point forward.
- G. Victory through surrender:
 1. Throughout Jacob's life, he relied upon his scheming to gain advantage or claim victory.
 2. Through the wrestling, Jacob finds himself crippled and now relies (desperately pleads) upon the angel for blessing.
 3. Jacob now relies on God and gains 'victory' through surrendering himself before God.

II. Job:

- A. Job loses everything as Satan tempts him to curse God and die. Job refuses to curse God but in his grief, he wrestles with the situation he finds himself in.
- B. Job and his friends operate from a basic worldview. If you are righteous, good things will happen to you. If you do evil, bad things will happen to you. Yet, Job maintains his righteousness and questions why the bad things are happening despite his goodness.
- C. Job expresses frustration and distress at his turmoil, even questioning God:
 1. Job expresses his sorrow: Job 7:11
 2. Job feels as if God abandoned him: Job 29:2-5
- D. In the end, God responds to Job and reminds him of who He is: Job 38-41
 1. God responds to various claims that Job has made and reminds him that He is still in control, He still cares, and He is still present.
 2. Job realizes that in his distress, he forgot God. He is reminded of the goodness and the majesty of God and Job realizes his need to fall prostrate before the Lord. Job 42:2-6
- E. Victory through submission:
 1. After all that Job endured, God blessed him abundantly.
 2. This blessing comes as Job surrenders himself before God. He sees God and His character and realizes his own unworthiness.

III. Victory through surrender:

- A. Throughout our lives we find there are times where we wrestle with God:
 1. The Psalms are filled with occasions where the psalmists wrestled with God: Psalm 13
 2. Sometimes, we wrestle because of an inward struggle between our will and God's will.
 3. Sometimes grief causes us to wrestle with questions of why.
- B. Paul pleads with God to remove his thorn in the flesh, but finds victory through surrendering to God's response: 2 Corinthians 12:10
- C. We need to realize that if we hope to gain victory with God, we simply must surrender to Him and let Him reign in our lives.
 1. There is no virtue in wrestling. God is gracious toward it, but the virtue is in the end, the surrendering.
 2. We need to get to the point that our will becomes God's will. Where we are no longer wrestling with God but we've surrendered to Him and have made accomplishing His will and His purposes our greatest desire.
 3. This is another point where the gospel seems counterintuitive. We assume victory comes through asserting ourselves and establishing our will. While that may be true in many earthly pursuits, victory in the kingdom of God comes through realizing our own unworthiness and surrendering ourselves to God.
- D. This is the basis of our salvation and our relationship with the Lord:
 1. It begins with the poverty of spirit: Matthew 5:3
 2. We realize our own unworthiness and our complete inability to dig our way out of the hole we've dug for ourselves.
 3. This realization becomes more apparent when we finally see God. The holy God in whom is no darkness.
 4. This leads us to depend wholly upon the Lord, surrendering ourselves to Him for the blessings that He provides: Romans 5:6-11

Conclusion: We all have points where we tend to wrestle with God. While God allows us some room to wrestle, we need to always remember that He is greater than we are and His ways are better than ours. Ultimately, we will not succeed if we continue to wrestle with God. We will only gain victory by acknowledging the greatness of God and surrendering ourselves to Him. Let us learn to do God's will in all things, surrendering to Him to gain victory.