

April 10th

WRESTLING WITH GOD

“And he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” 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.”

GENESIS 32:27-28

“Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing...” These are the words of Martin Luther in his powerful hymn “A Mighty Fortress is our God.” The hymn has been nicknamed “The Battle Hymn of the Reformation.” Luther wrote it based on Psalm 46. As believers, we could also call it a hymn that is a biographical tale of Jacob’s life. Jacob used his power but only gained loss and was despised by his own family. It was only when he learned about God’s protection in his twenty years with Laban that he finally understood life’s greatest lesson. What can God teach us here men through this story?

We find in verse 24 that Jacob is all alone. He is faced with the consequences of his betrayal of his brother Esau and doesn’t know his future. He’s afraid. He’s begged God to intervene to save him. But God. God answers Jacob’s prayer, but not in the way that Jacob expects. God rescues Jacob from himself...from his pride and trusting in his own strength. As the wrestling match begins, we can assume that Jacob cannot see who he’s wrestling with. There are no streetlights that would illumine God’s face here. It’s only after the Unnamed touches his hip socket to put it out of joint that Jacob realizes that He has been wrestling with God (it’s most likely Jesus, which is called by experts a theophany). Jacob wrestles with God for several hours. He won’t let God go because he wants God to bless him. He also wants God to reveal His name to Jacob. Remember, names carry great significance in the Bible. God’s names tell a story of His character. Therefore, Jacob wants to know God’s name here.

Jacob sees God’s mercy and grace after the wrestling match. He calls the name of the place Peniel, which means “the face of God.” Remember how we take special notice of words that are included in Biblical stories? What does Jacob say here? “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.” God has already spared Jacob’s life with Esau twenty years ago. He spared his life for twenty years when he served Laban. Now Jacob recalls in this hours long wrestling match that God still shows him mercy and grace.

Men, look closely at God’s grace over Jacob in this historic wrestling match. This isn’t a national championship meet between Iowa and Penn State here. Instead, generations will recall this moment in history. But why? Why is this so historic? Jacob is given a new name and a new cripple, and both are signs of God’s grace and blessing. The cripple and the name will always remain connected. God reminds Jacob of the source of his first name. He has always been one who cheats. His cheating created a worldview based upon manipulation and deceit. These were the strengths of Jacob, but they only led him to further failure. But God. God connects his crippling injury with finally prevailing. He first is humbled and will carry a reminder of his fight for the rest of his life. It’s only when he is weak that he is strong. This paradox instructs Jacob and us. Kent Hughes states, “The day of failure through power was over, and the day of success through weakness had begun.” But this lesson isn’t just for Jacob. We struggle with independence just like Jacob did. And then God gives his grace when He dislocates our lives. And it’s from this place that our walk with God will never be the same. Will you allow your God to change you through your weakness?

Spend some time reflecting on some dislocations that God has placed in your life. Ask God to teach you in these moments.

For Further Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

