

THE PURPOSE OF TESTING #4

Wrestling With God

Introduction

Tonight we continue our series on the Purpose of Testing with some lessons we need to learn from the life of Jacob, the man who wrestled with God.

I. The Journey of Jacob

The earthly journey of Jacob begins in Genesis 24 and ends in Genesis 49, a whopping 24 chapters of scripture! His name appears in the Bible almost 400 times in the Bible and his life holds many lessons for believers.

A. Who Was Jacob?

1. Jacob was the grandson of Abraham and the son of Isaac; but he is very different from his forebears in that his life is a continual conflict with God and man.

Arthur Pink

“It is intensely interesting to mark how each of the patriarchs foreshadows some truth in believers. In Abraham we see the truth of Divine sovereignty and the life of faith; in Isaac we see Divine sonship and submission; in Jacob, we see Divine grace at work in the life of conflict.”

2. Before he is even born, he is wrestling with his twin brother in the womb of his mother.

Genesis 25:21

Now Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

Gen 25:22 NLT

But the two children struggled with each other in (Rebekah’s) womb. So she went to ask the Lord about it. "Why is this happening to me?" she asked.

a. God reveals there are 2 nations at war within her; the sons of Jacob and the sons of Esau are still fighting each other to this very day!

3. The conflict that began in the womb continues in the birth canal.

Genesis 25:24-26

When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob.

4. What does it mean? Remember that to the Hebrews, the primary blessing, the “double portion” goes to the firstborn; in the case of these twins, which would be Esau. But even as he is being born, Jacob is having none of it! He is born holding onto his brother’s heel, as if to pull him back so he can take his place!

5. So he is given a *name* to match his *nature*: and it is not a compliment!

“Jacob”

Hebrew: “heel catcher” or “supplanter”

“Supplanter

One who wrongfully or illegally seizes and holds the place of another, through force, scheming, or strategy

6. This “Jacob Nature” is still among God’s people today: so many Christians are still more obsessed with obtaining the blessing of God more than they are to truly know the God of the blessing.

B. The Conflict Continues in the Household

1. Jacob, with the help of his mother, proceeds to use deception to do 2 things: steal his older brother’s birthright and steal his brother’s blessing.

2. In Genesis 25, Jacob catches his brother in a weak moment and persuades him to selling his birthright for a bowl of stew; in Genesis 27, his mother helps him steal his brother’s blessing by deceiving his elderly (and nearly blind) father into thinking he is Esau. By the time the deception is discovered, it’s too late for Esau; Isaac has given the blessing of the firstborn to Jacob!

Genesis 27:36

And Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!" And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?"

3. I feel sorry for Esau though he was not a good man; but Jacob, like many of us, is a mixture of good and bad:

- He desperately wants the blessing of God
- But he wanted the blessing of God more than he wanted the God of the blessing
- There can be a little bit of Jacob in all of us.

4. So how does God deal with a Jacob? He will spend the next 20 years keeping His word in blessing Jacob. But He will also submit him to testings and trials that will mold him into the man God has destined him to be.

5. If we have a Jacob spirit, we will have to wrestle with men and we will have to wrestle with God.

II. How God Deals With a Jacob Spirit

A. Wrestling With Man

1. Jacob runs away from the wrath of his brother by leaving the country to live with Laban, his mother's uncle, and falls in love with Laban's younger daughter Rachel. Laban offers him a job...

Genesis 29:15

And Laban said to Jacob, "What shall thy wages be?"

a. The great Bible commentator gives the meaning of this:

Arthur Pink

"Here the retribution begins. The blessing Jacob longed for was to be served, not to serve; he connived in seeking a place of dignity and honor. Now he is put in his place as a hired hand! How significant that Jacob, the deceiver, should fall into the hands of another crafty schemer."

2. If we have a Jacob spirit, we will have to match wits with those who may be better at deception than we are! So in the case of Jacob and his uncle Laban.

a. Jacob agrees to 7 years of labor for the hand of Rachel; but on the wedding night Laban switches the sisters and Jacob wakes up with Leah!

Genesis 29:25

So it came to pass in the morning, that behold, it was Leah. And he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?"

b. Suddenly the tables are turned: Jacob the Deceiver is now the victim of deceit; he has to commit to another 7 years of service to have Rachel.

3. In his book, "Gleanings in Genesis", Arthur Pink shows how the spirit of deception can wreak havoc in a family.

Arthur Pink, "Gleanings in Genesis"

"Jacob is the most striking example of what men call 'poetic justice'. First he deceived his father, now he is deceived by his father-in-law. Jacob came as the younger posing as the elder to deceive his father and now receives the elder daughter of his father in law given instead of the younger for his wife."

a. Jacob had dishonored the order of elder and younger in supplanting his brother Esau; but now his uncle forces him to honor the order of elder and younger in the matter of marriage.

Arthur W. Pink

"In deceiving Jacob in the matter of Leah, Laban tricked his daughter Rachel; later we find Rachel tricking her father Laban (Genesis 31:35). A mercenary spirit moved Jacob to buy the birthright from his brother Esau for a bowl of food; later, the mercenary spirit in his uncle moved Laban to change Jacob's wages 10 times! (Genesis 31:41).

b. If you deceive your employer in any way expect your employer to deceive you!

Arthur W. Pink

"Jacob deceived his father Isaac by allowing his mother Rebekah to cover his hands with the skins of goats (Genesis 27:16); much later in his life, Jacob's sons deceive him by dipping Joseph's coat in the blood of a 'kid of the goats' and making Jacob believe Joseph had been killed by wild animals."

A.W. Pink

"So just as Jacob had deceived his father (Isaac) in regard to his favorite son (Esau), so later Jacob will be deceived by his own sons in regard to Jacob's favorite son (Joseph).

4. The Hindus call it Karma; God's word calls it sowing and reaping!

Job 4:8

Even as I have seen, they that plough iniquity and sow in wickedness, reap the same.

5. In spite of his shortcomings, the hand of God blesses Jacob over and over as he wrestles with his uncle for 20 years. Then Jacob turns back toward home; where God has another appointment for him.

B. Wrestling With God

1. Jacob is in a bind; on his way back home to face the anger of his brother Esau; on the night before arrival he sends his family ahead...

Genesis 32:22

During the night he...crossed the ford Jabbok

Genesis 32:22

Jabbok

“Pouring out; emptying”

a. Have you been at Jabbok? The place of emptying? It is night; the darkest place. You're all alone; no one can help you. Tomorrow you may die at the hands of the brother you betrayed. Your conscience convicts you that you've brought all this on yourself. This is the place of desperation where God will wrestle with the Jacob spirit in our lives.

Genesis 32:24

Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.

2. The man who has wrestled with men, (his father, his brother, his uncle), now wrestles with a Man who he will discover to be God! Amazing!

The Biblical Illustrator

“Here is a rare show indeed. See and hear this great wonder, in some sense the greatest wonder that ever was in the world, that God Himself should come down from His throne in heaven to wrestle with man, a poor worm upon the earth.”

3. Jacob will wrestle all night-holding his own...

Genesis 32:25-26

**Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks."
But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"**

a. What a picture here! A man who wrestles with God to the point where God touches (Hebrew: “to strike” or “smite”) the hip joint of the man to render him helpless-and yet Jacob holds on even harder!

b. This is a picture of coming to the end of ourselves where all we can hold onto is God. This is a turning point in the Christian life.

Adam Clarke

Though salvation be the free gift of God, yet he gives it not to any who do not earnestly seek it. The deeper the conviction of guilt and helplessness is, the more earnest the application to God for mercy is likely to be. They whose salvation costs them strong crying and tears, are not likely to part with it lightly. The religion that costs us nothing is worth nothing to us.”

4. The good news is the glorious outcome of wrestling with God, recorded in...

Genesis 32:27-28

**So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob."
And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."**

a. Don't miss this! When God asks him who he is, Jacob confesses the truth about himself!

b. When we come to the point where we can confess who we really are, God tells us what we can now become.

5. This is a great spiritual truth: you can never really know who you really are until you know who God really is.

a. Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do men say that I am?”, Peter got it right. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”.

Matthew 16:17-18

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church..."

6. When God reveals Himself to us He reveals us to us: Jacob the heel catcher and supplanter is now "Israel", a "prince of God."

Adam Clarke

From this time Jacob became a new man, but it was not till after a severe struggle that he got his name, his heart, and his character changed. After this he was no more Jacob the supplanter, but Israel-the man who prevails with God, and sees him face to face.

The Biblical Illustrator

"Jacob was not at once promoted to his high place. As a wanderer and a stranger, he underwent most humiliating discipline. But on this night his old and wretched past was replaced by a new name and a new hope. There must be such a night in every life -- a night in which the sinful past shall go down for ever into the depths of unfathomable waters."

J. Parker, D. D.

7. God had appeared to Jacob years before at Bethel, and all Jacob wanted to do was make a deal with God: "If you will bless me I will..."; but now he is different. He wants to know the God of the blessing.

Genesis 32:29

**Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell me Your name, I pray."
And He said, "Why is it that you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there.**

a. God will not tell him his name; that would only be revealed when Jesus would come. But He did give him the blessing.

Genesis 32:30

So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

b. This is the "Jacob moment"; where we are really changed.

Rev. F.W. Faber

"What is it that will make us real? Seeing the face of God will do it."

c. The wrestling match ends with this...

Genesis 32:31

Just as he crossed over Penuel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip.

d. One great Bible scholar summed it up this way:

Biblical Illustrator

"There were two things which Christ gave Jacob in this encounter -- a wound and a blessing. The wound first and then the blessing. The wound was small and for a season; the blessing was infinite and forever."

J. Vaughan, M.A.

Matthew Henry

"The evidence of a divine touch is that it wounds and heals at the same time."

8. Jacob was chosen by God from before his birth; but it took many years of for him to come to the place where his scheming nature was completely conquered.

9. Let this be a lesson to all of us; every testing has a purpose; even when God wrestles us into submission.

A.W. Tozer

"The Lord cannot fully bless a man until He has first fully conquered him."

III. Conclusion

A. From Jacob to Israel

1. The purpose of God is to conform us to the image of Christ; to turn a Jacob into an Israel.

2. The deceiver must be defeated; the supplanter must be supplanted.

3. This is why God wrestles with a Jacob; that he might become an "Israel".

The Biblical Illustrator

“Israel is a new creation: Jacob is dead. Dark as the night was, Jacob passed through it, saw the face of God at day-dawn, and became himself, met his brother with serenity, and spent the rest of his days in the love and service of God.”

(J. Clifford, D. D.)

4. And we saved the best for last. What is the end of his story? Jacob is mentioned 377 times in the Bible! But here is the last place we see his name:

Hebrews 11:21

By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.

a. By faith-at the end of Jacob’s journey he was living by faith; it’s not how you begin your walk with God it’s how you end!

b. He blessed his children; there is continuity in the Kingdom; He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

c. He worshipped-he was giving God all the glory.

5. And the last thing may be most significant of all: “Leaning on his staff”! Surely this should remind us of that awesome night where he “wrestled with God”! Where God touched him once and for all and marked him with a limp; a constant reminder that he had truly encountered the living God.

B. Application

1. I personally believe there is a bit of a Jacob in every believer; but there is an “Israel” as well.

2. God will wrestle with us to displace Jacob with Israel.

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“As Jacob wrestled with God in human form, so it is with God in the Lord Jesus Christ, that in all our spiritual conflicts, in all our deep repentances, in all our struggling prayers, we too must wrestle.”

Title