

**Sunday 20th October 2019 From Wrestling to Resting**  
**Gen 32:22-31 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 Luke 18:1-8**

**Context:**

I don't know about you but sometimes I struggle to piece together all the various stories and people from the Old Testament especially. We may have been lucky enough to go to Sunday School and learn some of the great stories - has anyone got a favourite OT story?

Jonah & the Whale,

Joseph and his coat of many colours,

David & Goliath

Moses and the burning bush

We could go on I'm sure

Sometimes it is hard because on Sunday mornings we hear just snippets of a major story. Today's reading from Genesis feels like that to me. When Jon was preaching a few weeks ago our OT reading was also from Genesis (Chapter 28) about Jacob. We have jumped a few chapters from then to today's reading and I just want to give a brief roundup, hoping it will help us understand the significance of today's story.

So... Here goes...

There was a man named Abram who married Sarai (they were given new names by God - Abraham & Sarah)

They were unable to have children and yet God promised them that they would have more descendants than the number of stars in the sky.

They went on, eventually, to have a son who they called Isaac and their lineage began

Isaac had twin boys - Esau and Jacob

Esau, being the eldest should have inherited his father's blessing but Jacob had other ideas and devised a cunning plan to deceive his family and rob his elder brother of his rightful inheritance. The name Jacob means 'he grasps the heel' or deceiver!

Inevitable family dispute ensued as the brothers grew in their hatred of each other

Despite all he had done, God had plans for Jacob and continued to pursue him and remind him of the promise that he had given to Abraham - that their descendants would be numerous.

Hopefully you remember the story that Jon spoke about from Genesis 28 when in a dream Jacob saw a ladder reaching from heaven to earth with angels ascending and descending. Jacob's conclusion at the end of that dream was

'Surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it' Gen 28:16

God had also given Jacob a significant promise -

'Then the Lord said to Jacob - Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.' Gen 31:3

And so, Jacob, after many life-changing events set out to meet his brother with understandable fear and trepidation. He had, after all, stolen his birthright and been a pretty awful brother. But he had this promise from God

So he sent some of his men on ahead with several different herds of animals as 'peace offerings' and strict instructions on what to say when they met Esau  
And Jacob called out to God in prayer (Gen 32:9-12)

Finally, after they had all crossed the river, Jacob and his closest family stayed in camp  
This is where we pick up the part of the story from today's reading.

I told you it would be a brief round up!!! (20 chapters of Genesis and the 3 patriarchs of the Jewish faith covered in one side of A4 !!! Not quite covered - try reading it yourselves for the detail!  
Today's story -

IT'S NIGHT and Jacob sends his closest family and all the possessions they still had with them, across the river and he is left alone.

Night time was important because being dark it meant that Jacob could not see the face of the man with whom he began to wrestle. They wrestled & wrestled until daybreak

I wonder when Jacob understood with whom he was wrestling?

Despite the hours of wrestling they seemed to get no-where and we read the man struck Jacob's hip enough to dislocate it and then said 'Let me go for the day is breaking' (vs 26)

Daybreak was pivotal because no-one could live after seeing God face to face and the man that Jacob has been wrestling with all this time is God

The action changes at this point

Jacob chooses to hold on to God but stopped wrestling in exchange for receiving a blessing from Him

The wrestler, the one who was called Jacob the heel grabber, the self-determined schemer, finally stops wrestling and admits that he needs God's blessing. Without that he may well die.

Jacob is given a new name by God. He shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel meaning 'he struggles with God'

And then he receives a blessing from God himself, almost face to face in the breaking dawn.  
'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been preserved' vs 30

It was as Jacob surrendered in utter weakness that his wrestling with God turned to resting in God

Why is this a significant story for us today?

Jacob received 3 incredible things from God that night

- a change of name - a new identity Great store was given to a person's name in terms of ID
- a blessing
- a face to face encounter with God

He received these not because he was super holy - far from it  
not because he was attempting finally to put things right with his brother  
not because he wrestled with God

God had made a huge promise to a childless Abraham that he would have NUMEROUS descendants and this would come to fruition through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob

Jacob ended up wrestling with God in different ways throughout his life but this was not what brought him the greatest blessing

It was after wrestling face to face and then when he finally surrendered to God and swapped the wrestling for resting that he finally received God's blessing

God does not want us to grovel and struggle to earn the promises that are ours through Christ.

He calls us to rest in his undeserved mercy and grace as chosen partners with him

We just need to stop wrestling and start resting in His love and grace and abundant mercy

I wonder how we wrestle with God, because I am sure that we do in different ways?

Do we feel that we have to DO something to earn God's blessing? - behave in a certain way?

Do we wrestle to be accepted and loved by Him?

Issues to do with identity are huge in our present culture. Do we struggle with knowing whose we really are?

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The bottom line is that God LOVES us. He wants to bless us and help us and give good things to us

As Paul wrote to Timothy, all scripture is inspired by God for our teaching (2 Timothy 3:16) and the scriptures teach us that Jesus did everything that was necessary in order that we can receive the greatest of all blessings.

He surrendered himself and was crucified on the cross in order that our sinful ways can be forgiven completely by God

He rose from the dead to demonstrate to us that God has the victory over death and we can all receive the gift of eternal life with God

All we need to do is to stop wrestling, stop trying to earn God's favour or love or identity or blessing

And instead of trying trying trying wrestling wrestling wrestling

We need to ask for His blessing and then rest rest rest in all that He wants to bless us with

It does mean a change of heart.

Instead of everything being dependent upon us we have to admit everything begins and ends with God

Only when Jacob finally surrendered in utter weakness did his wrestling turn to resting

At that point his human striving turned to divine strength

God offers the same to us

Are you willing to surrender everything. To trust God for everything.

Stop wrestling and start resting in the greatest of blessing that God offers you...

PRAY