

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SCRIPTURE: *Genesis 32:22-32*

DATE: *April 24th, 2022*

SERMON: *“The Sun Rose Above Him...”*

(Acknowledgement to Tim Keller for his sermons/podcasts on “The Gospel According to Jacob” and The BibleProject for their overview of the Bible)

Today’s Scripture reading comes from Genesis 32, starting with verse 22.

Genesis 32:22-31 That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.”

But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” The man asked him, “What is your name?”

“Jacob,” he answered.

Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.”

Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.”

But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.”

The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.

If you were to ask me what my all-time favorite television shows were, I would probably say **Hill Street Blues** which was a very popular show in the 80’s...and also **The West Wing**, which was another very popular show in the early 2000’s.

Every week -with both of those shows - there would be a new story line, but there would also be story lines that ran from week to week, sometimes throughout the whole season. And so every week each show would begin with this voice over: *“Previously on Hill Street Blues”* or *“Previously on The West Wing”*. And then they would take a minute and show these short clips from previous episodes in order to remind the viewer of what had already transpired.

Back in February I brought a 2-week series called **The Deceiver Deceived**. We’re going to pick that story line back up for another two weeks, but before we do, it’s probably not a bad idea to do “Previously on The Deceiver Deceived”:

The first week we saw Jacob play the role of the Deceiver...deceiving his father into giving him the blessing that was intended to go to Jacob’s older twin brother Esau. And when the deception became known, there was all kinds of fall-out...Esau vowing to kill Jacob, Jacob fleeing the area, going to live with and work for his uncle Laban 400 miles away.

The second week it was Jacob who was the one being deceived, he thinks he’s marrying Laban’s younger daughter Rachel, but Laban deceives him and Jacob ends up marrying Laban’s oldest daughter, Leah.

The series we are starting this morning we’re giving a new name, somewhat ironically I’m calling it **Jacob’s New Name**. I really like what Beth does with the graphic here. Beth Swankler on our office staff designs the graphics for our sermon series, and because throughout the first part of Jacob’s life there is this downward slope, you see the downward slope in the February graphic. Over the next two weeks we’re going to see an upward slope in the life of Jacob, and Beth has seen that this is reflected in the revised graphic.

This morning’s message is titled **The Sun Rose Above Him** and just like in February, I’m hoping that you’ll be asking yourself these three questions: **What’s Happening? What Catches My Attention? What’s My Next Step?**

And so let's start by asking the first question:

1. WHAT'S HAPPENING?

You may remember that back in February we left off with Leah making a breakthrough, saying "This time I will praise the LORD" when giving birth to her fourth son, Judah. But as you and I well know from personal experience, a breakthrough does not mean that we never fail again.

And in Leah's case, what happens is that she and Rachel enter into this "battle of the babies"....they become locked into this competition over who can give birth to the most sons. And it's not just them, each of them has their own personal maidservant, and both offer their maidservants to Jacob so that any son their maidservant bears, they can chalk it up in their column.

In one instance, when Rachel's maidservant gave birth to a second son, Rachel says, **"I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won."** (Genesis 30:8a)

But she hasn't won anything, the struggle isn't over, in fact, it's just beginning as they go back and forth until between the 4 of them, Jacob eventually will have 12 sons to his name.

In the meantime, while this is going on between the two of them, **(Jacob)...grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and maidservants and menservants, and camels and donkeys.** (Genesis 30:43)

But neither Jacob nor Laban are behaving honorably. Jacob is being manipulative, using certain breeding methods to get the best flocks; Laban is continually messing with Jacob's wages.

But then comes a pivotal moment when the LORD said to Jacob, **"Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."** (31:3b)

So what God is asking Jacob to do is return home, to the land he had fled 20 years earlier because of Esau's vow to kill him. And so you can imagine his mindset when he sets out for home, with his wives, maidservants, menservants and livestock. He's probably wondering, *"Is Esau still alive, and if he is, is he still angry, still intent on killing me?"* Maybe. Probably.

And so he sends some men on ahead, loaded down with gifts for Esau. And when they return, they said, **"We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."** (32:6b)

So how does Jacob react to this news? It says, **In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well.** (32:7)

He anticipates an attack, and so he splits his entourage into two groups, so that if it comes to that, one will have to bear the brunt of the attack and give the other a chance to escape. But Jacob is hoping that it doesn't come to that, and so his plan is to pacify Esau. He loads down his servants with more gifts and instructs them to approach Esau in waves, and every one of them is to make clear to Esau that these gifts have come from Jacob.

And so this is brief summary of the what's been happening, and it brings us to this morning's Scripture passage. And so now the second question I'd like for you to be asking:

2. WHAT CATCHES MY ATTENTION?

What I read back at the start...I mean, this is quite a passage, and so what caught your attention?

How about the fact that Jacob makes sure that he has some...

A. Alone Time

We read that at some point during the evening, Jacob send everybody and everything – wives, maidservants, sons, all his possessions – across the river, leaving him **all alone**.
(Genesis 32:24a So Jacob was left alone,...)

What do you think is going on here?

Well, let's think this through. For Jacob, **Tomorrow is a day of crisis**. For the past 20 years, this death threat has been hanging over his head. But – for the past 20 years – there's also been a buffer zone. 400 miles of distance between Esau and Jacob. And this distance makes the threat of death less real. It doesn't appear to be imminent, in other words.

Do you know what it is to have something hanging over your head? A conversation, maybe an appointment, a date on the calendar... something that you've been dreading. You know it's out there, you know it's coming, but for a while you may have one or two things on your side: Time...Distance...sometimes both.

For me, when I was a kid it was the date when schools would reopen in the fall. I loved summer, going swimming, playing ball, riding my bike...and yet every summer lurking in the back of my mind was this date when it would come to an end and back to school you'd go.

For me, when the 4th of July would roll around, I knew that time was still on my side...still a lot of summer to go...but it was also the day when the clock started ticking...and then came all the back to school commercials and along with them this growing sense of dread

How about for you, do you know what it feels like to have a day of crisis? Jacob does, and for him, tomorrow is that day. He's going to come face to face with Esau, who not only has vowed to kill him, but he's bringing 400 men with him. And so Jacob goes out of his way to be alone.

And what do you think he does once he's alone? A lot of reflection? A lot of prayer?

The fact is, Jacob *has* been praying...listen to the words of his prayer prior to sending everyone on ahead:

Genesis 32:9-12 Then Jacob prayed, “O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,’ I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant (these are words of humility). I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, (these are words of one who recognizes his need of God’s help) for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’” (These are words of one who trusts God to keep His promises).

A prayer of humility, a prayer of dependence, while standing on the promises of God. This is what some of his alone time looks like, and I’ll bet once everyone goes on ahead, he continues to reflect on his past...his present circumstances...and what he hopes to be his future.

What else might catch our attention? Well, let’s get to it:

B. What’s With the Wrestling Match?

Genesis 32:24-25 So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.”

Okay, let me begin by acknowledging that this wrestling match – more of a grappling match, I’m not envisioning head locks and body slams – but it raises all kinds of questions that has led to various interpretations. And so let’s start by looking at what we *do* know.

First, let's look at this from **Jacob's perspective**. We know some of what had been going through Jacob's mind...we are aware of his heartfelt and humble prayer.

At the same time, I'm pretty sure he's doing a lot of soul searching...and he knows his life story has been less than stellar. Deceiving his father...his treatment of Leah...his unscrupulous breeding methods when dealing with Laban. Has to be a lot of stuff running through his mind.

And then, out of nowhere, we are told that this "man" appears, and we're told that this man and Jacob wrestle till daybreak.

We'll come back and talk more about what happens at day break, but let's also try looking at this from **God's perspective**. He obviously is aware of Jacob's state of mind. He sees the fear and the distress, but He also sees obedience. When He told Jacob to leave Laban and head back home, Jacob was obedient in spite of what might lie ahead.

He also heard Jacob's prayer of humility, dependence and trust. And so what kind of response would you expect from God? Maybe saying to Himself, *"Finally! This Deceiver has come to his senses. Jacob, I know tomorrow is a day of crisis, I know you are filled with fear and distress, but I've heard your prayer...the humility, the dependence, the trust...let me bless you with a good night's sleep...and know that as you sleep, I will be watching over you."*

A peaceful night before the day of crisis.

Except that's not what happens. This man – this Divine Being - suddenly appears before it's all said and done ends up maiming Jacob for the rest of his life. He dislocates his hip...I mean, what in the world? What kind of God responds to obedience and humility and trust in such a way?

And on top of that, what about the fact that **it says** this "man" can't overpower Jacob, and if this is God, what are we to make of this? And then we turn around and see how

this “man” disables Jacob with nothing more than a touch. (*“When the man saw that he could not overpower him he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched...”*)

What’s this strange passage telling us?

I think what this tells us - and Jacob – is that this man could have done this – or more – at any point along the way. If he can disable Jacob with a mere touch...then how is he not able to overpower him? On the surface, it almost seems contradictory.

I’ve heard some try to explain it this way – and believe me, I know there are various explanations out there – some will liken this to those fathers who wrestle with their child. Dad’s will voluntarily put themselves in a position of weakness, lay on their back, allowing the child to pile on. If Dad is on top, he will make sure he takes off his weight in order to not hurt his child. All the while knowing that when it’s all said and done, Dad can at any time stop holding back, and easily “win” the wrestling match.

I don’t know if that serves as a good analogy, but the fact that all it takes is a mere touch for Jacob’s hip to be wrenched says to me that this man ultimately is in control. More than that, it confirms what we already know, and that is, it’s God who is in control.

Not only in control, but what God is doing here, He is immersing Himself into Jacob’s life. He’s heard Jacob’s humble, heartfelt prayer....but it’s not His intention to take Jacob “this far” which is good...but to take him way beyond that...which is necessary if Jacob’s life is truly going to be changed.

Not “this far”...a life marked by humble, heartfelt prayers. But beyond that – no line, no barrier, no borders. Because what God is really after is total surrender which leads to a totally transformed life.

And that usually involves a certain amount of pain.

And so they wrestle, they grapple...and somewhere along the line, Jacob realizes that he wasn’t just wrestling with a man, he was wrestling with God. You see, later on in the

passage, in verse 30, Jacob says “..I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.” (32:30)

And I could be wrong, but it appears that Jacob came to this realization at the moment that his hip was touched and dislocated. And this realization impacts where Jacob goes next.

I said a moment ago that we would come back and talk about what happens at daybreak, so one more thing that might have caught your attention, and that would be...

C. The Blessing

Genesis 32:26 Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.” But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”

Here it is again, the theme of Jacob’s life, this longing for blessing. He grew up insecure, desperate to hear words of blessing from his father. He longed for the blessing, the love of Rachel, “If I can have her, it will change the story of my life.” We called it a mis-placed hope.

But it’s here in chapter 32, specifically verse 26, where it all changes. His hip has just been dislocated by a mere touch, and it appears that this is when his eyes and heart open up. He sees that he has been wrestling/grappling not with a mere man, but with God. And this awareness leads him to say, “I will not let you go unless *you* bless me.”

He’s not looking for his father’s blessing...not looking for Rachel’s blessing. He’s looking for God to bless him, and he won’t let go until he gets it. Through this encounter, through the wrestling, through the pain, Jacob comes face to face with God and realizes that it’s Him and His blessing that he really needs. No more mis-placed hope.

And because of this awareness, because Jacob seems to recognize his need of God in a way, to a depth, to a degree that he never has before....God does indeed bless him, in fact, He goes so far as to change Jacob’s name.

Genesis 32:28 Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.”

And you know what I think is really great here? Look down at verse 31 where it says...

Genesis 32:31 The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel...

“The sun rose above him...” Now when you are reading a Hebrew narrative, there’s no fluff, words are there for a reason. Back in Genesis 28 after deceiving his father and fleeing from his brother, we’re told that the sun was setting on Jacob. Here in chapter 32, after wrestling with and being blessed by God, we’re told that the sun is rising above him.

I think the narrator is giving us this kind of detail for a reason. The rising of the sun above Jacob is this great image of a new day, more than that a new life, a changed life because of having wrestled with God, and together, overcoming those things that were keeping him from a point of total trust.

I know that from here on out Jacob’s life will not be perfect. But Jacob is a changed man, and it’s here in chapter 32 that we get some of the background on when, where and how it happened.

God is looking to change our lives as well...always looking to take us from wherever we’re at to one step closer to Him, and so in order for that to happen, the last question I hope that you’re asking yourselves is...

3. WHAT’S MY NEXT STEP?

After allowing God to speak to you through His word this morning, what might He be saying to you personally, that is, what step or steps is He looking for you to take as a follower of Jesus?

Two suggestions. First, how about setting aside some **Alone Time with Jesus**. While here at Five Forks we have been stressing and will continue to stress the importance of being part of a close community of Jesus followers...one thing God might be saying to you is not to overlook the importance of being alone and having your own personal encounters with God.

You see, it's so easy for us to rely on other people's experiences and encounters as evidence of God's existence, love and His work in this world. Last month was the first meeting of the men's group called IronMen, and the guest speaker was a local dentist, Bob Zimmerman. And for 20 minutes or so Bob shared fascinating stories of how he had personally experienced God at work when he would travel to other countries on these short term missions trips.

And it was so encouraging to those of us who were there...and this is how it's supposed to work, we *should* be encouraged by other people's stories of their encounters with God. But here's the thing...it's possible to be encouraged by other people's encounters with God...without ever having a personal encounter of our own.

We can live off of other people's encounters, other people's stories, and end up believing in God without ever really knowing Him ourselves. Without knowing what it is to wrestle with Him. And one reason for this may be that we're not taking steps to get alone with Him.

To reflect - with Him - on our past. The time You walked with me through this...and You helped me get through that. To think about how my life has changed since I became one of Your followers.

To reflect – with Him - on our present circumstances. Jesus, where am I being obedient, in what ways am I trusting You even though it's hard? At the same time, what lines have I drawn, what borders have I established that are holding You back? Holding me back?

To reflect – with Him – what the future may look like. Jesus, what do I anticipate my life looking like if I were to eliminate the borders? And what might it look like if I don't?

And these encounters need to occur not occasionally, but daily. Because every day is a challenge, with all kinds of temptations and obstacles coming our way. And so we need these daily personal encounters so that we come to know, love and follow Him.

Pastor Tim Keller gives a great example when it comes to the importance of truly knowing Jesus in a personal way. He talks about when someone is about to undergo surgery...when this happens, friends will circle you, let you know that they'll be there for you, praying for you...and all of that is good and right.

But Keller goes on say that when they wheel you down the hall and into the operating room, your friends and your pastor are not going to be invited to go along with you. And if you don't have Jesus with you, you go in alone.

Here at Five Forks and I imagine in all churches, the importance of knowing Jesus is continually stressed, and we can't stress enough the importance of getting alone with Him in order for this to happen. But we know how it works.

We all know that some will go all of their lives attending church but will never set aside time to be alone with God to get to know Him personally...and reflect on their past, present and future.

But we keep on stressing it, because we also know that for others, there was that time where all it took was one more prompt...the encouragement to do something they knew they should do, what they knew they needed to do. Take time daily to get alone with Jesus. May this be that prompt that for some of you, will be the turning point in your relationship with Him.

And this step that I'm suggesting leads all of us into the second suggestion, the next step that we need to take, and that involves **Being Willing to Wrestle With God.**

You see, when we get alone with God, there is praise, there is intercession (praying for others), but there will also be a good bit of wrestling.

Now, some of us are already wrestling with God...maybe over things that have occurred in the past...mistakes we've made...deception, lies, manipulation. God telling us we've been forgiven and some of us are wrestling with God, refusing to accept it. Or we're wrestling with God over wrongs that have been done to us...God is trying to get us to let go, and some of us are having a hard time doing that. And so we wrestle.

Some of us may be wrestling with God over things that are occurring here in the present...wrestling with God over choices we're making and attitudes we're holding onto. And it's not easy. Wrestling with God is never easy. But it is necessary.

And the other thing is, some of us need to actually *start* wrestling with God. You see, it's easy to think that because we're being obedient in this or that area, or because we pray...we believe that God is pleased and that we're right where He wants us to be.

What did we learn this morning, or what were we reminded of this morning? That God isn't looking to take us "this far"...but beyond what we can even imagine. He's not looking to change us "this much", but to totally transform us so that we can be an effective witness for Him in this culture in which we live.

Like Jacob, it will likely involve some degree of pain. To be completely vulnerable before God, to be open and honest with God can be extremely painful. But it is through our pain – the pain of letting go of something we think we can't live without, the pain of obeying Him when a big part of us doesn't want to – it's in our pain that God takes us from "here" to one step closer to Him.

I think back over my life and some of the wrestling matches I've had with God. Many years ago I wrestled with Him over the music I was listening to. In the past I wrestled with him over the television shows I was watching. The thought of not listening to this, or watching that seemed painful to me.

But God would keep bringing to my mind this word “**Holiness.**” I live in this culture, I want to engage with this culture, and at the same time I know that I’m being called to live a holy life, that is a life that is set apart - different, distinct - from what might be called the norm. And I’ve wrestled with God a lot over what this looks like in my desire to live a holy life.

One thing I’m wrestling with Him now is the amount of time I invest in watching and following my sports teams. What’s the right balance, and how painful is it going to be if the answer I get is not one that I’m looking for?

I know that God won’t overpower me...He won’t overpower you...any of us can choose to avoid the pain and end up living lives short of what God intends.

But while He won’t overpower me, while He won’t overpower you, neither will He walk away. Whenever you are ready to wrestle with Him about anything in your past, present or future, He’ll be there to meet you.

Because His desire is to help you overcome anything that is holding you back. He wants you to have this sense of the sun rising above you, your life on an upward slope...and a big part of that includes these personal encounters with Him.

PRAYER