

In the Red Corner, Jacob...

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[0 : 00] And so we're going to turn to our scripture reading this morning. Edward is going to be preaching to us shortly. And we're turning right back to the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis, and to Genesis chapter 32.

I think we may well actually return to Genesis in the new year to begin studies in this book again, where we left off after the story of Abraham a year or so ago.

But this morning we're jumping into chapter 32. And a very famous story. You'll find it on page 27 if you have one of the church Bibles.

And it's the story of Jacob as he leaves his father-in-law's household, where he's been living for some years, and returns to meet his brother Esau.

And this is the dramatic chapter of what happens on the way. So Genesis chapter 32, then, reading at verse 1. Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.

[1 : 07] And when Jacob saw them, he said, this is God's camp. So he called the name of that place Machiniam, which means two camps. And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, instructing them, thus you shall say to my lord Esau.

Thus says your servant Jacob, I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord in order that I might find favor in your sight.

And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, we came to your brother Esau, and he's coming to meet you. And there are 400 men with him. But then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed.

He divided the people who were with him and the flocks and the herds and the camels into two camps, thinking, if Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape. And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, return to your country and to your kindred that I may do you good.

I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you've shown to your servant. For with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps.

[2 : 27] Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. But you said, I will surely do you good and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.

So he stayed there that night, and from what he had with him, he took a present for his brother Esau. Two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milking camels and their calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys.

These he handed over to his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, Pass on ahead of me and put a space between drove and drove. He instructed the first, When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, To whom do you belong?

Where are you going? And whose are all these ahead of you? Then you shall say, They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a present sent to my lord Esau, and moreover he is behind us.

He likewise instructed the second and the third, and all who followed the droves. You shall say the same thing to Esau when you find him, and you shall say, Moreover, your servant Jacob is behind us.

[3 : 41] For he thought, I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterward I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me. So the present passed on ahead of him, and he himself stayed that night in the camp.

The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them, sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had, and Jacob was left alone.

And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.

Then he said, Let me go, for the day has broken. But Jacob said, I will not let you go unless you bless me. 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. Then Jacob asked him, Please tell me your name.

[4 : 53] But he said, Why is it that you ask my name? And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.

The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. Therefore, to this day, the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.

Amen. May God bless to us this, his word. Well, you might like to turn to Genesis chapter 32 again.

On page 27 in our visitors' Bibles. The reason why I've chosen this passage for this morning really comes in verse 24.

And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him. I want us to think this morning about the wrestling and also about the aloneness.

[6 : 12] But we've got a little bit of work to do before we get to verse 24 there. A little bit of background work. Jacob, I'm sure you know, is a very significant figure in the story of the Old Testament.

So significant that when God revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush, he described himself or identified himself to Moses by saying, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

So Jacob is not simply any old believer. He occupies the third generation of the patriarchs who were the founding fathers of the Jewish nation. Now there are three things in chapter 22 which flag up for us the fact that Jacob's wrestling bout is a very significant moment in Old Testament history.

And these three things are the name Israel, the name Peniel, and the socket of the hip. Israel becomes Jacob's new name given to him by his antagonist in verse 28 when the two men are locked in battle in the very moment of battle.

But it becomes Jacob's name in perpetuity. And it becomes, of course, the name given to the whole of the Jewish nation who become the Israelites. And then Peniel is another new name which is given by Jacob as a permanent name to the place on the river bank where the wrestling bout happened.

[7 : 38] And the hip socket, again that has a perpetual ongoing aspect to it. As verse 32 puts it, therefore, to this day, the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket.

In other words, in these three respects, Israelite history was permanently changed. This wrestling match on the river bank has significantly altered the way in which the Jewish people regarded their ancestry and their culture.

The incident explains a great national name, the name of Israel, a place name and also a point of gastronomic tradition. So what was the story that lay behind this?

What was the story that led up to the wrestling? Jacob and Esau were two brothers, twins, and they were the only children of Isaac and Rebecca. And domestic life in that little family of four was not all sweetness and light.

In fact, if there had been a national competition for which family was the happiest and most loving family, a kind of family X factor, then this particular family would not have won it.

[8 : 50] These two boys were not bosom friends. They were very different. Esau was the elder and he was a muscular outdoor type who loved hunting and was very hairy.

He probably had to start shaving when he was about 12. You might describe him as Mr. Braun. And then Jacob was Mr. Brain, a smooth-faced boy and more clever.

He stayed at home, he avoided manly pursuits in the open air, and he successfully mounted a wily campaign, a scheme, whereby he cheated his older brother of his birthright and became, in effect, the heir of his father's position as the head of the family.

Now Esau, understandably, was incandescently angry with his brother Jacob for doing this and he planned to kill him. The mother, Rebecca, heard about Esau's intentions and she immediately packed Jacob off to her brother, Laban, who lived about 300 or more miles away up in the land of Paddan Aram, which in terms of modern geography is more or less Iraq.

And she said to Jacob, flee to your uncle Laban and stay with him until Esau's anger calms down. And when he's calmed down, I'll send word, I'll give you the all clear and you can then come home.

[10 : 07] However, Jacob stayed with his uncle Laban for many years, not least because he married not one, but two of his uncle's daughters.

You might think that one wife would have been enough and certainly would have caused a lot less trouble if Jacob had married only one, but he married both and he also took their two maidservants as concubines in addition.

And after about 10 or 15 years, he had at least a dozen children and he was working in partnership with his uncle Laban. They were breeders of large flocks of sheep and goats and cattle and camels and other creatures.

And between them, they built up very large wealth in terms of flocks and they became rich men. But neither Jacob nor his uncle Laban were straightforward, honest men.

They were both constantly trying to cheat each other. Jacob was a cheat and Laban, well, you might describe him as a businessman who bent the rules. And the whole setup, you could see, was a recipe for disaster.

[11 : 10] The fact is, friends, we know this from our own experience, when close relatives work together in business, two brothers or perhaps an uncle and nephew or a father and son, it can work very well, but quite often it doesn't.

Let me offer a word of advice. if you're a young person and your uncle Reginald is pressing you to join him in some business concern, do ask yourself if he's a man of real integrity.

And if you suspect that he's not, I should politely, in the words of P.G. Woodhouse, give him the bird. It might save you a lot of trouble in the years ahead.

Well, the relationship between Jacob and Laban reached breaking point in the end. And you'll see that if you just turn back a page to the beginning of chapter 31. 31.1.

Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban, Jacob's cousins, the sons of Laban were saying, Jacob has taken all that was our father's. And from what was our father's, he has gained all this wealth.

[12 : 11] And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him with favor as before. So it's a picture here of distrust and resentment and jealousy. And it's at that point, look at the very next verse, verse 3, when the Lord intervenes and says to Jacob, return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred and I will be with you.

Now that is one gracious intervention. If the Lord only had dealings with people who had squeaky clean moral records, we would all be beyond hope, wouldn't we?

But the Lord assured this morally grubby individual that he would go with him. He wasn't abandoning him because he was a cheat. He was promising to go with him. God had not finished with Jacob.

He was going to work on him. And the wrestling match of chapter 32 was going to be a decisive and formative moment in Jacob's relationship with God. Mind you, that promise in chapter 31, verse 3, has quite a bit of history behind it.

because really it's an extension of the great promise that God made to Abraham back in Genesis chapter 12 when he promised that he would take Abraham from his own country to a new land and he would make of him and his descendants a great nation who would prove to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth in due course.

[13 : 35] And the Lord restated that promise to Abraham several times over in Abraham's life. He repeated it again more than once to Isaac and he's now repeating it again not for the first time to Jacob.

So God was saying to these three generations of the patriarchs, I am going to do exactly as I've promised. My blessing is going to be upon you in the land that I've promised to give you.

So when the Lord says to Jacob in chapter 31, verse 3, go back to Canaan and I will be with you, he's not saying it then simply because the relationship with Laban had come to breaking point.

He's saying it because history is rolling forward and God is fulfilling his great purpose of establishing a people for his own possession. So, what does Jacob now do in chapter 31, verse 4?

Just have a look at that. Well, he does what any man with half a grain of cents does before moving house. That is, he consults his wife. Now, in Jacob's case, that was a little complicated because it meant he had to consult both his wives and you'll see that he was wise enough to consult the two of them together simultaneously.

[14 : 47] So they have a meeting of three people. Both Jacob's wives, Rachel and Leah, prove to be as fed up with their father Laban as Jacob is and they happily fall in with Jacob's plan to move away to Canaan.

And the family meeting ends, you see, with the two women saying to Jacob in verse 16, whatever God has said to you, do. We're with you, our husband. Do it.

So, verse 17, Jacob arose, set his sons and his wives on camels and off they went in a southwesterly direction towards the land of Canaan, taking their great flocks and herds of sheep and goat and cattle and donkeys and camels with them.

Now, the rest of chapter 31 tells the whole story. It's fraught with tension and interest and we haven't really time to look at the details. But the nub of it is that when Jacob and his family and all this great wealth of livestock flee, they flee without telling Laban and without saying goodbye.

Now, Laban, who must have been in a different part of the estate when they set off, he hears of it a couple of days later and he is furious. So, he sets off after Jacob, Jacob and family in hot pursuit.

[16:02] He feels that Jacob has stolen his daughters and his grandchildren and most of his wealth and pretty quickly he catches up with Jacob. After all, you can't move too quickly when you're driving thousands of farm animals in front of you.

Now, fortunately, when the men meet, they don't come to blows. They manage to patch up their relationship. They draw up an agreement about the extent of their territories.

And then you'll see in the final verse of chapter 31, early in the morning, after they've met and spent a day or two together and eaten together and so on, early in the morning, Laban arose and kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them.

Then Laban departed and returned home. You can imagine Jacob here waving his father-in-law off with a smile on his face, can't you? But saying under his breath, I hope I shall never have to set eyes on that gangster again.

Bye-bye, uncle. Bye-bye, uncle. See you later. See you later. I hope not. See you later, uncle. See you. Now, chapter 32 begins encouragingly. Jacob is by now almost back to the land of Canaan and he reaches a place called Mahanaim, which is on the east side, the right-hand side as you look at the map, the east side of the River Jordan.

[17:16] And there, as verse 1 tells us, the angels of God met him. Well, again, that is a gracious encouragement from the Lord, reassuring Jacob that he's doing the right thing in coming back to the promised land.

But, it is at this point that Jacob has to grasp a decades-old nettle, Esau, his big, muscular, hairy, potentially vengeful brother.

Now, Esau lived in the land of Edom, which is quite a lot further south, about 80 miles further to the south. But Jacob knew that with this great retinue of, well, the flocks and herds and his servants and his cowhands and shepherds and tens of thousands of animals, probably tens of thousands, he couldn't just quietly slip across the Jordan into the land of Canaan.

His arrival would be noticed. News of it would quickly travel as far as Esau in Edom. It's not as though he'd just slipped away for a quiet weekend with his wife to the coast of Fife, where nobody knew him.

Not at all. The whole countryside knew all about it. Jacob has returned. So he thought, I'm going to have to get in touch with my brother in the hope that we can patch things up and at least live as neighbors together on reasonably friendly terms.

[18:36] So, in verses 3 and 4, Jacob sends a friendly message via some of his servants. And he says to the men who are going to Esau, he says, Thus you shall say to my lord, Esau.

Very humble and polite, not exactly cringing, but humble and polite, my lord Esau. And the message basically says this, My brother, I've stayed with our uncle Laban for many years.

I now own a great number of livestock and I have a great retinue of servants and I'm letting you know that we've all returned so that I might find favor in your sight.

In other words, let's be friends, brother, and forget that row of many years ago and please don't be hopping mad when you see just how rich your little brother has become. I think that's part of the purport of the message.

Now, in verse 6, the messengers return but they have no friendly message from Esau. All they say is, We came to your brother Esau and he is coming to meet you and 400 men are with him.

[19 : 42] 400 men. So then, verse 7, Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. Well, you would be, wouldn't you? He must have felt a bit like the English army as they faced William Wallace who stood 6 foot and 9 inches tall.

Did you know that? He was a very tall man. So, you might say, Suddenly, the crisis has come upon Jacob. It couldn't be avoided forever. Like everything in God's good purposes, it had to happen.

So, what does Jacob do? Well, the first thing he does is to divide up all his people and his animals into two groups. He thinks, I won't put all my eggs in one basket.

If Esau comes to one camp and attacks it, maybe the other camp will escape. But having planned his tactics in verses 7 and 8, he now prays in verses 9 to 12.

Planning and praying, let's notice, are not mutually exclusive activities. Many of God's people in the Bible, not least the Apostle Paul, did plenty of planning as well as praying.

[20 : 51] But just look at this prayer in verses 9 to 12, uttered at a time of great fear and distress. It's not often thought of as one of the great prayers of the Old Testament, but I think it is one of the Old Testament's high moments of prayer.

We'd do well to study it, perhaps, as a model prayer. But let me just point out one or two of its striking features. First, it shows that Jacob understands God's long-term covenant purposes.

He doesn't just begin as you and I might have begun, O God, help me. Look how he starts there. O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac.

In other words, he's saying to God, I know that you have selected our family for your blessing, and I'm relying on you to perform what you've promised. Jacob knows God, and he knows that God has a wonderful plan and purpose.

And he then says, in verse 9, O Lord, who said to me, return to your country and to your kindred that I may do you good. He's humbly there, yet boldly reminding God of what God has promised to do for him.

[22 : 02] Then secondly, the prayer shows a delightful and appropriate humility. Look at verse 10. I'm not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you've shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan 20-odd years ago, and now I have become two camps.

In other words, you have blessed me so enormously, and I really haven't deserved any of it. I've gone from rags to riches. When I set out, I had nothing but my walking stick, but now I have a large family and a host of servants and more livestock than I can count.

I don't deserve it. And then thirdly, in verse 11, he expresses his pressing, painful need. Verse 11, Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him that he may come and attack me, the mothers, with the children.

And perhaps it's that last phrase that shows where he's most vulnerable, the mothers and the children. It's the thought that Esau might come and kill his family and his little ones.

It's that that he can't bear. But then fourth, and this is such a mark of real prayer, he finishes by reminding God of his promise, the promise made originally to Abraham.

[23 : 24] Here's verse 12, but you said, and really he's saying I'm holding you to it. You said, I will surely do you good and make your offspring as the sand of the sea which cannot be numbered for multitude.

In other words, I really do believe that you're not going to renege on your promise. I'm going to trust you to keep what you said you will do because if you were to allow all my children to be killed, how could you keep that promise?

So the prayer shows great humility a heartfelt expression of real need and a real reliance on the promises that God made as a matter of historical record to the patriarchs.

I think we can learn a lot from this little gem of an Old Testament prayer. In it, Jacob shows himself to be fearful and yet trusting. And that's a good way for us to pray too.

Fearful, we're often fearful, but we can trust the God who has filled our Bibles with his promises. Well, now what happens next? Verse 31.

[24 : 30] Sorry, verse 13. Verse 13. Evening comes and Jacob, perhaps reverting a little bit now to his old ways of craft and cunning, he thinks out a way of winning his brother's favor.

So he gets his servants to select five groups of livestock. If you do your maths, you'll see it's like this. 220 goats, 220 sheep, 60 camels, 50 cattle, and 30 donkeys.

Just a snip, really, in terms of Jacob's total wealth. So his men, his servants, are to drive these batches of animals on towards Esau, group by group, leaving a distance between each group.

And as each group meets Esau, they're to say to him, these are a present from Jacob to my lord, Esau. Notice that phrase, my lord, again in verse 18. And what's more, the men are to say, Jacob is following on behind.

Now, Jacob's motive is obvious, and there it is at the end of verse 20. When I see Esau's face, perhaps he will accept me rather than cut my throat.

[25 : 39] So, verse 21, this present, lowing, bleating, braying, and spitting, that's what camels do. So, the present passes on down the long road to the south to meet Esau.

And Jacob stayed that night in the camp. But, verse 22, that same night he arose. I think the implication is he got up somewhere around midnight or one o'clock in the morning.

It was dark. And he woke up his children and his wives and his two concubines and he hastened them across the river Jabbok. Can you imagine getting eleven children and four mothers across a river in the middle of the night?

Phew, hard work. Verse 23, he took them and sent them across the stream and everything else that he had. So, the camp equipment, the cooking pots, the tents, the bedding, the spare clothes.

It's a rather poignant phrase at the end of verse 23. Everything else that he had, all the possessions that he'd gathered over twenty-odd years of homemaking and marriage and family life and hard work.

[26 : 50] And, verse 24, Jacob was left alone. As is the Bible's manner, that little sentence is deliberately understated.

But we're meant to notice it. Jacob is alone, perhaps for the first time in many years. but he's not only physically alone, parted from his loved ones and his wealth and possessions, he's somehow psychologically alone as well.

All his life up to now, he's had resources to hand to deal with the challenges that have come at him. His main resource has been his craft and guile and the ability to manipulate other people.

He's always been able to cheat his way or wriggle his way out of difficult situations. But now, for the first time in his life, he's stripped down. He has no weapons, nothing to fall back on.

He's desperate and he's fiercely threatened. He may never see his family again. His servants may be killed, his livestock may be driven away. He's not a young man anymore, probably about 45, middle-aged.

[27 : 59] He's been laboring to build up his wealth for 20-odd years. He has known both joys and sorrows in family life, but his family have now disappeared into the night.

So there he stands in the middle of the night, in the dark, on the bank of the river, alone. Suddenly, there's a tap on his shoulder.

He turns around. There's a man stripped to the waist. Come on, says the man, come on, I challenge you. And Jacob strips off his shirt at this point and in his frustration and bewilderment and pain he launches himself at this man and he grapples with him.

Now, friends, this is wrestling and not boxing. Boxing involves a bit of distance, doesn't it, between the fighters? You know, the sort of thing, left jab, right hook, belcher in the solar plexus. But wrestling is different.

It's an all-in business. You're at very close quarters, aren't you? You're breathing and grunting in each other's faces. It's that kind of thing that's going on, isn't it? I imagine. Well, I don't imagine it. It is the case, isn't it?

[29 : 03] When I was a schoolboy, aged 10 or 11, I think, I wasn't fighting all the time, but I did get into fights occasionally. I guess most boys do.

I remember one time when I fell out with a good friend of mine. He's still a friend of mine, actually. We're still in touch. I guess it was over something trivial like a packet of sweets. But my friend and I were so cross with each other that we didn't just grapple with each other on the spot.

We made an appointment to have a fight. Can you imagine that? 11-year-old boys. Right, I'll meet you outside the chapel at 2 o'clock this afternoon and we'll settle it then.

Obviously, it was a boys-only school and obviously other boys heard about this because word got round. And when the two of us got to the chapel at 2 o'clock that afternoon, there was a great ring of half the school had turned out to watch Lobb battle with Rafe Court.

Rafe was my friend's name. Court. Lobby and Court were battling. And, well, we slugged it out, so to speak, in a kind of wrestling fashion for about 10 minutes or so.

[30 : 06] Right to the point, you know what it's like, don't you, when you're a boy of that sort of age? Right to the point where one gets the other one on the ground and he has him in a great grip and he says to the other one, do you give in? Do you surrender? Urgh.

Urgh. Actually, this was an English prep school so we tended to speak to each other in Latin. So I think what we said was, is it Pax?

Pax? Pax? Give in. Now, to this day, I can't remember who won the battle. I was certainly bigger and chubbier. Chubby Lobby.

That was me. But my friend Rafe, he was smaller, but he was quite wiry and strong and I just don't know who won the bout. Now, who won this bout in Genesis 32?

That's a ticklish question. It's not immediately obvious, is it? They wrestle for a long time, a long time, until the first light begins to show in the east. And in verse 25, the assailant, the man, as he's described, sees that he's not prevailing against Jacob.

[31 : 16] Jacob appears to be getting the upper hand. But this man suddenly displays an awesome stroke of power. Notice the verb. He touches. Very gentle-sounding verb, isn't it?

He touches Jacob's hip socket and dislocates it. Then he says, let me go, for the day is broken. Perhaps he says this because Jacob must not be allowed to see his face clearly because no mortal can see the face of God and survive.

But although Jacob's hip has been somehow dislocated, he still has this man in an iron grip and he says to him, I will not let you go unless you bless me.

Now surely Jacob is realizing at this point who it is that he's grappling with. And the man says, what is your name? As if he didn't know already, which of course he did. And Jacob says, Jacob.

And the man says to him, isn't this a grace-filled declaration? Your name will no longer be Jacob but Israel. He strives with God for you have striven with God and man and have prevailed.

[32 : 20] And then Jacob says, please tell me your name. But the man says, in effect, you don't need to know that. And there, he blessed him.

Blessed him. And vanished. And Jacob knows now who he's been wrestling with. And that's why he calls the place Peniel, face of God.

Because he says, I've seen God face to face, yet my life has been delivered. And verse 31 captures the last moment of the scene. It's a dramatic moment.

The sun rising there in its glory and revealing a changed man as he limps along. Disabled, but blessed. And if you glance on just over the page to chapter 33, verse 4, you can see how the dreaded meeting with Esau actually turned out.

So verse 4, but Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him and they wept. So Jacob had feared carnage and mayhem, but there was brotherly affection and peace instead.

[33 : 30] Well, friends, it's rather warm up here. Don't often wrestle in the pulpit. But let me, as we draw to a close now, let me take a few moments to reflect on all this and to ask what it might have to say to people like us.

The nameless wrestler is clearly a manifestation of God. Whether we should describe him as God's angel or God's son in pre-incarnate form, I really don't know.

What is important is that Jacob found himself locked in combat with God. Now just picture these two wrestlers tussling together. Surely Jacob is a man in two minds.

He wants God. He's craving God's blessing and yet he's fighting with God. He loves God and yet he's battling with God. He depends upon God and yet he's defying God.

Surely Jacob discovers in this critical moment that the one he's been battling with all through his life has not been Esau or Laban but the God that he belongs to.

[34 : 35] Now you and I are not likely to have to spend half a night wrestling with God in human form as Jacob did. Jacob was a unique and special individual in God's historical plan and this was a unique incident but there are aspects of this incident which do shed light on our lives and particularly on our struggles and I want to mention one or two in a moment.

It would not be helpful, I think, to regard this wrestling bout as Jacob's conversion or a kind of Old Testament version of a conversion. Jacob, after all, has always belonged to the Lord.

He's belonged to him for many years before he reaches this point but Jacob has been largely self-reliant and he has been a twister. Yes, he's belonged to God but he's not been living a godly life.

So what can we learn? Let me mention three things. First, battling. God will battle with believers who are living self-reliant lives.

He won't have it. If God is to be known throughout history as the God of Jacob, he's not going to allow the man Jacob to be a self-sufficient man who lacks integrity and we can trust God to do battle with us until he brings us into line and bends our wills into conformity with his battling.

[36 : 01] Next, blessing. Let's learn from Jacob that God's will is to bless. That has always been his will from Genesis chapter 1. And if God has to bring us into line by means of a great struggle, let's not mistake his motives.

He's determined to bring us into line not because he wants to impose a harsh tyranny on his people but because he's determined to bring us to the place of blessing.

We will only know the joy of God's blessing as our wills are increasingly bent into conformity with his will. And then third, disabling.

In order to subdue Jacob, the Lord has to dislocate his hip and lame him. Now friends, this doesn't happen to everybody. Of course not. The fact is that Jacob was particularly stubborn.

But it will happen to some believers that we may have to be disabled in some way or in some degree. I don't necessarily mean physically but in some degree so as to make us see our frailty and our need to depend on the Lord.

[37 : 12] Do you remember how the Apostle Paul was allowed to have a thorn in his flesh to subdue him and to make him realize that he couldn't get through life by the strength of his own right arm? If the Lord should disable you or me in some way, let's not assume that he doesn't love us.

It may be the very way in which he chooses to bring us his blessing. So there it is. In the end, the God of Jacob is truly the God of Jacob and Jacob becomes truly a man more submitted to God even though it takes till his middle years before this struggle comes to a head.

And friends, God will battle with us and God will bless us because that is his determined will and yet he may have to disable us to some degree because he is determined that we should learn to trust him.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. dear God, the only true God, we thank you that you are pleased to be known throughout history as the God of Jacob.

We think of the way this man started off in life as a cheat and a twister, how he lived without integrity and then we think of this meeting with you which changed him, left him limping and yet blessed and we want to ask you dear Father that you will in your mercy have your way with each one of us that you will indeed do battle with us as much as is necessary until our wills are gladly conformed to yours.

[39 : 14] We pray even that you will disable us in some way if that's the only way in which we can learn to follow and love you but we do trust you and we ask you to make of us as individuals and as a body of Christian people those who love and serve you and are fruitful in our service because of your blessing.

and we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen.