

The Blessing of Transforming Grace

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[0 : 00] And we're now going to turn to our Bible reading. And Willie Philip, our senior minister, is going to be preaching once again from God's Word, and we're continuing in the book of Genesis.

If you don't have a Bible with you, then we do have plenty of visitor's Bibles spread around. Someone in the land you would love to give one to you. Or if you're sitting beside someone who's a visitor and they don't have a Bible, why don't you go and grab one for them?

And do turn up Genesis chapter 32, and we're going to be reading from verse 3 to the end of the chapter. So Genesis chapter 32, beginning at verse 3, and that's on page 27, if you are using one of the visitor's Bibles.

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, meal servants, and female servants. I have sense to tell my lord in order that I may find favor in your sight.

[1 : 21] And the messengers returned to Jacob saying, We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you. And there are 400 men with him. Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed.

He divided the people who were with him and the flocks and herds and 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 you have shown to your servant. For with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps.

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.

[2 : 30] 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 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. For he thought, I may appease him with a present that goes ahead of me, and afterward I shall see his face, perhaps he will accept me.

[3 : 42] 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 and sent them across the stream and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him till 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?

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 answered him, please tell me your name. 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.

[5 : 03] The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, 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. This is God's word. Well, good evening, everyone.

And would you turn with me in your Bibles to the passage Josh read to us, Genesis 32. As Josh said, there are some Bibles for visitors scattered around the place. Do grab one so that you can see that what I'm seeing comes from here and not from my head or some other place.

It's always important, isn't it, to make sure that the person preaching is preaching the scriptures, not preaching something else. So that's why we encourage you to bring your Bibles and to use one.

And our passage this evening is really all about the blessing of God's transforming grace. Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say true and sound wisdom, consists in two parts, the knowledge of God and of ourselves.

[6 : 20] There's the opening words of the Institutes of the Christian Religion by the great reformer John Calvin. Indeed, that is the great revelation that the Bible brings us.

In order that it might, as Paul the Apostle says, make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. God is the principal subject of the Bible.

In every part, it is telling us who God is, how he works, why he does what he does, and so on. So that in the light of that great truth, we can view our own human hearts and we can see what God requires of us.

And so that we can see what God is at work doing in us and doing for us. And that's what these stories we've been looking at in Genesis here are all about.

We've seen how God is, the God of tenacious grace. How his covenant promise has proved true, has proved certain and constant, despite all the manifest flaws that are abundantly seen among his chosen people, the people of faith.

[7 : 26] And certainly in Jacob's life, through all his strugglings, through all his journeyings, we've seen God's transforming grace at work in his life. Refusing to leave him as the, well, the twisted schemer that he really is by nature.

But rather shaping him through, often through the crucible of suffering, that into a man whose wholehearted trust is in the Lord alone. And it's a story of lifelong struggles.

Jacob has wrestled to overcome with his father Isaac, with his brother Esau, with his uncle Laban for 20 years. And yet behind all of these, actually, it's been God that he's really been struggling with. God has had Jacob in a vice-like grip. In order that Jacob will gain that promise and that blessing of God's grace.

And that we will gain it in God's way, not in his own chosen way. It's a blessing that will transform him forever into God's image. And it's through all these things that seem to Jacob so often like obstacles to the blessing, that actually, in fact, God is imparting that true blessing to him, which is the blessing of transforming grace.

[8 : 50] And, you know, we also very often can misconstrue what God is doing. We often can think, don't we, that God has failed us somehow or maybe abandoned us.

When, in fact, so often it is through these very trials and these very battlings that God is at work in us most profoundly. As Paul says to the Philippians, both to will and to work for his good pleasure in us and in our lives.

Because he is determined to make us like his holy son, the Lord Jesus Christ. So, you see, scriptures like these help us to see much more clearly, to understand God and to understand, therefore, ourselves.

And what it means to truly belong to God as Jacob did and as all Jacob's true seed do, as all the people of faith in Jesus Christ do. And with this chapter and the next, we're reaching really the

climax of the cycle of stories of Jacob.

He returns to the promised land. He recovers and receives, indeed, the blessing at God's own hand. And we'll see at the end of chapter 33, he possesses real estate in the land, just like his grandfather Abraham had done.

[10:07] And we see him blessing God at the altar, just as he had done, do you remember, at Bethel when he was on the way out of the land. So, things have come full circle. And here in chapter 32, the key verses, I think, are there in verses 28 and 29.

It's God's words to Jacob as he blesses him. And as he marks that blessing by changing his name to Israel. Why? Because you have striven with God and man and have prevailed.

He means not just in this wrestling bout at the Jabbok River we're going to speak about, but all through his whole life story. There's a very illuminating passage later on in the Bible in the prophet Hosea, chapter 12, where he actually sums up Jacob's life.

This is what he says. In the womb, Jacob took his brother by the heel. And in manhood, he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed.

A lot of striving with man and God from the womb right to the grave. But in the end, prevailing, winning the victory with both.

[11:15] But here's the question. What does that really mean? What does it really mean for Jacob? What does it mean for any man? And that, I think, is what this story in particular helps us to see.

Derek Kidner, the commentator, I think is right in saying that this strange conflict in verses 24 to 29, he says, brings to a head all the battling and all the grasping of a lifetime.

Like his whole life is crystallized into this one episode that shows us the real truth about Jacob's battles and struggles and shows us that all along they were really with God himself.

And yet, as Derek Kidner says, the initiative has been God's always, as it was this night, to chasten his pride and to challenge his tenacity.

And the prevailing that we're shown here in Jacob, it is both a victory and yet a defeat at the same time.

[12:19] He strove with the angel and prevailed, says Hosea. He wept and sought his favor, sought his grace. A powerful prevailing and yet a victory that's marked also by penitent pleading for the grace of God.

And isn't that what the Bible tells us is real victory? To come to know that God's power is made perfect in our weakness.

So that with Paul we can rejoice in our weaknesses gladly, knowing that then Christ's power rests upon us truly. And only that way, you see.

So that we can say with Paul, when I am weak, then, then I'm strong. And that's what this story is all about. The true blessing.

And therefore, the true brokenness of God's transforming grace. So let's look at it then in a bit of detail. It's in three parts, really.

[13:25] It shows us Jacob's return, and then Jacob's wrestling, and finally Jacob's remembering. First of all, verses 1 to 21, pictures for us a changed Jacob as he returns to the land.

I think these verses give us clear evidence of God's transforming grace in Jacob's life. And we see it in his changed attitude to man. And a changed attitude in the quest for honor and success in the eyes of the human world.

And that's represented for us here in his attitude towards his brother Esau, and in his attitude to his own wealth and possessions. Verse 3 tells us, if you understand the geography, that it wasn't necessary geographically for Jacob to actually go anywhere near Esau's territory, because it was a way down in the south, right on the very borders of Canaan.

But it obviously was necessary on a much deeper level for Jacob to do that. Why is that? Well, because time doesn't erode and erase sin. And Jacob had wronged Esau, hadn't they, all these years ago.

And so he must seek peace with him. He knows that. And that's what he does. His approach via his messengers is one of genuine humility, of real repentance. Notice how he calls himself.

[14:47] Your servant Jacob, speaking to my Lord Esau. And verse 5 says he's seeking grace. He's seeking favor in his sight. The language is of humility, and it actually permeates the chapter.

He says the same thing again in verse 18 and verse 20. Then in chapter 33 again, in verse 5 and verse 8 and verse 10 and 11, again and again, he is approaching him as servant to master. That is, isn't it, a mark of genuine grace having touched somebody's life. when someone's willing to walk through that valley of humiliation, acknowledging your faults, seeking reconciliation. And especially so when the relationship involved is a very deep one and a very personal one with a family member, as it was here, or with a spouse perhaps. It's a mark of the person who knows that you can't be right with God in heaven if there are grave wrongs left undone and unremended with people here on earth.

Remember what Jesus said? Don't think you can go and offer your gifts on the altar to God without first being reconciled to your brother. Now that's right, isn't it?

[16:04] And here is a chastened Jacob, a changed man from the one who was last dealing with his brother 20 years ago. But imagine, verse 6, imagine the desolating feeling when Jacob hears these words.

Esau is coming with 400 men. That is, with a large army. Now the text is very ambiguous deliberately, isn't it?

We're not told anything about what Esau said or why he was riding out to meet Jacob. But Jacob's reaction is pretty understandable. Verse 7, he was greatly afraid and distressed.

Well, of course, he feared the worst. When he last saw his brother Esau, what was he saying? I'm going to kill you. So Jacob is deeply troubled.

He's literally trembling. But the verses that follow that tell us that nevertheless, he was also trusting. He was trusting in God's promise of God's presence and God's protection, which had never failed him yet, and he knew it.

[17:12] Now some people are very quick to criticize Jacob for his action here in verses 7 and 8. He divides his company in two, preparing for attack. Oh, it's a lack of faith, they say. Well, if that's what you think, I wonder what you would do if you heard that 400 murderous men were on the way to murder your family.

Are you just going to sit and strum your guitar and sing Kumbaya or something? I hope not. Of course you'd do everything in your power, wouldn't you, to protect them from harm? I'd rather hope you would. John Calvin is ever as much more realistic.

He says Jacob is acting in faith. He's caring for the covenant family of God so that even if destruction did approach, at least the whole of God's people wouldn't be destroyed.

And he adds this, those who fancy that faith is exempt from all fear have no experience of the true nature of faith. Well, that's much more realistic.

And once again, just as when Laban pursued Jacob in chapter 31, we see the Lord allowing real fear to come on Jacob, don't we?

[18:20] Why did he do that? Well, again, John Calvin says, the Lord willed that the mind of his servant should be oppressed by this anxiety for a time, although without real cause, in order to more excite the fervor of his prayer.

Or as William still puts it, Satan uses the news to excoriate Jacob's conscience, but God uses it to drive him to prayer for the complete purging of that conscience.

And isn't that what we know to be true very often as we look back on our own life and our experiences? Haven't there been times when it has been real fear, and sometimes that alone, that's actually forced us to throw everything on God and really teach us to trust God because we have no other alternative?

Think of Moses' first readers of this. Think of the Israelites in the Exodus. It was when the Egyptian army was pounding up behind them in their thousands, wasn't it? And then they look at the Red Sea in front of them, absolutely barring their way.

They're absolutely terrified and trembling, but it was then that they cried out to God. And God showed them a wonderful miracle of salvation. And plenty other times throughout their story, just the same.

[19:36] Sometimes it's only in these ways, isn't it, that God's people learn that we don't prevail through our own power and might, that we only prevail through God's power and His grace.

And Jacob here is driven to prayer. And his prayer is a prayer that lays hold on the promises of God with trusting faith. Do you see how his prayer in verses 9 to 12, it's hemmed in by God's promise?

Verse 9, Lord, you said in verse 12, but you said. Do you see what he's saying? Lord, you promised. So deliver me, verse 11.

He's saying, I'm not worthy of the least of your steadfast love and faithfulness. Everything I have today, it's all you're doing. And now it's all under threat. Everything you've given me, the seed that you've promised, the mothers, the children, but you promised that we had a future in this land. I'm afraid, Lord, but save us according to your promise. Save us according to what you said, according to your word. It's a prayer, isn't it, of real holy boldness.

[20 : 47] He's claiming in faith what God has promised to deliver to him. And I notice that is very different from what we sometimes call a name it and claim it prayer for things that God hasn't promised or hasn't guaranteed to give us.

And we mustn't get confused. Some Christians can think that we can just claim anything from God in the face of trouble. That God must heal us or must heal our loved one or must answer my prayer for a wife or for a husband or for a child or whatever it is in life that I want.

Or that God must give a church that prays everything that that church thinks is best for itself. But that's not so, is it? And it's very significant here if you notice that Jacob's prayer is very much for the preservation of his people not for his possessions.

It's for the spiritual future of his family not for their material concerns because that was what God had promised. And that is what God still promises to his people.

All the wealth the flocks and the servants and all of these things these were just ancillary blessings that God had given him besides all of that. And in fact if you look at verses 13 to 21 what they show very clearly is that these things matter very little to Jacob.

[22 : 14] In fact he's prepared to lavish all of these things on his brother Esau as gifts if only he is able to abide again at peace in God's land of promise with the seed that he has given him.

And again some people are very quick to criticize Jacob they're saying oh he's just reverting to type here he's using his own guile and wit to try and bribe his brother instead of trusting God.

No, no, no that totally misreads this passage. The controlling verses of this whole section are those of Jacob's great prayer in verses 9 to 12.

It's the longest prayer in the whole of the book of Genesis. And so surely we're to see all Jacob's actions flowing consistently out of that attitude of prayer. Verses 13 to 21 here simply reinforce that penitent faithful attitude of heart that shows us just how greatly Jacob does value God's spiritual promise and how little he values these material things.

He's willing to sacrifice everything virtually of his substance in order to find peace in God's chosen place. So far from reverting to type what we're seeing here is a very greatly changed Jacob.

[23 : 32] He's no longer grasping he's no longer seeking material blessings by robbing his brother but he's giving lavishly gifts out of a genuine heartfelt desire for reconciliation.

So look at verses 14 to 19. hundreds of animals he sends goats and then sheep and then camels and then cattle and donkeys wave after wave after wave not as a bribe but verse 18 says as a present.

That's a word in the Old Testament that often connotes an offering to compensate for a wrong. And that surely is the message here. In fact in chapter 33 verse 11 Jacob calls these gifts my blessing to Esau.

It's as though he's saying to Esau I'm giving back to you all the blessing that I sought to win from you the wrong way and I'm more than happy now for you to have all that material gain of the firstborn all the earthly honor.

You're my elder. You're my lord. Take what is yours. Jacob is genuine in all of this. He's willing to lose every earthly honor every earthly substance in order not to lose the inheritance of God's covenant promise to him and to his family.

[24 : 53] That's just worth thinking isn't it? As Christians today what value what price we place on the promise of God what price we place on his gospel of grace to us over against our earthly possessions our earthly privileges our positions would we be willing to give all of that up in order to have the prize of the call of God in Jesus Christ?

John Calvin again few follow God because scarcely one in a hundred will bear to be losers but considering Jacob he says we should be ashamed of our effeminacy and our tardiness who wickedly turn aside from the duty of our calling as soon as any loss is to be sustained I wonder what you think of that what are we willing to lose willing to sacrifice to have what God promises his way

for our lives for your family's life for our church's life as a church family not well much more than 10 years ago 12 years ago we once had to forfeit a great deal of what God himself had given us by way of great blessing in order to keep that which he had promised to us and to treasure that which could never be taken away some of us here remember that it was costly what are we willing to lose well I wonder these kinds of thoughts surely were were filling

Jacob's mind as he returned to the land a changed man a man now who was willing to let go of all the world's wealth for the sake of something far greater willing to be like his grandfather Abraham to be a stranger on earth an exile on earth because he knew God had promised him a city with foundations an eternal home a better country it's a change Jacob that we see here isn't it returning to the land but that's not all because verses 22 to 29 show us a challenge Jacob as he wrestles now with the Lord himself and again we see evidence of transforming grace at work in Jacob's attitude to God himself he's willing to let go of all his earthly wealth if need be but he will not let go of this heavenly wrestler because he's determined to have his blessing even if that blessing is going to cripple him or even kill him because he is so hungry now for God himself the whole story is very strange

I don't know why after seeming to settle everyone for the night in verse 21 there the very next verse Jacob seems to get them all up again to make a very dangerous crossing of the river in the middle of the night in the dark it's hard to understand isn't it but I rather think it's perhaps just a mark of the reality of the whole situation because Jacob was very stressed he couldn't sleep he was worrying about his whole family and the future and all of these things and when that happens you just you just want to get on with things you want it to happen you want to get on and find out what's going to happen whether it's for well or for woe I think we can understand that I think he feels also his own helplessness and yet at the same time that great weight of responsibility for this covenant family of God I don't know maybe he needed to be alone to think and to pray maybe he needed to seek the Lord and to seek assurance but at any rate verse 24 says he was left alone not quite clear which side of the river he was on whether he was separated from the others or not but he's alone just as he was alone do you remember back in

Bethel in chapter 28 in the middle of the dark night when the Lord appeared to him and he saw that wonderful reassurance of his presence with his angels on the stairway coming down from heaven and that was a wonderful experience but this time it's very different suddenly we're told a man hits him knocks him over and he's locked suddenly into a fierce fight limbs flying everywhere who is it he doesn't know does he I'm sure perhaps he thought it's Esau come right over himself to come and kill me before I even get any further but whoever it was we're told the resting lasted a very long time and Jacob puts out a very valiant fight he holds his own until suddenly verse 25 he realizes that this man this man has extraordinary power and reserve just by a touch he thrusts his hip joint right out of joint and he says to

[29 : 56] Jacob let me go for the day is broken otherwise I think what he's saying is it's getting light and it will be far far too dangerous for you to actually see me verse 30 confirms that because he says I have seen God face to face and yet I'm still alive Jacob realizes this is no ordinary man it was God himself in human form and the angel of the Lord let me go he says no says Jacob I won't let you go not unless you bless me I need your blessing I want your blessing and I don't care if I have to die to have that blessing that's what he's saying I'm injured I'm helpless but I will not let you go and so the man says to him all right but tell me your name that's a very pointed question isn't it remember that's the question that old blind Isaac his father in the dark asked him all those years ago when Jacob came trying to deceive him and get the blessing that way and remember what Jacob said then oh

I'm Esau but this time the Lord has forced him to honesty hasn't he and to humility and confessing yes I'm Jacob I'm Jacob the deceiver the cheater but he's a changed man and he's persistent he's even powerful now in his grappling with God and he is penitent and he's pleading he strove with the angel and prevailed he wept and sought his favor says Hosea and the Lord says verse 28 yes you have prevailed in your striving with men and with God you've learned to stop grasping for men seeking blessing that way and you've learned to grasp me God alone and seek your blessing for me the way it only can come you've changed Jacob and your name will reflect that and it will serve as an assurance to you that this transformation is real and that it's lasting and that it will be brought to completement in fulfillment of all the gracious promises of the covenant I've given you

Jacob says verse 29 tell me your name who is this mighty one who can rename me in terms of destiny and of moment and promise me all these things and God says why do you need to ask me that Jacob don't you know who I am by now and with his blessing with the naming that marked the reality of the work of transforming grace in Jacob's life he's left alone once again to contemplate this God to contemplate the Lord of the covenant who seemed all these years to be not blessing him at times but cursing him who seemed to be fighting against him who seemed to be wounding him all these trials of life but to see that in fact all the time all the time he was wrestling with him it was in order to bless him he was testing and trying his faith so that as Peter says it would come forth as gold so it would be worthy of the name of God himself and again friends that's a profound lesson for us to learn it's a lesson the Bible teaches us again and again and again

Moses people needed to learn that all the many trials the Lord led them through were part of that necessary wrestling so that they would learn real faithfulness real trust in God to cleave to him in faith not to blame him not to rebel against him but to trust him and it's the same with every one of us there's so many trials aren't there so many perplexities in our lives of faith and it seems sometimes that God is fighting against us that God's wounding us he's hurting us sometimes he makes us weep cry with pain who are you God we say just like Jacob who are you why are you doing this to me I'm sure you've felt that at times and yet just as we see God here resting with Jacob with divine power and yet also with merciful restraint his purpose is not only to bless us but it's to teach us that the nature of his richest blessing is the fruit in our lives as we are transformed to be those who overcome and prevail and are transformed by his wonderful grace and then even the darkest the most perplexing of struggles where God seems to be seems to be pitted at times with all his strength against us as John Calvin puts it so wonderfully he fights against us with his left hand and fights for us with his right hand for while he lightly opposes us he supplies invincible strength whereby we overcome that's the life of real faith see we are called to strive we're called to prevail by the grace of God and we shall but the blessing of God's promise doesn't come without the blows experienced in the battle or without the bruising that sometimes very often will leave us scarred or without the brokenness of spirit that knows that it can only plead with God very often through tears for his blessing in our lives and that's Jacob learned here so clearly at

Peniel and that's what we see so clearly in the last verses in verses 30 to 32 where we see a crippled Jacob a crippled Jacob as he remembers with a limp for the rest of his life there's three things in these verses aren't there that ensure a remembrance of these events at the Jabbok river first of all it's Jacob's new name Israel bears witness to the great transformation which is the great blessing that God has worked in him not only for Jacob personally of course but also in making him the father of a great nation a people who are chosen as Moses kept saying to his people not for your righteousness but by God's grace a people who Moses said to them you are humbled we're disciplined all their way to the promised land so that they might learn what it means to be a people who trust in the God of mercy and of grace the great remembrance in that name Israel as there is in the name Peniel or Peniel changed to make it even more obvious that it's the face of God that is here

[37 : 15] God himself who came down humbling himself in a way in order to bless Jacob face to face to affirm what what God had began in him would surely be brought to completion but then thirdly verse 32 there's another remembrance isn't there in this well this reverence of not eating the sinew of the thigh on the hip probably the sciatic nerve for those who are interested anatomically not eating that because it memorializes the evidence of transforming grace in Jacob's wounded body where study one is very evocative the sun rose on Jacob as he passed Peniel limping because of his hip many sermons preached on that text sometimes without much reference to the rest of the chapter it has to be said but it's a great verse isn't it why this extraordinary custom for all these Israelites to observe not eating that sinew well surely it was so that no Israelite should ever so pride themselves of having the name Israel and be God's chosen people that they would ever forget that even their great patriarch didn't gain his victory from God without a humbling and painful wound

Jacob is blessed but he's broken isn't he his natural manhood is bruised and bent forever he's honored by God but at the same time as being humbled by God he's transformed but but the grace that touches his life to change him is the same grace that touches his life to cripple him forever Bruce Walkie puts it this way the limp is the posture of the saint walking not in physical strength but in spiritual strength God's severe mercy allows Jacob a victory but it is a crippling victory Paul experienced and expressed a similar truth in another oxymoron when I am weak then I'm strong

see there's a kindness and a necessity in the severity of God's mercy that's true for Jacob that's true also for you and for me to be given the name of honor to be a chosen one of God to be someone who prevails with God how easily that could make us proud how easily we could we could no longer think that we need to depend wholly on God and God's grace for our salvation or for our service but God wanted Jacob to be fruitful to the end says William still and the only way to ensure he wouldn't take flight into some self-exalting fancy running the very possibility of spirit ruining the very possibility of spiritual usefulness was to cripple him there's no fruit without cost if we're determined to be fruitful we must be prepared he says to pay not our price but his and it's sobering isn't it friends to have to realize that that is true but that is biblical truth look at Paul and his thorn in the flesh which kept him limping right to the very end whatever that thorn was but it enabled him to reach the end to finish well to receive that great crown of life what does the Lord Jesus say better to enter life crippled and to enter hell whole a limp is the true posture of the saint and of the transforming grace of God and when that is real in our lives friends it will leave scars not because of God's mistake but because of God's mercy which might be saying why why why why must it be that way why is the life of faith to be so painful as well as glorious why well yes as I said it is because of

Jacob's sinful pride and our sinful pride which has to be humbled if any of us think that we're beyond that we don't need any further humbling well I'm afraid how great is your need for further humbling but it's more than just that yes Jacob's battling his wounding at God's hand was at least in part because of his sin and the consequences of sin will always hinder us always haunt us in our lives and throughout our lives but it was more than that it was not just because of his sin but it was also because he was the chosen seed of God he was called to be a source of blessing to the world Jacob was the father of Israel the father of God's people of blessing and so his life foreshadowed and reflected that of the seed ultimately the Messiah himself the true Israel the true servant of God our Lord Jesus Christ he at last came and was wounded by God not for his own sin but for the sin of all

God's people he wrestled with God and man he gave up the glory of heaven and humbled himself utterly not just to wounding but to death on a cross and yet in that death prevailing prevailing over death itself to receive the blessing of victory that brings transformation to everyone who is his that everyone might share in the glory of his name the name of Jesus who is the triumphant one and you see all who are his all who are engrafted into his true Israel by faith we receive that eternal blessing by being united to him in his death and resurrection we have been crucified with Christ as Paul and it's been granted to us he says as a blessing not only to believe in him but also to suffer for his sake we share in the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ in order that we too might be shaped into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ there's no other way to be like him and there is no greater blessing in all eternity than to be made like him and that's the deepest truth about Jacob's wound and indeed all his many scars in life that were allowed and indeed inflicted by God himself in his sanctifying mercy which is at times sometimes a very severe mercy he was receiving the blessing of God's transforming grace he was being shaped as

[44 : 52] Israel to reflect the true Israel the son of God himself our Lord Jesus Christ that's the deepest truth about Jacob's life and his wounds and his scars and that's the deepest truth about your life and mine and our wounds and our scars see in our perplexity in our darkness when we're flailing around wrestling all we feel is the pain all we see is the the bruising the brokenness see we need to help one another don't we to see the light of faith to see the beauty of what God's grace is doing for us and in us and through us so that we keep clinging to him even even though it be through many tears at times because like Jacob we also are determined to receive every blessing he has for us at his good and perfect hand we need to help one another to remember that he fights against us with his left hand but he fights for us with his far more powerful right hand for while he lightly opposes us he supplies invincible strength by which we overcome and he does all of that so that on the day of his appearing we will be like him we will be like him our great savior the lord jesus christ and that is the ultimate blessing of our god's transforming grace well let's pray together our god and our father how often we see but darkly and confusedly but how we thank you that your word does indeed show us the great truth about you so that we can therefore understand the truth about ourselves about what you're doing in our lives and for our lives and what you're taking us and the glory that awaits us so open our eyes and open our hearts we pray and help us to help one another to rejoice in all your transforming grace and to see the glory in every scar and every bruise and to know that when we're weak then indeed we are strong with a strength that will form us

forever help us we pray in jesus name amen