

## 42. The Blessing of Transforming Grace (2007)

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] And we're picking up again in the story of Jacob, and we're going to read most of chapter 32, beginning at verse 3.

Jacob, you remember, has spent 20 years on hard labor for his uncle Laban. At last, having been tricked many times, he is given the command by God to leave that place and to go back to the land of Canaan, the land of promise.

And despite Laban and his kinsmen following him, chasing after him, trying to stop him, the Lord intervenes and vindicates Jacob. And the first two verses of chapter 32 really round off the last story as we saw that God, as Jacob goes on his way, the angels of God met him.

And when Jacob saw them, he said, this is God's camp. And so he called the name of the place Mechanaïm. So verse 3 then, and Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau, his brother, in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

That's right down in the southeast of the land across the Jordan into what would be today the land of Jordan. And he sent messengers to Esau, instructing them, thus you shall say to my lord Esau, thus says your servant Jacob.

[ 1 : 2 6 ] I've sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants and female servants. I've sent to tell my lord in order that I might find favor, find grace in your sight.

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. And 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'm not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown 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 earth, which cannot be numbered from multitude.

[ 2 : 5 4 ] So he stayed there that night and from what he had with him, he took a present, an offering 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 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, literally I may appease his face with the present that goes ahead of me.

And afterward I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me, perhaps he will lift up my face. We don't quite get the play on words there in the English translation.

[ 4 : 18 ] So the present passed on ahead of him, and he himself stayed that night in the camp. And 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.

That's a tributary, that river that runs into the Jordan. 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 until the break of 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.

Then he said to Jacob, what is your name? And he said, Jacob. Then he said, your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel.

[ 5 : 24 ] For you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed. And Jacob asked him, please tell me your name. He said, why is it that you ask my name?

And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel or Penuel, saying, for I have seen God face to face.

Peniel means face of God. And yet my life has been delivered. The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

And 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 his word. Well, do turn with me, if you would, to Genesis chapter 32. Chapter all about the blessing of God's transforming grace.

[ 6 : 38 ] 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.

So reads the opening sentence of probably the greatest theology book ever written. A book which seeks purposefully to open up the entire message of the Bible.

Because that is precisely what the Bible is all about. Above all, the Bible brings us to a true and clear revelation of God.

And therefore, also, it forces us to make a true assessment of ourselves as human beings. And our status before Almighty God, our Creator and Lord.

And so it is, therefore, these sacred writings, the scriptures, that are able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, says Paul the Apostle.

[ 7 : 37 ] And if we remember that, then it will save us from all kinds of confusion as we read the Bible. Because we'll remember that, above all, it is a book about God.

That God is the great subject of the Bible. And therefore, the chief question that we have to ask of any part of the scriptures is this. What does this tell me about God?

About who he is? About how he works? About why he does what he does? And then, having understood that, we can ask ourselves, Well, what then does this tell me also about the human heart?

And about what God requires of man? And above all, about what he requires of those who are called his people? And what does that tell me about what God is doing in his people's lives?

And why he's doing it? Well, that's what these stories in Genesis about the life of Isaac and of Jacob are all about. And we've seen already so much about God's tenacious grace.

[ 8 : 40 ] God whose covenant promise has been true and certain and constant, despite the manifest flaws of his chosen family of faith.

I suppose since chapter 28, when the spotlight has been very much on the life of Jacob through all his journeyings and strugglings, we've seen also the God of transforming grace at work in Jacob's life.

Not leaving Jacob to be what he is by nature, his natural bent as a twisted and deceiving schemer, but shaping him through many, many crucibles of suffering and testing into a man whose real faith and trust is in God.

And it's a story, isn't it, as we've seen of lifelong struggle. Jacob has had to wrestle to overcome with his father Isaac, with his brother Esau, with his uncle Laban and his kin.

But all along, of course, behind all of these, it has been God that Jacob has really been struggling with. God has been the one holding Jacob in a vice-like grip in order that Jacob might gain the blessing he had sought all his life, the blessing of God's covenant grace.

[ 10 : 01 ] A blessing which consists in the transformation by grace that is being forged in Jacob's heart and soul through the struggles and the hardships which seemed to be the very obstacles to him receiving the blessing that he looked for.

How often we're blind, aren't we, to the reality of what God is doing with us. How often we misconstrue his way as having failed us or abandoned us, when the reality is that so often it's through these very struggles and battlings that God is at work most profoundly in us.

Isn't that true? Working both to will and to work for his good pleasure. And his good pleasure is to make us like his holy son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so you see, these scriptures help us to see more clearly and to understand both God and ourselves and what it means to be God's as Jacob was.

Now with this chapter 32 and the next one, we really come to the climax of the Jacob cycle of stories. He returns to the land of promise. He receives the blessing at God's hand, confirmed from God's own mouth the right way.

[ 11 : 21 ] And at the end of chapter 33, we see that he owns real estate in the land, a piece of land belonging to him, just as Abraham had done before him.

He blesses God at the altar, just as he had blessed God at Bethel on his way out of the land. Chapter 32 here is a taxing story, isn't it?

I think if you look at verses 28 and 29, you'll see the key in the Lord's words to Jacob as he blesses him, marking that blessing with the change of name from Jacob to Israel.

You have striven with God and with men and have prevailed, says the Lord. Meaning not just, of course, in this wrestling bout at the Jabbok River, but all through his whole life story.

There's a very interesting little passage in the prophet Hosea. Don't look it up now, but just listen. It sums up Jacob's life in a couple of verses like this. In the womb, Jacob took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he strove with God.

[ 12 : 25 ] He strove with the angel and prevailed. That's Hosea 12, verses 3 and 4. A life of striving with man and with God, but in the end prevailing, winning the victory with both.

That's how the prophet sums up his life. But what does that really mean for Jacob or for any man? I think that's what this story here helps us to begin to see.

I think Derek Kidner, the commentator, is spot on when he says that in this strange conflict that we see in verses 24 to 29, it simply brings to a head all the battling and the grasping of a lifetime.

It's as though Jacob's whole life is crystallized into this episode to show what he has really been battling with all his life and why. He says it wasn't really Esau or Laban against whom he'd been pitting his strength, but God, as he now discovered.

Yet the initiative had been God's, as it was this night, to chasten his pride and to challenge his tenacity. And the prevailing that we see in Jacob here is, as Kidner says, both a defeat and a victory in one.

[ 13 : 47 ] Again, Hosea, the prophet's words give great illumination. He strove with the angel and prevailed. He wept and sought his favor. He prevailed powerfully.

And yet that very victory is marked by a penitent pleading for grace at God's hand. And the victory of his strength only reveals his utter weakness.

And all he can do is cling to God and seek his grace. But that is the victory. That is what it means to prevail with God.

To come to the understanding that God's power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, with Paul, we can rejoice in our weakness, knowing that the power of Christ may thus rest upon us.

It's a victory when someone can come to the point that they say, yes, when I'm weak, then I'm strong. And that's what this story is all about.

[ 14 : 54 ] It's all about the true blessing and therefore about the true brokenness. It always attends God's transforming grace.

Let's look at the text then in the three parts as it focuses on these three things. On Jacob's return and then Jacob's wrestling and then Jacob's remembering. Look at verses 1 to 21 because they picture for us, don't they, a changed Jacob.

A changed Jacob as he returns to the land. These verses surely give clear evidence of God's transforming grace in Jacob's life.

In his changed attitude to man. And to the quest for honor and success in the eyes of the world. As especially represented here in his attitude to his brother Esau.

And his attitude to his own possessions and wealth. Verse 3 tells us that while of course it wasn't necessary geographically for Jacob to go anywhere near Esau's territory.

[ 15 : 53 ] Way down there in the southeast border of Canaan. Nevertheless, it wasn't necessary for Jacob. Necessary at a far deeper level for him to do this.

Because time doesn't erase sin or its consequences, does it? Jacob had wronged Esau those 20 years before. And he knew in his heart he must seek peace with him.

And as he does, he approaches via these messengers. And the approach surely is one of genuine humility and repentance. It's my Lord Esau, he addresses.

And I'm your servant Jacob, he says. And he's seeking favors, says verse 5. Seeking grace is the word. In his sight. And that language of humility permeates the whole of this chapter.

And indeed the next one. Look at verse 18 and verse 20 says the same thing. And again in chapter 33 and verses 5 and 8 and 10 and 11. And it is a mark, isn't it, of genuine grace.

[ 16 : 55 ] Having touched somebody's life. When they're able to walk that valley of humiliation. When they're able to acknowledge their fault. When they're keen to seek reconciliation for their wrong.

And that's especially so, isn't it, when the relationship has been a deep and close one. As deep and close as it is with a brother, a family member, a spouse perhaps. It's a mark of the person who knows that you can't be right with God in heaven while there are grave wrongs left unmended with your brother on earth.

What did Jesus say? Don't think that God wants your gifts on his altar until first you've been reconciled with your brother. Well, here is a changed Jacob.

A chastened Jacob. A changed man certainly from the one we saw dealing with Esau last some 20 years before. He comes humbly and penitently.

Well, imagine then the desolating feeling that must have hit him in the pit of the stomach when he heard those words from his returning messengers in verse 6. Esau is coming with 400 men.

[ 18 : 04 ] Now that is a large army. The text is deliberately ambiguous, isn't it? We're not told anything about what Esau had said. We're not told anything about why he's riding out with all these men to meet Jacob.

But Jacob's reaction is pretty understandable. He was greatly afraid and distressed, says verse 7. He absolutely feared the worst of the man who, of course, last time they had spoken, was vowing to kill him.

Jacob's deeply troubled. He's trembling. But the verses that follow show us that he was nevertheless trusting.

Trusting in God's promise of protection and God's presence, which had never failed him yet. Some people, again, are very quick to criticize Jacob for his action in verses 7 and 8, dividing his company and preparing for attack.

Oh, what a lack of faith, they say. Well, if that's what you think, let me just ask you what you would do if you felt a murderous mob was on its way to your home to massacre your children and your wife and everything that you had.

[ 19 : 09 ] Well, I hope that you would do everything in your power to protect your family. John Calvin is ever as much more realistic when he says that Jacob was acting in faith, caring for the covenant family so that even if destruction did approach, then at least not the whole seed of God's church would perish.

And he adds, they who fancy that faith is exempt from all fear have no experience of the true nature of faith. Well, that's right, isn't it? And once again, just as Laban's pursuit in chapter 31, we see the Lord allowing real fear to come upon Jacob.

Why? Well, again, John Calvin, the Lord will that the mind of his servant should be so oppressed by this anxiety for a time, although it was without cause, in order the more to 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.

Isn't that what we know to be true as we look back on the experience of our own Christian lives? That so often it's been at times of real fear and real need that have forced us to throw ourselves on God alone.

[ 20 : 36 ] That's when we've really learned to trust God, isn't it? It is in my life. Think of Moses' first readers and hearers of this story, the Israelites of the Exodus.

It was when the Egyptian army was pounding up behind them, and when the Red Sea was like a barrier right in front of them, that they cried to God in their helplessness. They saw the great power of God as he saved them.

Many, many other times besides. It's often only, isn't it, only in these ways that God's people learn that they don't prevail by their own power and might, but by God alone.

And Jacob is driven to prayer. Prayer that lays hold of God's promises in trusting faith. Do you see how God's promises hem in that prayer in verses 9 to 12?

Verse 9, Lord, you said. Verse 12, But you said. Lord, you promised, Jacob cries. Deliver me. I'm not worthy of the least of these blessings of your steadfast love and faithfulness.

[ 21 : 45 ] Everything I am, everything I have is your doing. And now it's all under threat. And the mothers and the children, but you promised them a future in this land.

I'm fearful, Lord. I'm afraid of Esau. He says, verse 12, Save us according to your promise. Save us according to your word. Now that's a prayer of holy boldness, isn't it?

Rightly claiming from God what God has promised to deliver. It's not a name it and claim it prayer of something that God has not promised or guaranteed.

Often as Christians, we make those kind of prayers, don't we? Claiming things from God in the face of trouble that God has not promised to do.

That he must heal us. Or a friend or a relative. Or that he must answer my prayer for a husband or a wife or for a child or whatever. Or that he must grant every church the way that they think is best for their future in material terms.

[ 22 : 53 ] No. It's very significant when you look at this prayer that it is for the preservation of his people, not for the preservation of his possessions. It's for the spiritual life and destiny of his family that he prays for, not for their material concerns.

Do you see? Because that was what God had promised. And that is what God still promises for his people. All the wealth, all the flocks and the servants and so on.

That was an ancillary blessing God had given Jacob besides all these things. And in fact, verses 13 to 21 show us very clearly that those things mattered far, far less to Jacob.

Far less than the spiritual promise of God. He's prepared to lavish nearly all of these things on Esau as gifts. If only he can win the prize of a peaceful existence back in the promised land.

Again, some people are quick to criticize Jacob, saying, oh, he's just reverting to type here. He's just back to the same old guile and wit and wisdom to bribe his brother instead of trusting God.

[ 24 : 04 ] I think that is to misunderstand the text here. The controlling verses of this whole section are those of Jacob's great believing prayer in verses 9 to 12.

It's the longest prayer in the whole of the book of Genesis. So surely we're to see Jacob's actions as being utterly consistent with his attitude in prayer. No.

Verses 13 to 21 simply reinforce his penitent and faithful attitude of heart. And just telling us again how greatly Jacob does value the covenant promise of God.

He's willing to sacrifice, to part with almost everything he has of his substance in order to find peace in the place that God has called him to. Now far from reverting to type, this is a change, Jacob.

He's no longer grasping and seeking material things and blessings by robbing his brother. He's giving to his brother. He's willingly lavishing gifts upon Esau to show him genuine, heartfelt desire for reconciliation.

[ 25 : 15 ] Hundreds of animals he sends. Verses 14 to 19. Goats, and then sheep, and then camels, and then cattle, and then donkeys. Wave after wave.

Not as a bribe, says verse 18, but as a present. An offering. That word is often used as an offering to compensate for a wrong that has been done.

And surely that's what the message is here. In fact, if you look to chapter 33 in verse 11, you'll see that Jacob calls all these gifts, my blessing that I'm giving to you, Esau.

It's as if Jacob's saying, Esau, I'm giving back to you the blessing, the material blessing that I sought from you all those years ago. And I'm more than happy for you to have all the material gain that goes along with it.

All the earthly honor that goes along with it. I'm willing for you to be my Lord and you to call me your servant. Jacob's being genuine in all of this.

[ 26 : 20 ] He's willing to lose every earthly honor and all his earthly substance so as not to lose the inheritance of God's covenant promise to him and to his family.

It's just worth thinking, isn't it? What value, what price we place on the promise of God to us in his glorious gospel.

Says John Calvin again, quote, Few follow God because scarcely one in a hundred will bear to be losers. But concerning Jacob, he says, We should be ashamed of our effeminacy and tardiness.

We wickedly turn aside from the duty of our calling as soon as any loss is to be sustained. There's truth in that, isn't there?

Many of us as Christians. I wonder what you think of that. I wonder what you and I are willing to lose, to sacrifice. What cost we would be willing to bear.

[ 27 : 29 ] To have what God promises, his way in our lives, in your life, in your family life. Could it be that as a church family, we might have to forfeit much of what God himself has blessed us with in material terms in order to keep what he has promised as the treasure that will never, ever spoil or fade away.

Is that possible? Is that possible? No doubt it was thoughts of this kind that filled Jacob's head as he returned to the land as a changed man.

A man who truly had become willing to let go of all of this world's honor and wealth for the sake of something far greater. Willing to be like Abraham, a stranger, an exile on earth because he looked forward to a city with foundations whose builder is God.

a changed Jacob returned to the land. But that's not all this story tells us because verses 22 to 29 show us a challenge Jacob as he wrestles with the Lord.

And once again, we surely see evidence of transforming grace at work in Jacob's attitude to God himself this time. He's willing, is Jacob now, to let go of all his earthly wealth if need be, but he will not let go of this heavenly wrestler.

[ 29 : 00 ] He's determined to have his blessing even if it would cripple him, even if it should kill him. So hungry has he become for God himself.

Now this whole story is very strange. We don't know why after apparently in verse 21 settling his whole family and camp for the night, why Jacob then seems to get them all up again in the middle of the night to go and cross this river in the darkness.

Highly dangerous. I rather think it's just a mark of the reality of the whole situation. Jacob was absolutely stressed up to the nines.

I guess he just couldn't sleep. I guess he just lay there wanting to know what was going to happen. Wanting to find out what it was going to be for well or for woe. He couldn't wait.

I can understand that. I guess also he feels very much his own helplessness. And yet at the same time the great weight of responsibility of being the leader of this covenant family of God.

[ 30 : 07 ] Maybe he just needed to be alone, to think, to pray, to wrestle all this out before God, to seek God's assurance. At any rate, whatever it was, verse 24 tells us that Jacob was left alone.

It's not quite clear if he crossed the river and came back or stayed and didn't cross or is on the other side. We don't know. But he's alone. Just as he was alone at Bethel, remember, on his way out of the land when it was in the darkness of night that the Lord appeared to him to give him that wonderful, wonderful reassurance of his presence.

Remember the stairway open from heaven. But this time it's very different, isn't it? Suddenly, we're told, a man appears and hits him, knocks him to the ground, wrestling with him, arms and legs, no doubt flailing everywhere.

What on earth is going on? Jacob doesn't know. Who is he? I wonder if he perhaps thought it was Esau, his brother, come himself to kill him himself and wreak vengeance on him.

But whoever it was, they wrestled for a long time. And Jacob put up a valiant fight, holding his own. And then suddenly he realizes that this man has enormous power in reserve.

[ 31 : 24 ] Just by a touch, he thrusts Jacob's hip out of joint, maiming him. And he spoke to him. Let me go for the day has broken, he said.

It's getting light and it'll be dangerous for you to see me. That's very probably what Jacob understood him to mean by these words as I think verse 30 confirms because Jacob knows no man can see the face of God and live.

And Jacob realizes that this is no ordinary man. This is God himself in human form. This is the angel of the Lord. No, he says to him then, 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 get it. I'm injured and I'm helpless, but I will not let go.

So the stranger says to him, all right, what's your name? And isn't that the pointed question? Remember, that was the question that poor old blind Isaac asked when Jacob went seeking to grasp the blessing deceitfully from him.

[ 32 : 45 ] I'm Esau, is what he said then. But this time, the Lord forces him, doesn't he, to honesty, to humility, to confession. He admits, yes, I'm Jacob, well named, as Esau had said, for he cheated me these two times.

But he is a changed man. He's persistent. He's even powerful in his grappling with God. And yet now he is also penitent. He's pleading.

He strove with the angel and prevailed. He wept and sought his favor. And the Lord said, yes, you have prevailed in your striving with men and with God.

You've learned, Jacob, at last, to stop grasping from men and seeking blessing that way and to grasp the blessing from God alone, his way. You've learned. You've changed.

Your name will reflect that and serve as an assurance that this transformation is real and is lasting and will be brought to completion in fulfillment of all the gracious promises of the covenant.

[ 33 : 55 ] Amen. Amen. Tell me your name, says Jacob in verse 29. Who is this mighty one who can rename him in terms of such destiny, of such moment?

Why on earth do you need to ask that, Jacob? Don't you know? And with his blessing, the renaming that simply marked the reality that the work of transforming grace in Jacob's life had been doing all these years with that word of blessing, Jacob's left alone again to contemplate that this God, the Lord of the covenant, who seemed for all these years to have been not blessing him but cursing him, fighting against him and wounding him through all the trials of life, was in fact the God who all the time was wrestling with him in order to bless him.

Testing and trying his faith so that it would come forth as gold and worthy of the name of the Lord his God. That's a profound lesson to learn, isn't it, friends?



It's the whole of the Bible teaches it again and again and again. Moses' people needed to learn that. That the many trials that the Lord led them through were part of a necessarily wrestling so that they would learn real faithfulness and real trust so that they would learn to cleave to God in faith not to blame him constantly and rebel against him.

Isn't it the same with us too? Aren't there so many trials and perplexities in our life of faith when it seems as though God is fighting against us and hurting us and wounding us even permanently?

[ 35 : 51 ] makes us weep and cry out in pain at times. Who are you, God? Why are you doing this to me? Haven't you felt like that?

Haven't you said those very things in prayer? And yet, just as we see God here wrestling with Jacob with divine power and yet with merciful restraint, his purpose is not only to bless us but 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 by his transforming grace.

Even the darkest and most perplexing of struggles where God seems to be pitted with all his strength against us as John Calvin so wonderfully puts it 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 and that's the life of real faith we're called to strive and 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 battle nor without the bruising that will leave us scarred or the brokenness of spirit that knows it can only plead with God very often through tears for that blessing in our lives and that's what Jacob learned so clearly here at Peniel and that's what the very last verses of the chapter make so plain to us because we see don't we in verses 30 to 32 a crippled

Jacob as he remembers with a limp for the rest of his life three things we're told ensure a remembrance of the events here at the Jabbok river as Jacob's new name Israel which bears witness to the transformation which is the great blessing that God has worked in him and is working in him not only for Jacob personally but of course making him the father of a nation of all God's people a people chosen not for their righteousness as Moses repeatedly told the Israelites but by God's grace and a people humbled and disciplined on their way to the promised land so that they might learn what it means to be a people who trust in the God of grace and mercy the name Israel and second the name Peniel to remind of the God who comes down humbling himself in order that he might bless Jacob face to face and to affirm that what had begun in him would be brought to completion forever as God had promised but thirdly it's also the remembrance in this custom this reverence of not eating of the sinew of the thigh on the hip the sciatic nerve that memorializes the evidence of God's transforming grace in Jacob's own wounded body verse 31 is very evocative isn't it the sun rose on Jacob as he passed

Peniel limping because of his hip many a sermon been preached on that text not always I might say with much attention to the rest of the chapter but it is a great text why this extraordinary custom we must ask for all the Israelites to observe well surely at least in part it was that no Israelites should show pride themselves in bearing the name of Israel that they would ever forget that even the great patriarch did not gain his victory from God without a painful wound he is blessed but he is broken his natural manhood is bruised and bent he is honored by God but at the same moment he is humbled by God he is transformed but the grace that touched his life to change him also touched his life to cripple him Bruce Waltke puts it this way the limp is the posture of the true saint walking not in physical strength but in spiritual strength

[ 40 : 37 ] God's severe mercy allows Jacob a victory but it is a crippling victory Paul expressed a similar truth in another oxymoron when he said when I am weak then I am strong there is a kindness and a necessity in the severity of God's mercy isn't there for Jacob or indeed for you or me to be given a name of honor as a chosen one of God who has prevailed with God how easy it is to become proud and haughty with that blessing to no longer feel the need to wholly depend upon God's grace for our salvation and for our service isn't that so God wanted Jacob to be faithful to the end says William Still and the only way to ensure that he would not take flight into some self-exalting fancy ruining the very possibility of spiritual usefulness was to cripple him there is no fruit without cost if we are determined to be fruitful we must be prepared to pay not our price but his that's sobering isn't it but that is biblical truth look at Paul his thorn in the flesh which kept him limping all the way to his life's end whatever the nature of that limp was but enabled him to reach that end saying

I have fought the fight I have finished the race and now there is waiting for me a crown of righteousness what does the Lord Jesus say it's better to enter life crippled than to enter hell whole there is a kindness in the severity of God's mercy a limp is the true portrait of the saint and the transforming grace of God friends in the lives of his people when it is real will leave scars not because of God's mistake but because of his mercy why must it be that way why is the life of real faith so painful as well as being glorious why is the limp the posture of the saint well yes as I've said it is because of sinful pride and if any of us think we are beyond that and have no need of such humbling then how great is our need for humbling but there is more than that yes

Jacob's battling and wounding at God's hand was in part because of his sin the consequences of which will always live on to haunt us and to hunt us in our own lives and through the lives of our families yes was because of his sin but it was more than that it was because also he was the chosen seed of God he was called to be a source of blessing to the world in God's plan he was the father of Israel God's people of blessing and so his life foreshadowed and therefore reflected that of the Messiah himself the true Israel the servant of God the Lord Jesus Christ he at last who came and was wounded by God not for his own sin but for the sin of all God's people he wrestled with man and with God he gave up the glory of heaven and humbled himself even to death on a cross and yet prevailed even over death itself to receive the blessings of the victory that brings transformation to all who are his by grace so that they too may share in the glory of a name that is above every other name the name of Jesus the triumphant son of God and you know all who are his all who are engrafted into God's true

Israel of faith of faith by grace all receive that great eternal blessing by being united with the Lord Jesus in his death and resurrection in his wrestling and struggle and crippling and wounding we have been crucified with Christ says Paul that's how we're saved it's been granted to us as a blessing not only to believe on him but also 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 and there's no greater blessing in all time or all eternity no greater blessing than that that's the deepest truth about Jacob's wounds and indeed the many scars in life that are alive and even inflicted by God in his sanctifying mercy which is at times a severe mercy he was receiving the blessing of God's transforming grace he was being shaped into Israel to be one who reflected the true Israel son of God the Lord Jesus and that's the deepest truth about your wounds too and mine in our perplexity in our in our darkness so often isn't it so that we only see the scars we only see the bruising we only see the brokenness but friends we need to help one another to see by the light of faith to see the beauty of what God's grace is doing in us and for us and through us we need to help one another to see that so that we also like Jacob keep clinging to him even though it be through tears and weeping clinging to him determined to receive the blessing from his good and faithful hand and remember he fights against us with his left hand but he fights for us with his right hand for while he lightly opposes us he supplies invincible strength by which we overcome so that at the day of his appearing as promised we shall be like him and that is the ultimate blessing of God's transforming grace let's pray

Lord your ways are marvelous and wonderful beyond us and mysterious to our short-sighted eyes and yet your promise teaches us that all things all things things that bring wounds and scars fears and sadness all things even these perhaps especially these are working for the good the ultimate blessing by grace of everyone that you have called to be yours for all eternity so help us even as you humble us to cherish the blessing of your transforming grace for we ask it in Jesus name

[ 49 : 05 ]    Amen