

The Cross Changes Everything | Striving With God

Genesis 32:22–33:11

1. Beginning — Why we're changing our church's name

- Beginning Easter Sunday — a new name.
- Why...
 - We have changed. We're not the same church that I took over 8-years ago.
 - We are standing in the shadow of the past. Our best days are not behind us.
 - We want to change the conversation. We want to infuse any dialogue about our church with freshness and enthusiasm.
 - We feel a freedom from God to do this. Years of prayer, unity among our staff and elders, and lots of outside counsel.
 - We're acknowledging what we've become together.
 - We are not saying "No!" to the past. We're saying "Yes!" to the future.
- [Renew Church Logo]

2. Middle — Let's not just think about ourselves, organizationally...

- Genesis 32:22-33:11 – Not about a church name-change, but it is about *identity*.
- Groundwork
 - **Abraham → Isaac → Jacob**
 - **Jacob was born after his brother, Esau, but God** intended that he be the next generational link leading to the establishment of the Hebrew nations, the Israelites. Isn't it interesting how God seems to deliberately seek out the weak and unqualified to use for his glory? (Remember Abraham in his old age to bear children.)
 - How it went down? Jacob **tricked** his brother into giving away his birthright and his father into giving him Esau's first-born blessing. Esau bitterly hated Jacob and desired to kill him for swindling him twice. Jacob had always been **unethical** in pursuing his dreams and vision.
 - Rebekah advised him to **run away** to her brother's house, where he met his first love, Rachel. Her father, Laban, agreed to give him her hand in marriage if he worked for him for seven years. But **Laban tricked him** into marrying his eldest daughter, Leah. When Jacob protested, Laban agreed to give him Rachel if he worked another seven years.

- Over that 14-years, Jacob worked hard and God blessed him. But he was tired of being unjustly treated. Laban changed Jacob's wages ten times! And it was apparent that he had worn out his welcome. His **brothers-in-law resented him** for his prosperity. They accused him of using their father to get ahead.
 - God then called Jacob to return to a place called Beth-el, where God previously revealed himself to Jacob. But Laban wasn't going to let him walk away with his two daughters, all his grandchildren, with his vast herds without a fight. After three days on his journey out of town, Laban realized that Jacob left without saying anything and he was incensed that his **household idols** were also taken. He chased Jacob down and they almost fought right there. But they decided to create a border than neither would cross.
 - Just when Jacob was breathing a sigh of relief, he received word that he was on a **collision course with his brother, Esau** — the man he hadn't seen since he swindled him out of his inheritance. Jacob was terrified. In his fear, he sent waves of goats, rams, camels, bulls, donkeys — hundreds of them — to his brother. Each **wave of gifts** was led by different servants who would present these gifts to Esau.
 - It was here, at a river called Jabbok, a shallow part through which he crossed on foot, that he camped alone that night, which is where our story picks up...
- Family brokenness is the story of Jacob's life.

[22] 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. [23] He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. [24] And Jacob was left alone.

- Back in 32:1, Jacob was met by angels of God as he journeyed. This was an encouraging visitation because he knew that God was with him, yet God was leading him straight to Esau.
- “Geographically, the call to Beth-el would take him no where near Esau...[but] spiritually he could reach Beth-el no other way...to meet God he must ‘first be reconciled’ with his brother.” (Kidner)
- You are uniquely called and empowered by God to carry out great things. And the reason some of us in this room are hitting a wall is because we're running. And God is calling you to face that thing you are running from. When you courageously choose to face that thing you're running from you will find that he will be with you. So what are you running from? Here's how you can figure that out:
 - What is the source of your guilt?

- What story from your past drags you down in shame?
- Who do you fear? What are their names?
- What risky thing is God calling you to do that frightens you?
- Jacob had to face his past. But he was reassured that God was with him.
- Still, throughout the chapter, Jacob had **planned and prayed**. He was good, after all, at being in control. But this time, he was powerless. And when we are at our weakest is when God likes to show up.
- Illustration: Friend who started preaching and every week received very critical notes from a theologian.

[24b] And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.

- Jacob didn't realize he was wrestling with God. An angel, maybe. But in the heat of his distress, he had no idea that he was fighting with God himself.
- I want you to think back to that place of shame, guilt, and fear. You look back and see yourself alone. But you were in the presence of God. I'm not saying that God liked what happened to you or even ordained what happened to you. But God was there. Even when you descended into Sheol, God was there. "If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!" (Psalm 139:8) You're looking for God, but he's always been there. By running from your fear and pain, you've been running from God. Which means you've been running from healing.
- Good news: God has mysteriously been with you this whole time. You've been striving with him all these years and you didn't even know you were wrestling with him the whole time.
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[25] 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.

- You see God loves you, but God is not going to let you stay you. He's going to change you. He's merciful and he won't allow you to remain the way you are, controlled by shame, guilt, and fear. He's going to deliver you from your Jacob-identity. Because it's all that stuff in the past that causes you to control, to withhold trust, to remain calloused and hard, to hurt others before they hurt you. It's the fear, the shame, and the guilt that keeps you from trusting God, from really believing that God is good.

[26] Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

- Jacob is changing. He's exhausted his own means. He sees that his future is entirely in this "angel's" hands.

[27] And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."

- Admit who and what you have become. Quit dodging the ugly, uncomfortable truth of your character.

[28] 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."

- Now here's what's interesting. God did not rename Jacob something like "the presence of God." He didn't rename him something like "the power of God." He didn't rename him "trusting God." He re-named him "fighting God." He renamed him "striving with God."
- What's even more remarkable is that all of Jacob's descendants, the Israelites, find their national identity in this old Hebrew phrase: striving with God. And that's what this life is between the cross and when Jesus comes again. We live in the tension that exists between our old Jacob-like identity and the new identity God calls us to. We are always calling our hearts to open to God again.

[29] Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. [30] 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." [31] The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. [32] 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.

- The place of pain was the place of healing.
- But that didn't mean Jacob no longer had to face his past. The difference was that God's blessing overshadowed him more than his own story did.
- Why would God dislocate Jacob's hip? Of what value could this possibly be?

[1] And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants.

[2] And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. [3] He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. [4] But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

- It likely wasn't the waves of gifts which melted Esau's heart.
- Maybe it was Jacob's limp – the way he winced with each bow to Esau – that showed him Jacob really was a different man. In the ancient world, the loins/thigh were representative of a person's source of power. Jacob appeared to Esau as a broken man, powerless. Humble.
- The thing that we all have to get is Jesus' way. Will we reject it or grasp onto like Jacob did to God?
 - "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. - Matthew 5:5 // When will we see that being powerful and impressive and in control isn't the answer?
 - "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. - Matthew 5:6 // When will we get to the serious business of cultivating our new hearts that we've been given in Christ?
 - "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. - Matthew 5:7 // When will we begin giving love to our transgressors?
 - "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. - Matthew 5:8 // When will we lay down our heart's weapons and open ourselves up to both extravagant love and the risk of personal injury?
 - "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. - Matthew 5:9 // When will we see ourselves as God's image-bearers and out of that identity bring healing to the people in our lives rather than passive-aggression, meanness, hidden resentment, and jumping into toxic drama?