

Daring to Draw Near, 4

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How many people here know the Moonlight Sonata? Okay, can you tell me who wrote that? Who said it? I'm hearing two or three different... Beethoven has one vote. I thought it was Gershwin. Who thinks it's Beethoven? Okay, we've got about a half a dozen hands. Carol, your idea didn't go over very well. That's Gordon's idea. Okay, Gordon is voting for Beethoven. Now, who thinks it's Beethoven? Yeah, it's Beethoven. It was Beethoven who wrote that. It's also known as...Gordon, do you know what it is? The Piano Sonata #14 in C Sharp. Gosh, I thought everybody knew that. Actually, Siri told me yesterday. I did think it was Gershwin so I missed by about 200 years.

But the Moonlight Sonata was also, in addition to being a wonderful piano piece, it was also the code name of a German operation during WWII, an operation that was so important that it was ordered by Hitler himself. So on that night, November 14, 1940, began an air raid whose ferocity has become a byword for devastation. Five hundred tons of explosives, 33,000 incendiary bombs and dozens of parachute mines were dropped on the city of Coventry in England. In less than a fifth of a square mile, 60,000 buildings were destroyed or damaged and the 600 year old cathedral in the city went up in flames. The movie which is relatively recent called "The Imitation Game" touches on this and the play "One Night in November" both claim that the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, knew several days in advance that the Germans would attack Coventry but deliberately held back the information.

Now, I don't know. I'm not taking a position on this but Churchill's intelligence purportedly came from the scientists at Bletchley Park in Buckinghamshire in England who in the utmost secrecy had cracked the Enigma Code that the Germans used for their military communications. The theory is that from an intercepted message that they had discovered that the city was a target but warning the city of 300,000 people, Coventry, of that imminent threat would have alerted the Germans to the fact that their codes had been cracked and their security had been breached. True or not, I'll leave it for you to do the research and the study and to come up with an answer to that but that was Moonlight Sonata.

Michel de Montaigne was a leading light in the French enlightenment, now I'm backing up a couple of hundred years, which was a secular humanist push back to the Protestant

Reformation. Montaigne mentored a great number of secular English and French philosophers and he was probably the leading light of the Enlightenment movement and Montaigne famously opined and this is the quote I want to get after here, it's in your outline under the Introduction, Michel de Montaigne said, "There are triumphal defeats that rival victories." There are triumphal defeats that rival victories. A case could be made that in those words, Montaigne encapsulated the life of the patriarch in the Bible named Jacob.

We're continuing our study of the concept of prayer and I want to summarize, first of all this morning, where we have come so far in the last three weeks, I want to summarize the back story to the sermon text that we have today which is Genesis 32:22-30 and I want to look at that passage under three headings. 1. Alone at last. 2. Wrestling for blessing. 3. What's in a name?

First of all, let's summarize without a lot of elaboration where we have come so far in the last three weeks because we're trying to determine a strategy for prayer among ourselves and so far what we've seen is in Colossians 1, that the apostle gave us three word pictures by which we can characterize prayer. And the first was that of a raging river in which the apostle for all practical purposes says, "Get swept up in prayer. Make it your ambition to train your mind to keep a running dialog with God going." The second word picture that Paul gave us to the Colossians was that of a relentless pursuer; one who tirelessly pursues God's throne of grace. The third picture he gives us is that of a tireless traveler in which they would cleave or weld themselves to God, being devoted to him in prayer.

After a couple of weeks of that, we went into Nehemiah and we learned that there is a variety of types of prayer ranging from a prayer blast...you know, this last week I was thinking about that idea that comes to us from the Scriptures, this prayer blast idea, and I was thinking about the story and you probably remember this story, the story of Peter who was in a boat out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee and the Lord came to those in the boat walking on the water. It was a little choppy that day, the seas were 3 to 5 feet, and Jesus came walking up to the boat and as he came walking up to the boat, Peter said, "Gosh, that looks easy. I think I'll give that a try." And so he said, "Lord, if that's you, tell me to come." And Jesus said, "Peter, come." And then Peter stepped over the side of the boat, took a couple of steps and then began looking at the waves that were building around him and he began to sink and Peter sent up a prayer blast. He sent up a three word prayer. I think every word was measured for its importance to come out of his mouth. Those three words were, "Lord, save me!" Now, each of those words are important but I'm not sure that he could communicate that message with any less of the words that he used and I think this is a little bit of what we talk about when we speak of a prayer blast and I think you've probably done this in your own lives from time to time, "God, help me! Lord, save me!" That's a prayer blast in times of need.

But Nehemiah talked about another kind of prayer. Nehemiah used that prayer right before the king said, "Come into my office. We're going to talk." Nehemiah said, "God, help me!" But he also engaged a different type of prayer that made his prayer blast all that much more effective and that was his involved prayer and Nehemiah's involved

prayer involved fasting and prayer that went on for days and days in which he praised and adored God. I was thinking of this song that Gordon taught us this morning, "I will worship you, Lord, with all of my might. I will praise you with a Psalm," and Gordon said God gives us Psalms and he turns them around and makes them into statements of praise and we did that with that song. That's exactly what we did and God gives us Psalms to turn around into prayer and that's for days and days Nehemiah could have been turning those Psalms around and turning them right back to God as statements of praise and adoration. Nehemiah also confessed his own sin, the sin of their nation, and he was transparent and authentic in his prayer.

That's where we've come so far. Now, I want to give you a little bit of the back story of the story that we're going to consider today, it's the story of Jacob, the patriarch Jacob. God the Holy Spirit, I believe, loves to teach by way of human personality and he picks some rather colorful people to highlight in the Bible. One of the things and I'd say that Jacob qualifies as being colorful and one of the things that I love most about Jacob is that he is so marvelously flawed. I love that because the fact that he's not a perfect person, it gives us points to cling to, attributes about which we can identify with and we can say, "I get that, Jacob. I know why you did that because I've done that myself." And so those flawed characters in the Scriptures give us little crags to hold onto as we try to climb up in our lives to lives of holiness.

What we'd say broadly about Jacob is that Jacob struggled half of his life to gain for himself the very thing that God had planned to give him anyway. He schemed. He collaborated. He swindled his way to get things that God had intended for him anyway. His very name means swindler and he swindled his brother Esau by stealing his birthright. He conned his father, with his mother as an accomplice, by taking Esau's name. And in Genesis 27:18-19 this is what we read, this is what is recorded for us about Jacob, "So he went in to his father and said, 'My father.' And Isaac said, 'Here I am. Who are you, my son?'" Remember, Isaac was, I guess we would have called him legally blind at the time. His eyesight had faded. He said, "'Here I am. Who are you, my son?' Jacob said to his father," and Jacob said, "'I am Esau your firstborn.'" Was that true? No. It was Jacob. The reason why he did that was because he wanted the family blessing and he swindled the family blessing by taking his brother's name. That is going to be important. Put that in a little reachable place in your mind because we're going to get to something that's going to relate to that a little bit later on in the sermon today. So Jacob took a name that was not his own and then Jacob got a taste of his own medicine as his father-in-law swindled him. Great antipathy existed between the two of them, Jacob and his father-in-law, though in the end, there was peace.

Now as we come to the passage that we're going to consider this morning, there was a settling of accounts with Esau and Jacob sends a message on ahead to Esau and he says fundamentally, "Don't mess with me. I am rich and important." That's my translation. What he actually said went like this, "I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, female servants. I have sent to tell my lord in order that I may find favor in your sight." He was saying, "I am rich and famous. Don't mess with me." He was trying to bluster his way through this encounter with Esau but here is the irony in this story: you remember that

Jacob worked so hard to wrestle that birthright away from Esau and now that it's his, he doesn't even use it. It's of no use to him. Do you see what Jacob says to Esau? He calls him lord. In the language of the day, that's just as easily translated "master." And beyond that in verse 13, Jacob adds to the irony, Genesis 32:13, "So he stayed there that night, and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau." Now, that Hebrew word "present" is the word "mincha" and it can be translated "tribute," and tribute is something that is exchanged from an inferior to a superior. When a country was conquered, the conquered king would be compelled to send the conquering king tribute and that's exactly what he says. "So he stayed there that night, and from what he had with him he took a tribute for his brother Esau."

So all the trouble he went to con his father, all the guilt he felt over decades for stealing from his brother and fooling his father. There's a passage that on rare occasion I pay attention to, it comes out of Proverbs 28:1, it says, "The wicked flee when no one is pursuing." You know, I think of that when I'm thinking something that maybe I shouldn't be thinking, maybe I've said some unkind words and I know that whenever you say something that you shouldn't say, you pretty much have to assume that the wronged person is going to hear that because you need to prepare your defense right then. The wicked flee when no one is pursuing. Jacob qualifies as wicked. I mean, I do too, but Jacob qualified as wicked and so for all his life he just assumed people were pursuing him, trying to get him.

All that nomadic lifestyle that he lived and here's Jacob acting like another servant of Esau's and Esau called Jacob's bluff. He didn't ask for tribute, he said, "No, I want to see Jacob with my own eyes." So he and his 400 men traveled to meet Jacob and Jacob caught wind of that and, keeping in mind that Jacob and Esau parted decades ago and not on good terms, Esau is bringing 400 soldiers with him and Jacob is scared. Chapter 32, verse 7, "Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed," is what the Bible tells us. And for the first time, Jacob tried something that heretofore had only been theoretical for him, Jacob prayed. In Genesis 32:11 it says, "Please deliver me from the hand of Esau for I fear him." He stole from Esau and yet here he is afraid of him.

Now, what follows is a brief explanation of our text this morning from Genesis 32:22-30 and the first we want to look at is: alone at last. Jacob before he prayed had hatched a scheme and in his scheme he was going to divide his group into two and that way there would be one safe group if the other was attacked. What Jacob didn't realize was that God had been working behind the scenes. Jacob had always forgotten about that but, here again, Jacob forgot God had been working behind the scenes. And he was so afraid of Esau coming with his 400 men and what he didn't know was that God had been working in Esau's heart and Esau was coming in peace. And not only that, God's intent was to bless Jacob, not to harm him. But Jacob was putting feet on his plan. He was hustling his wives, servants and 11 children to the other side of the Jabbok creek and Jacob was left alone. Now, I'm not sure that simply to say that Jacob was left alone makes the point. When I say "alone," I don't mean that he was sitting among people and no one would talk to him. I mean that for as far as the eye could see, there was no one. No one to see. No one with whom he could interact. No one to talk to.

In the early 19th century, the United States led the world in a new practice of imprisoning people in solitary cells without access to any human contact or stimulation. It was a method, so it was thought of the day, of rehabilitation and the results were disastrous as prisoners suffered severe psychological harm. The practice was all but abandoned. There are a number of lawsuits now across the political spectrum trying to eliminate altogether the practice of solitary confinement. You know, one of my favorite movies of all times is the movie "The Great Escape." Do you remember that movie? Steve McQueen jumping over the barbed wire fence on the motorcycle and then what happened when he got caught? The cooler. What was the cooler? Solitary confinement and he brought his baseball and his glove, remember? And he would catch the ball and play ball in his cell.

But Jacob was for all practical purposes in solitary confinement. He was alone with his tortured thoughts. I have come to believe that in hell there is going to be silence. When Jesus hung on the cross, he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you condemned me?" Is that what he said? "Forsaken." Jesus cried out from the cross and what did he hear back? Silence. God was silent. That was the condemnation. For the first time from all eternity, Jesus called out and no one called back. That's not all hell will be but it will be at least solitary confinement.

So we had Jacob alone at last and next we have Jacob wrestling for blessing. After a bit of the silent treatment, Jacob was accosted and we're not sure the duration of the wrestling that Jacob had with this man but in Genesis 32:24, the second part of that, it says, "And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day." While this wrestler is here identified as "a man," we are within biblical integrity to say that Jacob was in fact wrestling with God and he knew it. Chapter 32, verse 25, "he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint." I can't do that and I'm strong like bear, but I can't touch somebody's hip socket and push it out of joint. Someone touched his hip socket and it came out of joint. Chapter 32, verse 26, "I will not let you go until you bless me." Chapter 32, verse 28, "for you have striven with God." Chapter 32, verse 30, "For I have seen God face to face." Jacob wrestled with God and he knew it.

He's accosted by God. All his life, he has schemed his way around and he's now scared to death and even in his fear, Jacob was scheming dividing that group in half. Well, you remember Mohammed Ali in the Rumble in the Jungle in 1974? It was Mohammed Ali versus George Foreman in the ring and Ali's strategy was to let George Foreman punch himself out while he would lean against the ropes and cover up. Remember what that strategy was called? Rope-a-dope. Now, I want to know how come you knew what rope-a-dope was but you didn't know Moonlight Sonata? I think we've got some sports fans in here. I think you've been watching too much ESPN and not enough PBS.

Yeah, that was rope-a-dope. Ali's strategy worked and Ali won the fight but it's origins that Ali used go back to Jacob. Jacob wrestled with God all night long. It was rope-a-dope. God could have put him down at any moment but he didn't. Jacob was tenacious but whenever he was ready, God simply touched the hip and it came out of joint which is a small thing for the one who took out an entire army of 185,000 people in one night.

Jacob was fighting as he had his whole life with a God who wanted nothing more than to love him and bless him.

I want to read for you a passage out of Romans 9:10-12. It says this, "And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived," now Rebekah was Isaac's wife, it was Jacob's mother. "And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad - in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls - she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'" Before they were even born it was established that Jacob would be the dominant of the two; that it would be Jacob who would receive the blessing of God.

As daybreak came, God touched Jacob's hip. It wasn't arbitrary. He didn't touch the hip because it was the closest to him. He didn't touch his back so that his back hurt. He didn't touch his arm so that he couldn't punch. It was the hip so that there was only one way for Jacob to remain upright, he had to lean on God which was God's ultimate purpose and like George McDonald that we talked about the last couple of weeks said, "That's God's ultimate purpose in prayer, to foster a leaning or a dependence on God."

Genesis 32:24-26, "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 until you bless me.'"

Then, finally, what's in a name? Ravi Zacharias has some remarkably deep and beautiful commentary on the matter of Jacob's name. The Lord asked Jacob who was seeking a blessing for his name. Now, I think this part of the story closely is akin to Jesus' story with Peter as Jesus is seeking to restore Peter from being a self-centered and self-absorbed sinner to a useful servant in his kingdom and Jesus, sitting around the campfire after the resurrection says to Peter, "Peter, do you love me?" How many times did he ask him that? Three times. Three times. Peter was shattered by reliving the experience but he owned his own sin.

Now, the Lord asked Jacob, "What is your name?" And remember the last time Jacob was asked his name? It was with Isaac his father and his father said, "Who are you, my son?" And he said, "I am Esau." Just like Peter had to relive the experience of his denial of Jesus, now Jacob is having to relive his experience of stealing the name of his brother in order to steal the blessing. And it was when Isaac asked him and Jacob lied and stole the family blessing and the inheritance and from that point Jacob was a different man. From the beginning, God's intent was for Jacob to be served by Esau but here Jacob is stealing what God had intended to give him anyway. This time, Jacob gives the Lord his real name and it had to be as painful as those three times the Lord talked to Peter.

He gives his real name, he says, "My name is Jacob." What does the name Jacob mean? Supplanter, swindler. Jacob in giving his name was owning his sin. He was telling God,

"I am a swindler." God said essentially, "You, Jacob, have spoken well. You have been a duplicitous man, deceiving everybody, and everywhere you went but now that you have owned your sin, acknowledging the real you, I can change you and use you for kingdom purposes." And Ravi Zacharias adds, "Greatness in the eyes of God is always preceded by humility before him. There is no way that you or me or anyone else can attain greatness until we have come to God and owned our sin before him." And so it was that Jacob was owning his own sin before God.

Well, there's something wrong with that clock again this week. We're behind the 8-ball in time again. I think I see a pattern developing. So next week we're going to do the takeaway first. This week, I just want to conclude by saying this: it turns out that Jacob's hip was the triumphal defeat that rivaled the victories he gained by duplicitous means. Remember that quote by Montaigne? "There are triumphal defeats that rival victory." When Jacob was touched on the hip and it was put out of joint, that was the triumphal defeat that he experienced that rivaled any of the victories he had gained during his duplicitous life. In the midst of these painful but faithful wounds on Jacob, how can we miss the connection to the cross because there God the Son endured agonizing and terrifying, the accosting of God the Father so that grace and blessing might flow out to his people. Jesus wrestled with God in the garden of Gethsemane; three times he said, "God, let this cup, the cup of your wrath, pass from me." Three times he wrestled with God.

Jesus wrestled with man throughout his earthly life. He wrestled with God in the garden. He wrestled with God on the cross. He wrestled with a difficult and painful will of God and Jesus took that holy and righteous wrath of God upon himself as he stood in our place. He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Silence was what Jesus heard back. You know, left to ourselves, we'd all be in a world of hurt except that Jesus wrestled with God and he prevailed. Just like Jacob prevailed through his defeat, so also through his defeat Jesus prevailed and because of that, God has secured for us eternal life for those who believe in him.

We're going to wrap it up here but next week when we come back, we'll revisit this briefly but then we'll go into the takeaways and what is it that we learn about prayer from the life of Jacob, the one who wrestled with God and in his defeat, he prevailed.

Let's pray together.

God, we thank you for the truth that you give us in human experience. Thank you for the life of Jacob and what he teaches us about your marvelous grace and the way in which you wrestled with our Lord Jesus in the end so that we might be set free of our sin debt. Thank you for that, God. We ask that you would bless us and keep us this week. For those who are returning north this week, we pray for travel mercies on their journeys. And God, we ask your blessing on all of our moms and those who are moms and those who will be moms. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.