

# Peniel

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**Bible Text:** Genesis 32:24-31  
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## **Faith Free Presbyterian Church**

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If you have your Bibles with you tonight, I will ask you to open them in the book of Genesis and in the 32<sup>nd</sup> chapter of that book I would like to read a portion of Scripture that informs us about a great experience that came in Jacob's life. There may be differences between us and Jacob, but there should be no difference between our experience with the Lord and his. And I would like to challenge you tonight with the thoughts that come from Jacob's struggle at the place called Peniel.

I want to say what a joy it has been for me to have been here for these meetings. I have been treated royally. Your pastor and his dear wife have been host and hostess and have done par excellent. I have had the opportunity of being in some homes where I have enjoyed fellowship and I go with some fond memories. And literally, honestly, it is true. Being in a place just from Sunday to Wednesday leaves pictures of people's faces in my mind that I will think about for a long time and if I hear of any reason for which there ought to be ministry in prayer on my part for your sake, I will be your servant for his sake. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

What I am speaking on tonight I need before I read the passage of Scripture to give you some background and let you see the events that happened preceding it.

The man who is the subject of my ministry tonight had a grandfather who was the founder of a nation. He was a tremendous person that knew the invisible God. He could have stood on Chaldean hill. He could have cupped his mouth and shouted to the people around him, "Curse me and my God will curse you or bless me and my God will bless you."

The same man could take his fortunes that would be in flocks and in cattle and he could take them to the edge of a dry, desolate desert and not knowing where he is going walk that desert path in the will of God looking for a city without foundations whose builder and maker is God. He could stand against a confederacy of men and with 318 at his elbow, he is able to defeat and to frustrate this amalgamated war power that came from the Babylonian area.

When God asked this man to surrender his only beloved son there was no question in his heart or in his mind. As we found out last night, he went up a mountain that was to be a

mountain of death to his son, only to stand there and watch what he believed God would perform as a result of his obedience and raise his boy back again from the dead.

He was like the cedars of Lebanon. He cast a long shadow. Everything that it touched, whether it was dirt, animal or people, it brought blessing and it brought prosperity.

And the man of my story wanted to get under that shadow. More than anything else that happened in his life, he wanted the blessing of his grandfather to fall upon him and the prosperity that results from it to be his. He was a 15 year old boy when the old man died. And you will never appreciate this portion of this story if you don't keep the knowledge of that fact in the back of your mind.

The second observation I have—and I have four of them that precede the reading of the Scripture—my second observation is his immediate family, the Isaacs. They were as carnal as his grandfather had been spiritual.

There is no question that when he was a younger man he was committed to God. And it is believed that he could only have been sacrificed on that mountain by cooperating with his father's request and he was willing to do it. He was told when the boys were born that the elder shall serve the younger, but he grew in love with the older boy and his heart had become so cold to God and he was so backslidden from God that when it came for time to pass the blessing he fully intended to pass it to the older of these two boys.

But a mistake was made. But it is the revelation of that man's carnality. Not only is he a carnal person, but his wife is a conniving, secretive antagonist to his objectives. And the boy himself is willing to fit in to the mother's design, willing to play an actor's part and try to deceive an old man who doesn't have all five senses working for him. The sound may indicate it, but he kissed him, he touched him, he listened to him, but he couldn't see him and he got deceived in the process of doing it. This is the family the boy is brought up in and it is a breeding place for carnality.

My third observation is that between these two twin boys there was bitterness and animosity between them. We first find out about it when they were as yet not born. They were in the womb of their mother. She was very puzzled over the events that were happening, for while they were in the womb, they were struggling and asking inquiry of God, "Why should this thing be?"

The only answer that she can get is, "Two nations are in thy womb. You will have to accept that is the nature of these two boys. And that will only grow."

When the time came for birth and the red, hairy boy came out first before he had separated completely from his mother's womb the hand of Jacob was on his heel. And he became known as Jacob, the heel catcher. Unusual obstetrics. But, again, all part of the background of the picture. And you may miss the point of the story if this is not in the background.

My fourth observation before I start reading the passage requires an examination of some six different verses of Scripture. In these verses of Scripture—can I just read them for you—and there is no requirement to turn up the page on that place, but Genesis 41:46 said that, “Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh.”<sup>1</sup> If he is 30 years old, that is before the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine.

In Genesis 45 and verse 11 it is said, “There,” meaning in Goshen, “will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine.”<sup>2</sup> That means it is nine years later when this incident happened, making the boy 39 years of age at the time.

According to Genesis 29 and verse 30 Jacob “went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him,” referring to his uncle, “yet seven other years.”<sup>3</sup> And he worked a total of 14 years to get the two daughters of his uncle. And on this occasion it is seven years later which means that at that time Jacob was 91 years of age.

When you look in Genesis 30 verse 25, “And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place.”<sup>4</sup> But the old man wouldn’t do it. The old man brought up a dispute over the cattle and required that there was additional servitude for that and that additional servitude came to six more years which brings me to Genesis 31:41. And it tells me there that, “Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle.”<sup>5</sup>

I deduct from putting those verses together that when the incident happened about which I am to read the old man was 97 years of age. He had lived a carnal life. Carnality was part of the warp and woof of his character. And after 97 years of playing the game the way he wanted to do it, with some measure of success, he came to this place called Penuel.

And if I could read for you beginning in verse 24 in Genesis 32:

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob’s thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.

And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

And he said unto him, What is thy name?

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 41:46.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 45:11.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 29:30.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 30:25.

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 31:41.

And he said, Jacob.

And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.

And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.<sup>6</sup>

And I believe that ever God adds a blessing to the reading of his own immutable, invincible, infallible, inspired revelation.

Peniel. Have you ever been there? I am not asking if you have gone to a certain location. I mean, has an experience happened in your life that is comparable to Peniel in the life of Jacob?

I ask the question, first of all, when does Peniel happen in life? And the answer to that is simply: When all the cards are on the table, when you are hiding nothing and every human effort conceivably possible you have engaged in and it won't work. And you know if there is going to be any benediction or any blessing it is going to have to come from God himself.

So he separated his company. He took the expendable men and he put them in the front of the battle, concealing another group so that they could come in the middle of the battle. And he thought he knew of no better way to meet his brother who was coming against him with 400 men that were skilled with bow and arrow. And he thought to himself, this will offset his intention. But it didn't give him rest. He struggled within himself.

Then he said to his servants, "I want you to get a very generous gift." He outlined the gift to them. "I want you to take this. It will be psychologically to my advantage. And you go ahead of me and you meet my brother and you say to him the things that I am going to tell you to say and let him know that I am coming afterward, maybe I will appease my brother."

But when one generous gift went out, he still wasn't at peace in his heart. He asked another group of servants, "Do the same thing, the same amount. Have the same story to tell. Tell it convincingly and be sure you don't get there too soon. Wait until the impact of the first gift has hit him and then hit him with the second gift. And he still didn't feel contented. And he did it the third time believing that he was going to be able to appease his brother. And he thought, if what I have selected is proper in its amount, if these men

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<sup>6</sup> Genesis 32:24-31.

are convincing in their statement, if there is any power that I can have psychologically with my brother, these will help me at that moment of meeting him.

But he still wasn't satisfied. It was past midnight and he couldn't sleep and he got up and called his two wives, his two women servants and his 11 sons and got them together to gather the things that they had and stealthily and quietly they slipped through the camp and got out until they came to a place called ford Jabbok. And when they got to ford Jabbok his instructions were that they were to hide in the darkness on the other side.

He is indicating, "I am not sure that I am going to be able to compete successfully against my twin brother."

I don't know what it was like at that riverside by Jabbok. There were hugs. There were kisses. There were good byes that were given. There were boys there that said goodbye to their dad who wondered if they would ever see him alive again. There were wives saying goodbye to a husband and servants to a master. And they stood there in the darkness of the night at the quietness of that little brook and one by one he let them cross over that brook to the far side and he stood there. And while he is standing there he is listening to the silent noise of them wading in water and waited until that noise had come to an end and he knew they were safe on the other side.

And it was at that point a foot hit a twig, a garment brushed against something beside it and made a noise. And he turned around in the darkness and there was his twin brother standing over him with his hands ready to grasp him. And he immediately and instinctively struggled for the better position in the wrestling match that was about to follow.

That is when it happened. That is when Penueel comes into our experience. It comes in when everything that we have at our disposal that could measure success we have used. And we still have something to accomplish for God that we have not yet been able to do, but we have tried everything physically, emotionally, psychologically, every step that is needed to be taken is taken and yet in spite of all of that there is something that hasn't yet been done. And I need something from God that in all my exactness I have not experienced as yet. That is Penueel.

You have to come to the end of yourself before you ever enjoy the benediction that is brought by Penueel.

I remember when I was just turned 22 years of age. My parents took off for South Africa for a two year tour of evangelism. I didn't know what boat they were on. I had been invited by the Billy Graham organization to come over to Northwestern Schools in Minneapolis and they would train me with nine other young men that came from England, Scotland and Ireland and they would train us for leadership in the Youth for Christ movement of that day.

I went down to buy my ticket and fortunately for me I went a little bit earlier than I normally would have gone, because before the ship left to take me over the pound devaluated in half. And the shipping company ordered me to pay them an equal amount as what I had already paid. I didn't have it, but I told them I wouldn't pay it if I did have it. "You sold me the ticket when that was the currency and I demand that you get me over there."

They said, "Well, we'll get you there, but you will have to go the way we send you."

They sent me... [gap in audio]

The cargo was whiskey. It is light. It took us 12 days to cross the Atlantic. The British government would only let me take five pounds with me. And in early November when I got to St. John, New Brunswick, I met the Americans that were searching my passport and said, "You are on a student visa."

I said, "What does that mean?"

They said, "It means you can't go into the country until the day before the second semester begins, so you have got approximately three months that you have got to take care of otherwise."

I said, "What do I do now?"

They said, "Well, you had better go and ask the Canadians."

They were not kind and polite to me. They told me in a sheet, two sheets of dos and don'ts that I wasn't allowed to work and they gave me such problems that I had to live up to that I didn't know how to do it.

I remember getting in a train and saying, "I will go as far as Toronto. That's the last major city before I leave Canada to go into the United States and I will go that far." And I remember 10:30 on a Friday night standing on a platform, just got off the train, didn't have anything more at that point than eight dollars in my pocket, didn't know one person on this continent, didn't know how to get a hold of my parents and could do nothing but just ask God to give me guidance.

A man came down the platform that I recognized one of the passengers, because there was only four of us. And one of the passengers is here in Toronto now getting off the train. I stopped him and I said, "Do you know where you are going?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "Where are you going?"

He said, “My daughter made arrangements with a house in the suburbs. They are charging me 18 dollars a week and I have to pay it in advance.”

I said, “Is it possible I could convince you to let me come and share whatever the quarters are and share the cost with you?”

But I only had eight dollars.

He said, “Yes.”

We paid 25 cents on a street car to get out to the location. We found the house and when we went to bed that night, it wasn't a bedroom, it was a closet. It wasn't a double bed, it was a single bed. We couldn't both be in the room to dress or undress at the same time. There wasn't enough room for that and I remember getting my head on my pillow that night and thinking, what can I do? How will God direct me? And I wet my pillow with tears. And it is as though I heard a voice that came from heaven. I didn't hear a voice, but I got a distinct message that came into my heart and it said, “My strength is made perfect in weakness.”<sup>7</sup>

I learned there that there was nothing else available to me. Whatever I had did not work and I needed something from a divine power above me. And I never forgot that lesson. I thank my God to this day that he took me into that one valley. I have been in many of those valleys since then, but he has proved to be faithful every time. And he has never left me hurt. I have never missed a meal to my knowledge and he has taken care of me for everything that I need and his grace was sufficient.

Why do I bring it up? Because I just don't know if you have had an experience like it. I am not asking if you have been in a tight position. I am asking: In the challenge that God has given you in ministry for him, are you smart enough to take care of it? Are you big enough to do it? Are you wealthy enough? Are you talented enough? Do you walk around in this little world in which you are serving God whistling the Frank Sinatra song, *I Did it My Way*? Until you have got all your cards on the table, until there is no other turn that you can take, until you have said goodbye to your loved ones on earth and the angel of the covenant is closer than you ever imagined, that is when Penuel comes into our experience.

My second observation is: What is Penuel?

If I try to analyze what it is I think there's three obvious stages that it is in. First, it is a wrestling match. He tells us that in verse 24. When he spoke about wrestling he used a word that had never been used before and hadn't been used since. And when I come to study something like that I go to the experts that have done the study on it like Keil and Delitzsch and I try to find out from them what it means. And they say it means to force by violent twisting. It is the same word from which we get our word wreath. It is the same word from which we get the word “wrist.” It is not the same word that Paul uses in

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:9.

Ephesians six, “We wrestle not against flesh and blood,”<sup>8</sup> because there he admonishes them to put on the whole armor of God. But in this experience of Penueel there is no armor. It is the interlocking of limbs that you are so close you can feel the strength within his limbs. You can feel his heart beating from his body as it is pressed against yours and you can feel his breath hitting you on the shoulder. It is an intimate closeness with God.

And it is my persuasion that we have learned by ritualistic means to keep God at a distance. Penueel is when God comes close to you, when he is as close as the man that struggled with this man.

We know how to pray. We know how to pray with fervency. But many of us only speak to God when we do the speaking and never wait nor give the time for God to speak to us.

The first thing that it is, it is an intimate close, personal relationship with the Lord in which he is not an object at a distance. He is a vital person and he is as close to you as it is humanly possible to be. That is Penueel. It is more than that.

In verse 25 he said that, “when he saw that he prevailed not against him...”<sup>9</sup> And I pause to say, “What a profound statement that is.” The angel of the covenant, at this point not identified as such for Jacob, but the angel of the covenant saw that he prevailed not against Jacob. It is my persuasion that the only thing that prevented him from prevailing was that certain lessons had to be taught to Jacob and he was bound until those lessons were understood.

When he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched him.

I don't know what position they were in, but I know from the conversation between them that Jacob had the prominent position. And though currently the man in the struggle with him had an arm hanging between, closed in by the arms of Jacob, and he was unable to move that arm and he simply took a finger and he touched Jacob with his finger, just gave him a light touch and two things happened. The first thing that happened was the hollow of his thigh went out of joint and he became crippled.

If you know anything about wrestling, you know, that it is imperative to be able to gain advantage, that you must learn how to lean your weight from one side to another and a cripple can't do that. And he found out that he was crippled and a little piece of the supplanter that was in his heart died at that moment. It is the concert pianist that for the first time feels arthritis. It is the wealthy man who touches everything and it turns to gold and he gets his first loss. Or it is a healthy man who is well muscled and well built and then discovers one day the first sign of leprosy. It is the wrestler who is crippled. That is the first thing that he discovered.

The second thing that he discovered was the identity of his opponent. Esau could never have accomplished that. He didn't need an arm to push and thrust his fist against me.

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<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 6:12.

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 32:25.



There was no known force that he exerted. He could feel his limbs and there was no pressure that was made by his muscles. He only touched him and it dawned upon this man, that is the angel of the covenant. That is the one that put the blessing on Abraham. And here he is and it is a holy moment when you awaken to the realization that he is God, that he is supreme in his power, that he is impeccable in his holiness. It is a holy moment when it happens.

Before it happens we are always crying to God, “Oh, we need a visitation from heaven. Give us another Spurgeon. Give us another Whitefield. Resurrect some of these men that in past years have known the blessing of God upon them.”

There comes a moment in your life when you recognize: I don’t need a Whitefield. I don’t need a Wesley. I don’t need a Spurgeon. I need the God they had and like Elisha I need to cry, ‘Where is the God of Elijah?’<sup>10</sup> It is not Elijah that I need. It is God that I need.”

I am speaking to you because I know that many of you serve in different capacities and I wonder if you realize that by that touch in that holy moment, you are awakened to the realization that you are in the presence of God and he is getting the upper part of you.

The third observation I have about what happened is not provided for me in the Genesis record, but inspired by the Spirit in the book of Hosea chapter 12 and in verse four. He tells us that “he wept, and made supplication unto him.”<sup>11</sup>

I said we don’t read that in the Genesis record, but whenever the angel of the covenant touched his thigh and his thigh went out of joint and the sinews stiffened and he was unable to get the mobility that he previously had with his leg, that he knew he was beaten. And he wept.

There is some holiness about tears that are brought to your eyes when it is the recognition that you are at God’s disposal and God could do through you what you would never be able to do for yourself. Isaac knew something about that. When Isaac gave the blessing to Jacob in Genesis 27 in verse 32 it says that, “Isaac his father said unto him, Who art thou?”<sup>12</sup> Because Jacob had already deceived his father and had stolen the blessing and had gone. And Esau came back in from the fields and said that he was ready for the blessing and the father said to him, “Who art thou?”<sup>13</sup>

And the answer that got was, “I am thy son, thy firstborn Esau.”<sup>14</sup>

And it says, “Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and [he] said Who?”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See 2 Kings 2:14.

<sup>11</sup> Hosea 12:4.

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 27:32.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 27:33.

A volcanic eruption took place within his being. He remembered the words that were spoken about the elder and the younger in the day of their birth. But now that is past and he determined that he would do it his way, not God's way. And he suddenly realized that God is so sovereign and so powerful that God is able to take even the vilest intentions of men and make them contribute to his glory and it caused an eruption that came within the man.

I wonder if Peter felt it when he had denied his Lord at the fireplace with soldiers. And they were taking my Lord from one part of his trial and taking him to a holding place waiting for the Sanhedrin to come. And when they walked by close where Peter was Jesus looked at him and Peter looked at the eyes of the Savior and somewhat the same as with Isaac and somewhat the same with Jacob Peter immediately went out and he wept bitterly. Those are the tears about which I am speaking.

I am speaking about an intimate close relationship with God when everything that you boast of as being your ability and your talent and the sufficiency that you have in yourself, you recognize it is not big enough for the task to which God has committed you and you come to this place in your experience and it breaks your heart.

I believe the breaking of the heart is part of the experience. I don't know how many times I have been to the place where God has given me his blessing, but for some reason my heart wasn't smitten as it should have been and my eyes were dry. I have never forgotten the times that in his dealing with me he caused me to weep.

Let me conclude and just say why did it happen. You remember what the angel of the Lord said to him, "Let me go, because the day breaketh."<sup>16</sup>

It was the same thing. It was in the morning watch that Egypt was defeated in the Red Sea. It came to him when it was a new day beginning. And that is the meaning of it. I am going to experience something from now on that will make me different. And I will resolve with my God, whatever the issues are that keep us apart, I shall do away with everything that separates me from him and I want to know him in the intimacy of his person, in the closeness of his presence. And in order to do that he has to say, "Let me go."

Here is the poor Jacob that is still holding on with the advantage grip. And he said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."<sup>17</sup> "I want this to be a beginning in my experience. I want something new to happen in my life. I spent 97 years living on carnal means, developing my own will and doing my own task and satisfied with what I have done. But I have come to a place, Lord, where I am no longer satisfied with your work through my life and I don't want to let you go this day unless you bless me."

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<sup>16</sup> See Genesis 32:26.

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 32:26.

You notice that Esau said, “Jacob’s name was well placed.”<sup>18</sup> In Genesis 27:36, “Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing.”<sup>19</sup> His name is right.

But he didn’t realize Jacob has come to a place where he is not going to leave this grip with God that he has got until God places a blessing upon him. He will not let him go. And the blessing that comes is, “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob,”<sup>20</sup> no more clever heel catcher, no more I can do it in my own power. But as of this moment, dependent reliance upon God. No more Jacob.

What does Israel mean? G. Campbell Morgan said, “It doesn’t mean power with God. It doesn’t mean prince.” Now, those may be part of it, but they are part of it in terms of effect. If I look at it in terms of cause it is like the name Bethel, house of God. It is like the name Emmanuel, God with us. Here it is Israel and it means God governed, God mastered.

I close by just showing you the picture that is given to me in verse 31. “As he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.”<sup>21</sup> It was the tendon that kept the thigh bone in the socket. And they have got a whole set of rules in the Mishna that forbid them from ever touching that whether it is domesticated or wild, whether it is part of the house or part of the field, whether it is one side or the other side, to Israel, never again touch that. And that, somehow, is ironic when you think about it because that day when the sun came up, it found Jacob limping back into the camp.

It was a message that came from his legs, not from his lips. And a 97 year old carnal man that tried to live the Christian life in his own power and tried to serve the gospel of Christ by his own means and he came to an end and he realized it is God and God alone that can give me the power that I need in my life.

I wonder how many teachers take a class of young boys or girls and you feel quite competent to teach them. It is the competency that is the question. Do you ever take them one by one to the throne of grace in prayer? Do you ever say, “No longer am I going to try to get you to put your blessing on me by my talent? I am going to bless my talent. I am going to pray that from the simple lesson that I have to present, there might be a dynamic power that is so present in that room that these young people to whom I am responsible for spiritual instruction, they will see that in my life there is a greater power than I am and it is that relationship and dependence that I have with God.”

A hymn writer once penned the words:

Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free.  
Force me to render up my sword and I shall conqueror be.

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<sup>18</sup> See Genesis 27:36.

<sup>19</sup> Genesis 27:36.

<sup>20</sup> Genesis 32:28.

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 32:31.

I sink in life's alarms when by myself I stand,  
Imprison me within thine arms and strong shall be my hand.

Have you been to Penuel? God bless you.