

# Genesis: Jacob Struggles More

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**Bible Text:** Genesis 31:38-32:23

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Good morning.

Sometimes I think I would like to ask Jacob why he did all those hateful dumb things. I'm afraid to because I fear he might ask me why I did too. This is what Genesis is about. It's not just about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it's about you and me. We all fall under the same category. We're all this kind of people and save for the grace of God, we wouldn't have any hope.

We're in chapter 31, along about verse 38, where Laban and Jacob are in their last rendezvous with each other. Jacob has been running from Laban and Laban has been seeking him and they finally arrived and they're having a fuss and Jacob is giving his final defense for leaving Padanaram and returning home to Isaac so he says in verse 38 and following,

"This twenty years have I been with you; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night. Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes." Well, we feel a little sorry for Jacob as he recounts all of the hardships he has gone through on behalf of his uncle Laban. He says that, "The sheep or the goats died in the field and I took responsibility for that and I paid for it," and that, of course, according to the law was what he was supposed to do. He would return one or sometimes the Lord demanded that you return four for any one that you had lost. Then he talks about how tired he was and how hard it was under the hot sun of the desert, 120 degrees. And the frigid nights which he had to face after the 120 degrees of the day. "You know what I've been through," he said. Now, this is recounting his experiences during the last 20 years of his service to Laban.

Then beginning in verse 41, he talks about his first 20 years of labor for Laban because, remember, he has been there 40 years. "Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your sheep: and you have changed my wages twenty times." So now he suggests that the other 20 years were pretty hard too and they were if you remember the story which is recounted in the

Scripture about how he had to fight and struggle and work for 14 years for his two wives and an additional six years for the beginning of his own business.

But Laban was a contrary kind of a person. He was cantankerous and he was cranky and he was hard to get along with. No wonder Jacob left, it was partly because of that, I think. The old man was grumpier than usual that morning when he came to the breakfast table and his wife served his breakfast. He was always grumpy. The eggs were either too soft or they were too hard. The coffee was either too hot or it was too cold or it was too strong or it was too weak. If she would have brought him a poached egg, he wanted a scrambled egg. If she brought him a scrambled egg, he wanted a poached egg. So this morning she decided she would solve the problem and so she brought him a scrambled egg and a poached egg and when she handed it to him, he snorted, "You scrambled the wrong one." You know, we think no wonder Jacob left because that was the kind of guy Laban was. He was hard to get along with.

"Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac," and note that still in his travels in this late time in his life, he is now about 100 years old and he's been gone 40 years and now returning to Canaan and he still has not discovered the reality of the God of Abraham and Isaac. This God is still distant from him. He's not his own personal God.

"The fear of Isaac and the God of Abraham, except it had been for them, surely you would have sent me away empty. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked thee yesternight." That was in Laban's dream, the dream he had the night before which said to him that he should not touch Jacob; he should not certainly do him any harm.

Now, at this point in his life, Jacob is still struggling with his religion. He's trying to be religious but he's trying to be religious on his father's religion, on his father's account and that still happens today for many people. Many people grew up in a Christian home and they think that's all that's necessary and they call themselves Christians. Many people join the church because they grew up in a Christian home without ever making any real commitment to Jesus Christ and discovering him personally. My brother who has now gone to heaven, when he was about five years old, I think as I recall the story. He was in church one night with his parents, my parents were Baptists in the beginning and he grew up as a Baptist. And that night in the church service they were having a revival and as so often in that day, people would end the congregation during the invitation, get out of their pew and go around and talk to somebody and invite them to go to the altar and to accept Christ. One of the men of the church came to my brother, my young brother, and he said to him, "Are you a Christian?" and my brother answered, "No, I'm a Baptist." But God has no grandchildren. We're all children of God, not grandchildren of God. We're not God's children because our parents were Baptist or Methodist or Christian and we grew up in that kind of church and we lived in that kind of a home.

So Jacob needed to have something to happen in his life which had not happened yet in verse 42. "And Laban answered and said unto Jacob, These daughters are my daughters,

and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle, and all that you see is mine." That sounds like Laban and it also sounds like Jacob because Jacob probably answered him, "You're wrong. These women are my wives. These children are my children. And this cattle is my cattle." They sound like the man in Jesus' parable of the rich man and the barn. Do you remember that one? And he said, "I've got so much stuff I don't know what to do with it so I'll tear down my barns and I'll build greater barns and I'll store all of my fruit and I will say to myself," etc. etc. Self-centered man was this Jacob and also this Laban.

"Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee." This is what Laban wanted to do because he knew that they would never get along, they could never live together, so let's enter into an agreement. He never thought of saying, "These are our children and this is our sheep." And Jacob never thought of saying, "This is our children and this is our sheep." It was always "my." So Laban says, "Let's make an agreement. Let's solve this whole problem," and they set about to do that.

"And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made an heap: and they did eat there upon the heap. And Laban called it Jegarsahadutha: but Jacob called it Galeed." Now, Jegarshahadutha is a Syriac word. In fact, it is two short Syriac words put together and it means "the heap of witness," and the word "Galeed" means the same thing. So they are putting up a monument which they will call "a heap of witness," that is, it will be the witness of what they are doing this day.

"And Laban said, This heap is a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed," which is the same as the Syriac name. The covenant was ratified here and they were saying, in essence: God will stand upon the top of this pillar and with the kind of perspective and viewpoint which God and no one else has, from the top of this pillar, he can watch over us and be sure that we don't get into each other's way.

"And Mizpah," he says, "We'll call it Mizpah also," which means "watchtower" which is exactly what I've just described. "For he said, The LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another." Now, if you notice carefully, it doesn't say the Lord will watch over you and me, it says the Lord will watch between you and me. That is, the Lord will keep us apart, safely apart. We sometimes use this verse, verse 49, as a benediction in our church. We say that at the close of the service. In one church I served years ago, the Methodist Youth Fellowship always used this as a kind of a loving benediction but what we do not realize is that this was never a benediction. This was a malediction. This was a hateful thing they were doing. They were raising up these stones as a malediction to each other. They were saying, "This is a sentry post. This is a look-out where we can keep each other at a distance." It was kind of an ancient Berlin Wall or a Mendelbaum Gate.

"If thou shalt afflict my daughters," and this is the first mention in the Scriptures of spouse abuse, "If you should afflict my daughters or if thou shall take other wives," and

that's because Laban didn't want to share the inheritance which his daughters would get, with other women, "if you shall take other wives beside my daughters, no man is with us; see," there is nobody here to witness what we're doing, nobody to tell what has happened here except God, "God is witness betwixt me and thee." Betwixt me and thee. Now, these men were both religious men: one of them served Nanna, the god of Ur, and one of them served the God of his father Abraham and Isaac in Canaan. But their religion had torn them apart too and that's a tragic thing because religion if it is true religion, brings people together. It doesn't tear them apart. And today we have this awful antagonism and hostility which is now gaining in momentum between the Judeo-Christian tradition and the people of Islam. All over the world this is happening so that we have two religions which now are becoming more and more hostile even though we've tried to be across the years friendly one with another.

"And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold this pillar, which I have cast betwixt me and thee; This heap be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee," we will never be reconciled, we are always holding this grudge, we'll never see each other again, "and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me. The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us." That's a very interesting verse. It says more than you think. The God of Abraham would have originally have been Nanna, the moon god of Ur because that's where he lived and he grew up in the household of Terah who was a pagan worshiper of Ur. Abraham would have been a worshiper of Ur too until God called him and he discovered a new God and went out by faith not knowing where he would go to become the father of the nation of Israel and the people of the world. So Abraham's god would have originally been Nanna and, of course, the god of Nahor, his brother who remained behind when Abraham left, would have been Nanna, the god of the Mesopotamians.

So he says, "The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob sware by the fear of his father Isaac." So Jacob says here, "Yes, we will accept a swearing for this covenant on the authority of Nanna, but we also must swear on the authority of the God of my father, Isaac. Now, the point to note here is that when he says "And Jacob sware by the fear of his father Isaac," you notice the Scriptures have been saying the God of his father Isaac, the God of his father Abraham, this was one of the ancient names for God, fear.

Throughout the Bible God is called by different names. He's sometimes called the rock. God is sometimes called our shield. Sometimes he is called our shepherd or even our advocate. But here he is referred to as God who is our fear. One of the names of God is fear. Now, does that strike you strange? When we recite the Lord's Prayer, we say, "Hallowed be thy name." That is because we think in terms of the fearfulness of a holy God. The Bible refers to God as the dreadful one which means he is a God of majesty and sovereignty and power and he is awesome. When Isaiah went into the temple the year Uzziah the king died, he said, "I stood in the temple and looked upon the face of God and I said, 'Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips and I live in the midst of a people of unclean lips. Woe is me because this is a God of fear.'"

Every time I go to church to worship God in the sanctuary here or whether it be in a church somewhere, every time I do, I always recognize that this, if it's meaningful at all, is an encounter with a divine and holy God and therefore when I walk into the church, I walk in with the greatest of reverence. I had a man say to me just recently, a younger man, he said to me just recently, "You know, I wish I could go to church again where I could walk into a lovely, holy, awesome, moving experience in a sanctuary and everybody would be quiet and I could sit and think as I worship God." Today we have the tendency when we go to worship to make as much noise and create as much confusion as we can and, of course, you smile this morning when I say that because you're thinking, "Well, that guy is an old fuddy-duddy," and you smile rather than frown because most of you are old fuddy-duddys too. That is, we grew up in that tradition. We grew up in a tradition where we thought of God as a fearful God, an awesome God and you should revere him, respect him and be quiet and holy in his presence. Solomon says, "Fear God and keep his commandments." It's not enough to be chatty with God. "Keep his commandments and fear him for you Father is a holy being. He is the Creator of the world, the preserver and sustainer of everything that is. He is the Almighty God. He is the sovereign One. Fall on your knees and on your faces before God."

I had a minister friend who has now gone to heaven who was pastor at one of the largest churches in the state of Kentucky and he used to glibly refer to God again and again in his sermons and in his conversations as "the man upstairs," and I never liked that. I never liked that. God is an awesome God, a power, and we don't refer to him like that. Psalm 8:3 says, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" So it's interesting to note that Jacob here says, "We will seal this covenant in the name of the God who is known as fear." Fear God and keep his commandments.

"Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount. And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters," that means grandsons and daughters. There were 12 of them and there was also Leah and Rachel, so he kissed all 14 of them on either side of the face, typical of the time. But note if you will, that he didn't kiss Jacob. Early in the morning, Laban rose up and he kissed his sons and his daughters and he "blessed them: and Laban departed, and returned unto his place."

Now, Laban has gone home. The fuss is still there in the air but he has gone home and Jacob has turned his face to the east now for he is going to travel on to the house of his father. Laban has turned his face to the west. Laban has gone back to the east and now he is returning to the land of Canaan and the interesting thing is that it is at this point in his life that something is about to happen which is going to make him a brand new man.

"And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him." He has had a lot of bad experiences. He's trying to put it all behind him and now he's going on his way. The Bible says of Jesus with the approach of the time of his crucifixion that he sets his face toward the cross. He went on his way. The Jews have been people who have done that from the beginning of their existence. They have all kinds of trouble. Nations and peoples of the

world have been opposed to them. We have killed them. We have tormented them. We have persecuted them. We have hated them. We have said evil things about them. But the one thing about the people of Jacob is that they just keep going and going and going and they will keep going until they win the final battle, the battle of Armageddon. So you have to keep going.

I remember the day the bishop gave me an appointment to a place that I didn't like and I didn't want to go. I was really afraid but I just set my face and I kept going. And I remember when my mother was almost 95 years old and she had arrived at the place where my sister who was taking care of her could not take care of her any longer and so we decided that we would have to put my mother in a retirement home and that was the one thing she never wanted, the one thing we never wanted either but sometimes things happen and you just lose control over them and you have to do what you have to do. I remember it was my responsibility to sit in the ambulance by my mother as we took her to the retirement home and she lay there in the ambulance with tears running down her face and kept saying, "Please don't. Please don't. Please don't." But I had to keep going. I had to set my face and I had to go on. I remember when my father died and he was in many ways the light of my life and I remember how difficult that was to put him in that dark deep hole and yet I had to keep going and I just went on.

Jacob went on his way and the angels of God met him. The angels were very real to Jacob. It all started back at Bethel when he was making his journey down to the house of Laban in Padanarm. But they had kept track over him all those 40 years and he really didn't know that that was going on. Angels are like that. Do you believe in angels? Oh, I don't have any question but that there are angels and they are everywhere and they are here with us this morning in this sanctuary. I believe that every person has a guardian angel to watch over him and I believe the Scriptures when it says he will give them charge over you lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone. They are there to take care of you. Be aware of the angels in your life.

And the angels of God met him. "And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host," God's army, "and he called the name of that place Mahanaim," which means "two hosts." I think he's referring to the fact that there is the invisible host of the angels, the army of God, and there is also the big host of his own family and the caravan which is with him.

"And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom." You can sense in reading that simple verse that here Jacob is haunted by his own old sin. It's on his mind. It's distressing and disturbing him. What he has done to Esau, he can't get that out of his mind. Henry Drummond once wrote, "I have gone into the heart of Africa and when I have opened the curtain of my tent in the morning, the first face I see is this hideous face of my own temptation. Go where you will, you cannot avoid that." What Drummond was saying is that we all have that feeling of guilt that we just can't get rid of. Of course, when we come to the cross, God assuages that but still you go through life remembering those things which you did which haunt you and you wish you hadn't done them and Jacob wished he had never done this to Esau but it was too late now to make amends.

"And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob," he refers to himself as a doulos, the servant or slave, "Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: And I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight." I don't need anything. I'm not coming to ask you for anything. I'm just coming to ask for grace, that is, I'm asking only forgiveness. Now remember, even though Jacob had the birthright and he was going to be head of the family, he's not the head of the family yet. The birthright hasn't become effective yet. You will discover that Esau when he meets him is even richer than Jacob is and more powerful than Jacob is, but the Scriptures say that the day will come when the younger son will be the master over the older son.

"And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him." So immediately Jacob thought, "He's out to get me. He's got a big army of 400 men. They are all armed and they're coming after me. They're on expedition. They're on the hunt. They're on the prowl. This is going to be a hostile showdown between his 400 men and my family and my servants. This slaughter will be the mother of all battles." Huckleberry Finn once wrote in his book, "Conscience takes up more room than all the rest of a person's insides," and that's why he felt like he was going to explode because his conscience was so big in his heart and in his mind.

"Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands." He's very cunning even yet. He's very scheming. He knows how to handle this; how to organize it to his advantage.

"And said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape. And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee." This is the first prayer recorded in the Old Testament. Now, I'm sure many of them had prayed in their own way but this is the first prayer that is recorded and according to the Scripture, Jacob had not prayed since he left Bethel 40 years earlier and now he is praying for the first real time, praying to the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac. And I think what he prayed was probably more than what the Scriptures give us here; he probably was saying, "Guide me, O thou great Jehovah. Pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak but thou art mighty. Hold me with thy powerful hand. When I tread the verge of Jordan. Bid my anxious fear subside. Bear me through the swelling current. Land me safe on Canaan's side." All of us sing that song when we're sick, when we're troubled, when we're in a tight squeeze, when we're afraid, when we're dying. And God answered him long before he spoke these words to Isaiah, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with you and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you, and when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." But I suppose Jacob didn't really hear God answer that prayer that day because his heart was beating so loud that he couldn't hear anything else.

"I am not worthy," he said, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies." That sounds a little different, doesn't it? That sounds a little different. Something seems to be happening to Jacob. Yes, he's afraid to meet his brother. He's scared to death. His heart is pounding in his chest. He thinks the jig is up. But there is more to it than that. I think that he is beginning to humble himself which he had never done in his life and he says after God, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies." He had been so arrogant and he's been so proud and so pompous and never before had he made this kind of a statement but now he's down and out. If you read the Scriptures, you hear John the Baptist saying, "I am not worthy to untie his shoes," and you hear Peter saying, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man," and you hear the prodigal son saying, "I'm not worthy to be called your son anymore." And yet Jacob had taken God for granted all those years. Have you don't that? Some of us here have done that. Some of us probably are still doing that, not recognizing how much we have depended upon God. We just sort of expect God to take the responsibility of taking care of us.

"Now I am become," he said, "two bands." Now, note this self-centeredness still coming out in him. "Look," he says to God in his prayer, "look what I have become. When I left my home 40 years ago I didn't have anything. Nothing. I didn't have a wife. I didn't have a family. I didn't have a camel. I didn't have a U-haul trailer. I didn't have anything but I left home 40 years ago but look at me now. I have got two bands. I have got two hosts. I have got two armies and all of these wives and all of these children and all of these servants and these slaves. Look what I have done."

Some time ago I was preaching in an ashram in Montana up in those beautiful snow covered mountains and the gentleman who was also preaching in that ashram that year was a district superintendent from the state of Montana of the Methodist church. One morning he told us a story which I shall never, never forget. He said, "Do you see all these beautiful mountains around here? Do you see the snow on all of them? Do you see how cold they are up there? Do you see how rough they are to climb? How difficult to get up? Well," he said, "there is a mountain here which everybody likes to climb because it is so beautiful but it is also so difficult and it's an achievement to get up there." He said, "I've been up on the top of that mountain several times myself and I have a six year old boy," and he said, "when he was five years old he began to say to me, 'I want to climb that mountain. Dad, I want to see what's up there. I want to climb that mountain.' I would say to him, 'Son, you would never get up there. You couldn't climb that. You couldn't get over all those ragged, jagged edges and those big rocks and it's cold up there, son. You couldn't do it.'" But he kept on and he kept on and he kept on and he kept saying to his father, "Daddy, I can do it. I know I can do it."

So he said, "When he was six years old I decided I would take him up there so we started the journey up the side of the mountain, my son and I and for the first short distance he did fine and then he began to stagger and stumble over the rocks and I had to go back and take his hand and help him up over the rocks. By the time we got about halfway up, I was exhausted but he kept saying, 'Daddy, I can do it. I can do it. I know I can do it.' So," he said, "we continued to climb and finally we got almost to the top and he just, the little



boy just fell. He was prostrate on the rocks. So," he said, "I picked him up and I put him on my back and I climbed the rest of the mountain by myself and when I got to the top, I was so exhausted I fell flat on my face and," he said, "when I fell flat on my face, my little boy who was sitting straddling my neck was waving his arms in the air and saying, 'I made it, Daddy. I made it!'" But he hadn't. He didn't know that when he fell down numerous times, God had picked him up and carried him to the top of the mountain.

"Deliver me, I pray thee," this is what he's saying now. "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother," and have you ever thought about the fact that he was scared to death of Esau but Esau, so far as we know, had never done a bad thing in his life. There is no reason to be afraid of Esau. It was Jacob who had done the bad stuff, not Esau.

"Deliver me from the hand of my bad brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children." He had a bad idea about Esau. He thought he was so vicious that he would kill his children and kill his wives. That, of course, is the most miserable part of any war when the innocent have to suffer, the wives and the children. So he was terribly afraid.

When I was a boy, I was kind of scared about some things. I remember I was a little bit afraid of the night, the dark, and my mother used to say to me, "Don't be afraid of the dark. There is nothing out there that is going to hurt you." If you're walking down that road and you pass the cemetery, which also I was afraid of, you pass the cemetery and she would say, "Just whistle. Just whistle," and I knew that couldn't help because that didn't mean there was anybody with me but she tried to influence me to believe that if I could just hear my own voice, I would feel like that I wasn't by myself. So she said, "Just whistle," and I would try that and it would help a little bit but not too much.

Well, when Zachary, our grandson, was seven years old, we were with him one day and he had cut his foot on a piece of a shard of glass which had gotten lodged in the nap of the rug. It wasn't much of a cut, just a tiny little cut, but it bled a little bit and he was ready to go to the hospital. He was crying and he was screaming and he wouldn't let anybody touch that foot. Nobody could wipe the blood off. Nobody could bandage it. He sat there with his foot up in the air and screamed and screamed. I tried to console him. His mother tried to console him. Everybody tried. No, no, no, it wouldn't happen. Eventually after probably 20 minutes, he calmed down and they got a bandaid on his foot, put a shoe on him and he was fine.

Well, that night, we went together as a family over to the high school where they were putting on a production of Peter Pan and my older granddaughter was Peter Pan and there is a point in that story, that children's story of Peter Pan, where Peter is having his shadow sown onto his body. Hurtful. Painful. And Wendy is sowing the shadow onto Peter Pan and Wendy says to him, "Don't cry. Don't cry, Peter." And Peter says, "I never cry," and so he begins to whistle. Well, when the play was over, I called Zack off to the side and I said, "Zack, now you should learn a lesson here tonight. Do you remember when you cut your foot today and it hurt so bad and you cried so long? Do you know what happened to Peter Pan when they sowed that shadow on? You know how that must

have hurt with those needles sticking in and Peter Pan didn't cry. Peter Pan just whistled. So the next time you hurt your foot, the next time you get in trouble, just whistle." And Zachary said to me without any hesitation, "But that's the problem, Pop, I can't whistle." And after I stopped laughing I tried to explain to him that, "No, that wasn't the problem that he couldn't whistle, the problem was that he was just a big coward." Jacob was a big coward and we see that coming out clearly in this story.

"And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude." You promised. Don't let me down now.

"And he lodged there that same night; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother." Now, if you note carefully, the present he is giving his brother to appease his wrath is magnanimous to say the least. He is sending ahead of him 550 of his best sheep and camels. That ought to appease anyone. That ought to make restitution for just about anything you might have done.

He describes it here, "Two hundred she goats, and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes, and twenty rams, Thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses, and ten foals. And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove. And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose are these? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee? Then thou shalt say, They be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, also he is behind us. And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him. And say ye moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me." Now this sounds like the kind of man who fights and fusses with his wife all day every day and every night sends her a dozen roses, doesn't it?

Notice the word "appease" in verse 20, "For he said, I will appease him." This word means, "I will cover his eyes," and the word is the word that becomes in the New Testament "atonement." He says, "I will make restitution and in doing so I will cover his eyes so that he cannot see my sin, my crime against him anymore." Isn't it interesting that that's the word that later becomes the word for "atonement." It means that God covers his eyes so that he does not see our sins anymore.

"So went the present over before him: and himself lodged that night in the company. And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok." Now, that was an isolated ravine about six miles wide at the south end of the Sea of Galilee. It was a desolate area.

"And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had." He was expecting an encounter the next day with Esau and he is preparing himself mentally and physically as well for that encounter.

"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." Now, you know if you know Genesis at all, you know that we're reaching in these verses one of the high points in the book of Genesis. There are several of them and this is one of them.

Jacob was left alone all by himself and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. Now, at the outset let me remind you that this is God wrestling with Jacob but it need not to have been. The reason there was a wrestling going on was because Jacob was resisting. If he hadn't been resisting God, God would have simply touched him and changed him but God had to wrestle with him because he was resisting. This is what we call the struggle of the soul or the dark night of the soul. The moment of conviction when God is dealing with us and we are rejecting, trying to reject what God is saying to us.

Have you ever done that? Have you ever had a dark night of the soul? Have you ever been through a time when you struggled and wrestled with God? Have you ever been through a wrestling match with God when you thought that God was going to kill you before it was over? Well, go back to the Old Testament. You remember Elijah had just had a contest with the prophets of Baal and you remember that Jezebel, King Ahab's wife, was so angry with Elijah and the fact that he had killed all of her prophets that she threatened to kill him. So the Bible tells us that Elijah ran for his life down to Beersheba and there he sat under a juniper tree and he said to God, "Let me die. Let me die." And God said, "I'm not ready for you to die. You go down to Mount Horeb and I will meet you there." So he went to Mount Horeb and there he said to God, "I am alone all by myself. All of the prophets are gone. I'm the only one left who believes." And God said, "Wait just a minute. I want to show you something." The Bible says the wind began to blow and it got stronger and stronger until the wind was uprooting everything. Trees were blowing across the fields. All of the shrubs, all of the grass, everything that was there was being dislodged and Elijah stood there and watched. Then an earthquake came and the rocks began to fall and the mountains began to tumble. Then a fire broke out and everything that had been disturbed by the winds and the earthquake was in a flame. And Elijah said, "O God, don't kill me. Don't kill me." It was a time when he wrestled with God.

I have had those times. Jonah had that time. God called Jonah to go down to Nineveh and preach. Oh, you know that story. Instead he got a boat to Tarsus and a big fish swallowed him, do you remember? And down in the belly of that big fish with the water up to his armpits and seaweed wrapped around his neck, he was crying out to God, "O God, are you going to kill me?"

And Paul was on the road to Damascus. He was going down there to persecute the Christians, probably incarcerate them, maybe even kill some of them, and on the road to Damascus there was a great light which knocked him to the ground and he couldn't see and he was rubbing his eyes. He thought he was going to die and he said, "O God, are you going to kill me?"

I was 13 years old when I accepted Christ as my Savior. At the age of 15, I began to preach the Gospel and for the next three years as a teenager I preached all over Kentucky and Indiana and elsewhere, filling pulpits, holding revivals, holding tent meetings, winning people to Christ. It was a great time. At the age of 18, I went into a college and there in the college, God began to deal with me in ways he had not before. In fact, from the time I was converted until the time I went to college at 18, I also in that same year was given a station appointment church in the city of Louisville by the bishop, believe it or not. 18 years old and pastor of a church in the city of Louisville. I look back sometimes and wonder what on earth I said to those people, but God was dealing with me from the time I was converted at 13 until that time at the age of 18 when I had entered college.

And I remember what a difficult time it was that I was having with God. At night sometimes I would get up by myself and I would just walk through those lonely country roads out from the college and I would stop at the fence and I would talk to the cows and I would weep with the cows and I really didn't know exactly what was wrong with me but I knew that there was something wrong that had to get straightened out. That went on for five long years while I was preaching and it was not until after that was resolved with God in a very subtle way, it was not until that happened that I realized what was going on. God was dealing with me about preaching the Gospel. I had been preaching the Gospel for five years. I had been winning souls to Christ for five years but God was saying to me over and over and over as he wrestled with me, he was saying to me, "What kind of a preacher are you going to be? What kind of a preacher are you going to be? What kind of a preacher are you going to be?" And I discovered that God was trying to instill within me the fact that if I was going to preach the Gospel, I could never lose track of the simple things. I could never get off on some tangent. I must stay at the very heart of it and I must preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I must preach the cross and nothing else.

Not everybody has had that kind of an experience in the call to preach. Many men and women who now talk about the struggle they have when they're called to preach, I never had a struggle in which I didn't want to preach. I was willing to preach. I was ready to preach but, you see, God knew that I was going to be subjected to some things after I was 18 years of age in college and then in seminary. I was going to be hearing some strange things which would cause me to depart from the faith and God was saying to me, "Let's you and I do this thing right. Let's get your feet settled solid upon the rock right now so that nothing will disturb you or move you away from what I have called you to do."

Jacob was wrestling with God because he was resisting but God is going to win and God just said to me, "Your time is up," so we'll start there tomorrow in this beautiful story about the wrestling of the angel with Jacob. Thank you very much.