



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Genesis 32: 1-32; Hosea 12:2-4, 12

“Peniel: Supplanter To Prevailer”

TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading this morning is in Genesis, chapter 32, and we’re going to read the entire chapter. You remember in the life of Jacob, Jacob has now been called back to the land by the Lord and he is on his way, and now in anticipation of meeting Esau again. We’re reading chapter 32, verse 1.

“Now as Jacob on his way, the Angels of God met him. And Jacob said when he saw them, ‘This is God’s camp.’ So he named that place Mahanaim. Then Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. He also commanded them saying, ‘Thus you shall say to my Lord Esau; Thus says your servant Jacob, ‘I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now. And I have oxen and donkeys and flocks and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.’ And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, ‘We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.’ Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies, for he said, ‘If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape.’ And Jacob said, ‘O’ God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O’ Lord, who didst say to me, ‘Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,’ I am unworthy of all the

lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which Thou have shown to Thy servant; for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him lest he come and attack me and the mothers with the children.’ For thou didst say, ‘I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered from multitude.’ So he spent the night there. Then he selected from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau: Two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milking camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. He delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, ‘Pass on before me, and put a space between droves.’”

This was a rather large gift because there were over five hundred animals that were to be given, so evidently Jacob has become a very wealthy man in the years that he has spent in Haran. Notice also that he reserves his position for the end. And that was contrary to the custom of shepherds. They usually in the east went before their flocks, and so it is clear that he is doing this for political reasons. He wants the animals to appear first, he wants them to appear in drove in separate divisions so he may impress Esau. And by the time Jacob arrives, Esau maybe to some extent appeased by the gift that he is being given. The 17th verse we read,

“And he commanded the one in front, saying, ‘When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, saying, ‘To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and to whom do these animals in front of you belong?’ Then you shall say, ‘These belong to your servant Jacob; it is a present sent to my lord Esau. And behold, he also is behind us.’ Then he commanded also the second and the third, and all those who followed the droves, saying, ‘After this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him; and you shall say, ‘Behold, your servant Jacob also is behind us.’ For he said, ‘I will appease him with the present that goes before me. Then afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will

accept me.’ So the present passed on before him, while he himself spent that night in the camp. Now he arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had. Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.”

You can see that was a lengthy period of time in which this wrestling took place. And when he saw that he had not prevailed against him, that is when he the angels saw that he had not prevailed against him, Jacob, he, the angel, touched the socket of Jacob’s thigh, so the socket of Jacob’s thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him.

“Then he,” (that is, the angel) “Then he said, ‘Let me go, for the dawn is breaking.’ But he, Jacob, but he said, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me.’ So he said to him, ‘What is your name?’ And he said, ‘Jacob.’ He said, ‘Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.’

The term Israel, for a lengthy period of time, was thought to mean a prince with God because of the relationship between the word Israel and Sarah, which means “princess.” Most students of the Old Testament now feel that this word comes from another word that means to strive, and consequently this means God’s fighter or perhaps may God fight for him. So Israel, for you have striven with God, God’s fighter, or may God fight for him, you’ve striven with God and with men. That’s reference, of course, on the local context to Esau, and have prevailed.

“Then Jacob asked him and said, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And he blessed him there. That is he, the angel, blessed Jacob there. So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.” And of course this tells us that this was not an angel but was the angel of Jehovah. The angel of

Jehovah is the second person of the Trinity. He appeared as the angel of Jehovah before the incarnation, it is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a theophany, an appearance of God. This morning, after the meeting, someone asked me, “What is a theophany?” Well the term ‘theophany’ comes from two Greek words, *theos* which means God, and the “phany” part comes from the word *phano* in Greek which means “to appear” or “to seen.” And *epiphanea* is an appearance. So theophany is an appearance of God in human form or in another form. And in this case, in the form of an angelic being. The angel of Jehovah, also is an appearance as a man, I should have mentioned here because it says a man wrestled with him. Now these theophanies in the Old Testament, we’ve already seen there are already a number of them in the Book of Genesis, right in the beginning of the unfolding of the divine revelation, and as I’ve said from time to time, they are intended by God to prepare Israel for the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. So they would not be surprised when God appeared as a human being. So there’s no excuse for Israel and others stumbling over the appearance of God in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now Christianity is a monotheistic religion. That is, we believe that there is one God, but we believe that He subsists in three persons. So Christians are monotheists, but they also are trinitarian. Now this was designed to prepare them for that, so that they would not stumble over the three persons of the Trinity. Of course, we know from history that Israel has stumbled over that. They failed to respond to Christianity claiming they are monotheistic. Mohammedans likewise, who base a great deal of their own views on scriptural facts, they too have stumbled over this. But God was patiently unfolding through the theophanies, the possibility of a divine appearance among men. And of course when the time came the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory. The Apostle John says, “No man has seen God in any time, the only begotten son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has led Him forth into full revelation.” So this is the theophany, the appearance of God. Therefore we read in verse 30,

“I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.” Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Peniel, that’s the other name for Peniel, Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh. Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip, which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip.”

Now I am going to turn over to the Book of Hosea for just a moment and if you want to try to find that chapter you can. It’s the 12th Chapter of the book. And I want to read just a comment that the prophet Hosea makes since it touches on this particular chapter. Now the prophet in Hosea, Chapter 12 is berating the nation Israel because of their disobedience and their desire to make a covenant with Assyria. And he says in the 2nd verse of Chapter 12 of Hosea, “The Lord also has a dispute with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways.” Now Jacob is the name for Israel that reminds Israel of Israel’s crookedness, Israel’s disobedience, Israel being like Jacob before his experience of Peniel. And then that reminds the prophet of the life of Jacob and he reminds Israel in Hosea’s day, Hosea does have Jacob in order to show Israel later on that he can do for the nation what he did for Jacob in the beginning, after whom the nation is following.

So we read in verse 3 in Hosea 12,

“In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his maturity he contended with God. Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed; He wept and sought His favor.” (Notice that clause, He wept and sought His favor, that’s not found in the Book of Genesis. He found Him at Bethel, this is not the first appearance of Bethel but the later one in chapter 35. And there He spoke with us. And look at verse 12: “Now Jacob fled to the land of Aram, that is, to Haran, and Israel worked for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep.”

So the life of Jacob is brought by the Prophet Hosea to the attention of the nation in their later apostasy, to remind them of what he could do for Israel. May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

Our subject this morning is “Peniel: From Supplanter to Prevailer.” The life of Jacob, it has been pointed out, is deftly summarized in Hosea chapter 12 and verse 3. “In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he strove with God.”

Now if we put between those two lines of Hosea chapter 12, verse 3, the lines of verse 12 of that same chapter, “Jacob fled, Jacob did service for a wife, Jacob herded sheep,” then in the principal statements we can trace the successive concerns of Jacob; his brother, a wife, and then go and in the actions you can trace a rather rough path in Jacob’s journey from immaturity to maturity. He took his brother by the heel. He was still in the womb. He fled. He served Laban in Haran. He shepherded sheep. He strove with God. And He prevailed.

In fact, Jacob had two names. He had the name Jacob that comes from a word that means to take by the heel. And then he had the name Israel, and that comes from a word that means to strive, and thus to prevail. And so here we have the beginning and the end of his spiritual pilgrimage in one sense. We have him taking by the heel, supplanting and now he becomes God’s fighter. And from this point on in Jacob’s life you’ll see a difference.

Now, I think as you look back over Jacob’s life, you might wonder why God chose Jacob. Well, you might wonder why he chose Abraham and Isaac too because they were very human. You might even wonder why Jesus Christ chose the apostles and it might be even a more startling thing to you to realize that He prayed all night before he chose the disciples, the Apostles. One might even ask did the Lord Jesus Christ make good choices, because after all He chose one who was a denier, and chose another who was a betrayer. He chose still another who came to be noted for his doubt. And he also chose two dirty politicians, James and John, who sought to do Peter out of his place around the table of the Lord. He chose a curser, he chose violent men who were called the sons of thunder.

But now of course the layer of tradition down through the centuries has been piled on these men and so what do we call these men now? Well, we call them Saint John, Saint Peter, Saint Thomas. But really they were birds. Now the patriarchs were similar men, they were just like that too, but the layer of tradition tends to make us think of them as great saints throughout all their lives, but they were not. They were men very much like ourselves. Esau, of course, we know, he was the kind of man we would have liked; he would be middle linebacker. He was a likeable kind of guy, he’s probably the original of that statement; he’s a jolly good fellow.

Jacob, on the other hand, is the kind of man you would not have chosen; ceaseless, restless in his activity, always doing something. I can just imagine Isaac being very disturbed with that little boy watching him constantly move until finally he would just say, “Jacob, for goodness sakes, a penny if you’ll just keep still.” But that’s the way he is, just constantly moving. But he moves from being a crafty supplanter, a crook, to a spiritual giant.

Like almost all the saints down through the centuries, the way to spiritual heights for Jacob leads through the valley of humiliation. Jacob made no attempt to avoid it; you can say that for him, he did not seek to avoid the meeting with Esau. And while he did not know the text of Scripture that our Lord speaks in the Sermon on the Mount, he illustrates first “be reconciled to thy brother, then take your gift and offer it” because he realized that he must deal ultimately with Esau. Now he went out of his way to do it, because Esau lived in the land of Edom, he didn’t have to think of himself as going to Edom. But nevertheless, he went out of his way because I’m sure that deep down in his heart he was disturbed over the fact that he had left Esau under unfavorable circumstances. And for twenty years there had in his heart been that anxious thought; what about Esau and my relationship to him?

The Bible says, “Be sure your sins will find you out.” And that is certainly true. Because no matter how we try we can never avoid our sins, and when we commit them, there is always the anxiety. You may seek to comfort it over with various forms of activities, but sooner or later it surfaces again, our sins.

And so here Jacob goes out of his way in order to seek out Esau to be sure that he is going to have a relationship with him as he is now coming back into the land. The chief subject of the chapter, however, is the struggle of Jacob with the will of God, and that is played out in this last part of the chapter when he wrestles with the angel. To put it theologically, here is the struggle of nature and grace. Here is the struggle of the human and the divine. Here is the struggle of self-effort versus God’s enabling.

Here is the struggle of man with his incurable heart and God, the only one who can cure human hearts. “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can understand it?” the Prophet Jeremiah speaks. And this is one thing that we all have to ultimately find out that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked and is beyond our understanding in its wickedness. Only sovereign grace can touch the human heart.

Only sovereign grace can reduce us to helplessness from our arrogant self-esteem and cause us to cling to him who is our shield and strength, and from whom ultimately and only comes victory. This incidentally is not the day of Jacob’s salvation. So far as we can tell, Jacob was a believer but like most believers in the earlier part of their lives, Jacob is a double-minded man. He has a love for God, but he has also his own sin principle dwelling with him and he follows that too. So he’s a man who is disturbed by two things, the interests of God and the interests of Jacob. And that struggle is going on within.

He is a man who is in the midst of great struggle that Paul describes in Roman chapter 7, seems to be in a stage of life in which some believers stay for their whole lifetime unfortunately. Well, this is the day of dedication; it’s the day in which Jacob comes to a new understanding of how the believing life is to be lived. And it’s an experience that every Christian should have. So it’s an important, critical event.

Chapter 32 fortunately is a rather simple chapter in its divisions; it has three parts, corresponding to the parts of this memorable day. The day begins in the morning, then there’s the evening, and then there’s the night. And we have here a morning, and then we have an afternoon,

and then we have a night. And in the morning, he has the vision of the angels. In the afternoon, he makes preparation for meeting Esau. And then at night God prepares him for meeting Esau. So it was a memorable day and a very critical time in Jacob’s life.

We read in the morning, now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him. Now most of the commentators of the Book of Genesis lay a little bit of stress on the expression “as Jacob went on his way.” He had been called by God to go back to the west, to the land. And most of the commentators, whom I think rightly point out that as Jacob went on his way, that is, as he obeyed, then the angels of God met him. In other words, the response of faith brings a response on the part of the Lord God.

And there is a spiritual principle in that when he speaks to us and commands us to do certain things as we by grace respond, he responds to us. It reminds me of the incident of the healing of the lepers in the life of our Lord. In Luke chapter 17 we read, “When he saw them, he said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And it came about that, as that as they were going, they were cleansed.” So as they responded to the word of the Lord Jesus Christ, the healing ministry of God came to them.

As Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him. The purpose of the angels is to assure Jacob that God is with him. And Jacob names the place Mahanaim, or “two camps,” because he recognizes that he has a camp of people, his family and his flocks and herds, and his helpers. But he realizes that he is not travelling alone, that the angels of God are travelling with him.

In the Psalms, Psalm 34 and verse 7 we read about the angel of God encamping round about his saints and keeping them. This is Jacob’s realization of the truthfulness of it. And we are taught here as we are taught through the Bible that the angels are ministering servants sent forth for those who are the heirs of salvation. It was God’s way of encouraging Jacob. Now you would think perhaps that a man who was encouraged by an angelic visitation would manifest great faith, but after all Jacob is just like us. He is just like us, we have all the promises of God, we even have the promise, “Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age.” And in the experiences of life, we,

like Jacob, turn to maneuvering and scheming and stratagems, seeking to accomplish the will of God in our own strength. It is so difficult for human beings to learn that lesson, it seems.

Well, God gave him encouragement but that does not help Jacob a great deal. What a difference between God’s messengers who encouraged Jacob and Jacob’s messengers who seek out Esau and try to find out the lay of the land. We read in verse 3, “Then Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir.” Jacob gave them some instructions. He says “You say to my lord,” notice the servile language that Jacob uses with reference to Esau; he didn’t have to do that. “My Lord Esau, this is your servant Jacob.” Later on, he repeats that. It makes one wonder if Jacob has had any real repentance over his treatment of Esau or his relationship to Esau.

At any rate, he sent his messengers off and when the messengers came back, they came back with an alarming report. It was absolute silence about Esau’s relationship to Jacob. Jacob could not tell from the report whether Esau would be reconciled to him or not. He was simply told, “We came to your brother Esau and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.” And the four hundred men of course alarmed Jacob considerably because he thinks that perhaps they are coming for battle. So characteristically, energetically forgetting the presence of the angels with him he makes his plans, he schemes a little bit. Now all through the section incidentally it has been pointed out by the students of it that he will plan and pray, plan and pray, plan and pray. Now that’s all right, it’s all right to make plan, it’s all right to be sensible. After all, a person should be sensibly cautious.

One of the reasons John Knox was able to do the work that he did in Scotland was because he was sensibly cautious. There have been a number of men who were martyrs unnecessarily. Now we regard them holy because they were martyrs for the testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ. But one wonders if they had perhaps been a little more cautious, they might have lived a little longer to do work for the Lord. One thing about Knox when you study Knox and you’ll see that one of the reasons that he had the influence in Scotland that he had, which persists to a small degree even today, one of the reasons was that when trouble came, Knox went into hiding. And when Mary was there

and sought his life, he didn't mind fleeing. He would flee. And then he would come back to serve again. And the result was that he finally won the struggle for Scotland and Scotland became a nation that followed the Reformation because he was a cautious Reformer. So it's all right to be cautious.

It's all right to be sensible but we must, of course, put our ultimate trust in the Lord. And Jacob at this point, it appears that he is putting his trust in his scheming. In the 7th verse, he gave instructions to divide the people and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies because he said, “If there are two of us, if he attacks one company then the other will escape,” that was sensible. And then he turned the prayer, which was even more sensible.

Now one thing about Jacob, if you'll look in the preceding sections, you will discover that he doesn't pray a whole lot in the immediately preceding section of his life. This is almost as if he were returning to the kind of life that may have characterized him at one time. I rather think, one of the commentators made a statement that rather made me think of Samson who, you remember, finally told the secret of his strength that it lay in his hair and when it was cut off, he became weak just like any other man. But unfortunately, the Philistines forgot that. I have often said I would have assigned a hairstylist for Samson and have him cut his hair everyday, but they forgot about that and so his hair began to grow again and he became again the strong man that he was and won his greatest victory in his death. One of the commentators said concerning Jacob that the hair of his consecration began to grow again; and he turned in prayer to the Lord. Now that prayer that he offers is a mortal kind of prayer. Notice, it's grounded in the promises of God. Verse 9, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Yahweh, who did say to me, 'Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you.'" Notice verse 12, "For Thou didst say, 'I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'" In other words, the prayer begins with the promises of God; brought to God's attention.

I suggest to you that that's a good way to pray in 1980. That is, to bring to God the promises that he has made to us. For when we bring to God the promises that he has made to us,

we make God, this is language I’ve carefully chosen, we make God serve us, because he has committed us to his word. He is committed to his word. And when we come to him with his word, we come to him with that from which he cannot turn aside.

And so Jacob does that, he reminds the Lord of the covenantal promises. He approaches him as Yahweh who gave those promises to Abraham. He said, “You said that I would prosper when I went back into that land.” So his prayer begins properly with recognition of the promises that are made. That incidentally is why prayers are made with the beginning dwelling upon the promises that have been made to us.

And then he makes confession because it’s good to make confession. He says in verse 10, I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to me. Now that’s a second step in all prayer: the acknowledgement that we do not really deserve anything of ourselves.

And finally, there comes the plea, the pleading. That’s what makes a prayer a prayer. And so in verse 11, he says, "Deliver me, I pray, from the hands of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him lest he come and attack me, the mothers with the children." What a beautiful pattern of prayer, bringing to God’s attention the promises that he has made to us. And then the confession of unworthiness for a true acknowledgement of what we really are before the Lord. And then the deliverance, the prayer, the plea; the pleading for the blessing of God. One might ask the question, “Was it a totally sincere prayer?” Well I’m not sure I would know how to answer that. I know that he immediately started planning again. But nevertheless, he did pray. But he is a divided man; he is a double-minded man still. There are influences that come from the old nature and there are influences that are coming from the new, and so they are contending. The flesh and the spirit are fighting in Jacob’s heart and mind.

Well he divides his property into droves with shrewdness; puts himself at the end in order that by the time he meets Esau, as he anticipates Esau will perhaps be placated and accept him. And incidentally, that statement in verse 20 is rather interesting because it shows that pagan thinking is

directly the opposite of divine thinking. He said, “I will appease him with the present that goes before me.” I don’t accuse Jacob of being a pagan in saying this, but I just want you to know that he hopes that by doing something for Esau, he will be able to appease or propitiate Esau. And perhaps Esau will accept him. So he stoops to human methodology. And that’s the way man thinks that he gains favor with God. He thinks by doing things in the church, he will gain favor with God or doing things in his life. He thinks by his culture, by his good works, by his benevolences; even by his religious activities, joining the church, being baptized, sitting at the Lord’s table, working in the church bazaar, whatever it may be, getting money for the church, being in every member canvass, and all of these kind of thing, he hopes that he will win some points with God, appease him, propitiate him; little realizing that the Bible teaches the precisely opposite strategy.

That is, that God gives his blessings on the basis of grace to those who recognize that they have nothing with which to commend themselves to the Lord. With this thinking, using even scriptural words like propitiation, appeasing, placating because that reminds us of the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the propitiation of the holiness and righteousness of God, satisfaction of it for us. Well, Jacob is thinking, in his relationship to Esau, like pagans think in their relationship to the Lord God. Unfortunately, that’s very common in the Church of Jesus Christ today.

Well, the latter part of the chapter records the great encounter, the crisis in Jacob’s life. It’s really Jacob’s Mount Moriah experience, like Abraham had his with Isaac on that mountain. And on verses 22 through 25, Moses describes the wrestling that took place between the Lord and Jacob. I wonder what was in Jacob’s mind as he sent his family and all of the people across the stream and then was left alone by himself. Was he thinking perhaps that he could gain the land in his own strength and by his own efforts? God had promised him that land, he was going through all of these stratagems and schemes and all of the shrewd division of the forces. Was he thinking that by his own wisdom and skill, he will be able to outwit Esau and thus win the land which God has promised him? Well if he was, he learns that his own strength and cleverness cannot deliver him.

He learns a very important spiritual truth. To put it in the language of the New Testament and in the language of this experience, he learns that the sinews of the old nature must be shriveled up so that the strength of the new nature activated and enabled by the Holy Spirit may be manifested. In the one case, we have Jacob scheming but in the other case, we have him clinging. And there’s all the difference in the world between the scheming and the clinging that follows. And Jacob learns that it is not by might nor by power but by my spirit, says the Lord that spiritual victories are won.

Now we read in verse 24, “Then Jacob was left alone.: It was his Gethsemane that reminds us of the experience of the Lord Jesus in Gethsemane where he finally said, “O my God if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not my will but ‘Thou be done.” Now the Lord Jesus never got to go through the experience of being a supplanter to become a prevailer. He was always a prevailer. But nevertheless, it was a struggle with him for he struggled with the will of God. And his struggling was not because he had a tendency to disobey, but he had to enter into the experience of doing the will of God right on down to the ultimate end of his human experience. And in Gethsemane, it was a real struggle with the will of God.

Now we read also in this verse that a man wrestled with him. What was going through Jacob’s mind? He was sitting by his fireside perhaps and there came up by his side a man, who was a strange man and this combatant, grabbed Jacob and a wrestling match ensued. It was a fight and Jacob may have thought this is one of Esau’s men, they’ve already come. And so he began the struggle. Some of the commentators say he had a nightmare. But I’ve never known of a nightmare to leave you lame for the rest of your life and in this case, whatever it was, it was a real experience of wrestling. Now as far as the man is concerned, Jacob probably did think it was a man as he began this fight, the struggle. But later on, of course, he learns that he was more than a man and Hosea makes it very plain that he was God. He prevailed with God and so does Jacob here in this chapter. It’s a theophany.

So he moves in his understanding of what was happening perhaps from an emissary of Esau to the realization that this is an emissary of God and, in fact, is God Himself. For he says, “This place will be called Peniel, for I have seen God face to face.” Now also notice, it says a man wrestled with him. It does not say that Jacob wrestled with the man as if Jacob is the one whose activity is emphasized. The activity of the visitor is emphasized. It is he who wrestles with Jacob. It is God, the Lord Jesus, breaking down the opposition of Jacob; bringing him to the place where he realizes that he is of himself unable to accomplish the will of God and the only way in which he is to be blessed by God with the possession of the land is through simple trust. That land is to come to Abraham, and to Isaac, and to Jacob, and to the whole of the seed as a gift from God, not by their activity.

Now Hosea added something else. He said, “He wept and sought his favor.” Now, that’s not said in Genesis 32. That evidently is tradition that was carried down and the prophet understood that tradition. It was definitely true. He did weep and seek the favor of God. It points to the method of victory by which Jacob came to be the victor. Because you see as the struggle went on hour after hour, and it went on from the early evening to the next morning because the angel finally says, “Let me go for the dawn is breaking.”

Perhaps incidentally he said that because it was impossible for an individual to look upon the face of God and live. And that by the way is also why I think that when we get to heaven, we will still not be able to look upon the face of God, for we are always creatures. We may look upon the face of Jesus Christ and we are seeing God when we see him but the unveiled essence of the eternal God, we creatures shall never, so far as I can tell, see. He is one who cannot be seen, as well as is not seen.

But anyway, this angel with whom he wrestled for hour after hour has a reserve of strength that Jacob does not know anything about in the opening time of this struggle. While the angel is the second person of the Trinity, he wrestles with Jacob, he brings Jacob to the place where finally he realizes he cannot win and then all he does is just take his little finger and touch Jacob in his hip joint

and Jacob is lame for the rest of his life. There is an awful reserve of strength in the second person of the Trinity, or in our great God.

Well when that happens, Jacob realizes that the battle is won. And now so far as he is concerned, instead of struggling and fighting and scheming and trying to overthrow this divine being, he begins to cling and to plead, and to plead with tears. Now we know that that was true because not only did he in Hosea say “He wept and sought his favor,” but look at the language of the angel in verse 26, “Let me go!” Jacob is now grasping God the Son with such strength that the angel of Jehovah says, let me go. So he is forced to cling, forced to plead. And he cannot obtain the blessing by wrestling. He has learned that he cannot obtain the blessing by his scheming and the only way in which he can get it now is by pleading with the second person whom he has come to see is the Lord God.

One of the commentators had said, referring to the fact that the name was thought to mean a prince with God, He has said that “At Peniel, Jacob was knighted in the field.” That is, in his actual service, he became a prince with God and now he is called that. This conversation I say is very revealing because it shows the struggling has become clinging and now the combativeness of Jacob has become dependence. And Jacob is a broken but a blessed man for he is blessed by the second person.

There is nothing more glorious, my dear Christian friends, than to throw your arms around the Lord God and cling to him. I want to assure you that that is the posture of power. And Jacob has come in his experience to realize it. It is the posture of power to grasp the second person of the Trinity as he did. To grasp our God and to weep and plead for his favor, that’s how victory comes. That’s how Jacob comes to be known as “God’s fighter,” or “may God strive for him,” because he has prevailed by not taking the combative, independent position, but by clinging to this person and pleading for his favor. That’s the way of victory.

And this critical point in Jacob’s life is the point from which all of the rest of his life proceeds. It was a defeat at Jabbok and it was a victory, all in one; the defeat of Jacob and the

victory of Israel and the limping was a lasting proof of the reality of the event and a lasting reminder of the fact that Jacob of himself will never win the blessing of God; it is only when he pleads as a dependent man.

I can just imagine as Jacob came back and told the story of that that afterwards whenever Jacob appeared on the horizon and the boys were about and with their friends and someone would say, “There is Dad!” And someone else would say, “Why he is limping? Is that your father?” And they would say, “Yes he is limping because he met God at Jabbok.” That was the sign, always the sign. He met God, a man who limps with the touch of God in his body.

Well, the chapter concludes with Jacob naming the place Peniel because he has seen God face to face yet his life has been preserved. And the sun rose as he crossed over Peniel and he was limping on his thigh. And a reference is made to a custom, which is not found in the remainder of the Old Testament but is known among the rabbis, so it became a custom among the Jewish people. So Jacob has come to the crisis of life. He has come from sinner to saint through faith in the Lord God. And now he has come to the critical point in his life as a saint to self-surrendering trust initiated by the sovereign grace of God. For this man approached Jacob and began to wrestle with him. And the new status meant new power and that comes only when our strength fails and we begin to cling.

As Paul in a similar kind of experience said, “In weakness, he had become strong.” So I speak to you who are believers in the audience reminding you that you came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ because you realize you couldn’t save yourself. That same principle holds within the Christian life. You will never please God in your Christian life until you see what Jacob saw that it is the pleading, clinging person who is the prevailing person. May God help you see it. For those of you who have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, the atoning sacrifice has been offered. God stands with the promise of forgiveness and if God the Holy Spirit has brought you to knowledge of your condition, flee to the cross and cling to the atoning sacrifice. You will know the forgiveness of

sins and justification of life and begin this great Christian experience of the walk with God. May God help you to come to him. Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee Lord for these wonderful events in the life of Jacob, spelled out so plainly and clearly. They speak to us of the deceitfulness of the human heart with our plans and schemes and stratagems. They speak to us of the necessity of trusting Thee. Enable us O God to be trusters and thus prevailers.

We thank Thee for every means by which Thou does bring us to the knowledge of ourselves and the knowledge of our weakness and dependence. O God, may we cling like Jacob and may we cling with prevailing power. O God, bring us to the place where truly we may in honesty say I will not let Thee go until thou doest bless me. Go with us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.