

Genesis 32 — The Fight Of Your Life

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It is great to have you at CrossWinds. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. As a church, on both of our campuses, we are studying the book of Genesis. Today we continue our study in Genesis 32. Take out your outlines or open your Bible or iPads to that chapter.

We are following the life of Jacob. Last week was a pivotal moment when after 14 years in virtual slave-like conditions for Laban—his father-in-law, God began to turn things around. Jacob and Laban came to an agreement that would get Jacob out of poverty. Laban would let the spotted and speckled sheep and goat born in his flock be Jacobs. Laban, the consummate crook, sifted through his flocks and removed all of the spotted and speckled sheep he had sending them far away. When Jacob went for his first paycheck, all his animals were gone. Laban ripped him off again! In these types of situation it is important to remember that God is the one who has the last laugh. In God's amazing kindness, almost all of the animals born in Laban's solid color flock were born as speckled and spotted. In six years Jacob went from poverty to a wealthy man. Last week, we saw Jacob, at God's direction, finally broke away from Laban and headed back to the Promised Land with his four wives, twelve children and vast herd of animals. Laban chased him down and planned to do him harm but God intervened in Laban's dreams and warned him not to touch Jacob. Last week we left off after Jacob and Laban erect a pile of stones as a monument that would

keep them divided. They agreed on a peace treaty and parted ways. Today Jacob continues to the Promised Land where he has some wrongs to right.

There are two important parts of his life we will study this morning that we can apply to our own. For Jacob to make spiritual progress he needs to go out of his way to right the wrongs he committed in his life. That applies to all of us. In addition we find when God wants us to have a large step of spiritual growth he often takes us to the end of ourselves. That is where we find Jacob this morning. Let's jump in at the beginning of chapter 32.

Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" So he called the name of that place Mahanaim. Genesis 32:1–2 (ESV)

This is one of the classic understatements in the Bible. Angels show up to meet Jacob but they only get one verse. Personally I would like a little more of a description. I am sure they were impressive. Unfortunately there is not much in this verse to preach on.

Notice Jacob calls the place Mahanaim. That literally means two camps. Jacob has a camp that he can see and around him is a vast angelic camp that Jacob normally couldn't see until God pulled back the curtain for Jacob to see. God allowed Jacob to see these angels as he was on his way back to the Promised Land. The natural question is, "Why?"

There are numerous verbal connections between this angelic vision and his earlier angelic vision at Bethel when he was heading out of the Promised Land in Genesis 28. His exiting the land and his returning to the land 20 years later are bracketed by visions of angels. Why does God pull back the curtain on the angelic world at these crucial moments in his life? I think this was incredibly

important to encourage him in this time of his life when he was far from his family and his was far from any support system.

This was a great reminder to him and to us that while we may feel alone and feel far from God, he is not far away. What we can not see is his angels are around us and guarding us.

**The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.
Psalm 34:7 (ESV)**

For the last 20 years, while Laban was ripping him off, God was still watching over him and protecting him. While Jacob was wondering where the money would come from to feed his family because Laban was ripping him off, God was sending his angels to watch over Jacob and provide.

The same is true for us. There are times when we feel alone. There are times when God feels far away, perhaps we are far from our family or we are far from our church friends so we feel alone. We may feel alone but we are not alone. God's angels are watching over our life.

Jacob spent most of his life thinking he was the one looking out for his life and he needed to be the one to rescue himself when it looked like things were going wrong. He tricked his brother and his father when it looked like his father was going to give the blessing to the wrong son. He tricked Laban when he was afraid he wouldn't let him leave town. Jacob didn't need to lie, trick and deceive. He was acting like the only thing happening in life was on the horizontal plane he could see. There was much more going on. God was watching out for his life on the vertical plane with his angels. We see God doing this when he broke into Laban's dream the night before he overtook Jacob and intended to do him harm.

God rescued Jacob by speaking to Laban in a dream, a way Jacob never expected.

This is a great reminder to us. We don't need to cheat or trick to help God. Everything that happens on this planet is not just on the horizontal plane that we see with our eyes. God's angels guard you and me just like they were Jacob's life. We can trust him. Honor God and leave the results in his hands.

And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.'" And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him." Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps, thinking, "If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape." Genesis 32:3-8 (ESV)

What is not apparent is Jacob did not need to cross paths with Esau to return to the Promised Land. It was not a geographical necessity. Earlier in Genesis we learned Esau settled far south near Mt. Seir in Edom. Jacob did not need to meet him. What was not a geographical necessity was a spiritual necessity. For Jacob, and for each of us, to make any true spiritual growth our past sins can not be ignored. They must face them. True repentance simply require outward sorrow but restitution and restoration are also necessary whenever possible. Jacob left the Promised Land running because Esau planned to kill him. Now he is return to the Promised Land but the first thing he does is seek out Esau to do whatever it takes to make things right and restore the relationship. When Jacob left, he was prideful and he tricked his brother and

his father into giving him the birthright and the blessing. Notice Jacob's attitude now.

He calls Esau "my Lord" and describes himself as "your servant Jacob". Even if he hasn't relinquished it in a legal way, he certainly has relinquished it with his attitude. He approaches Esau humbly and seeking to do him good, not harm.

In addition, he planned to buy Esau's favor. He tells Esau he has lots of stuff, lots of animals. He has plenty of cash. When your estranged brother comes to town and you don't know what to think about him but he tells you he won the lottery and wants to share his winnings with you because you are family, that puts everyone in a better mood. That is Jacob's plan.

Jacob shows us the importance of trying to make broken relationships right, not just ignoring them, even if the break happened 20 years in the past. Unfortunately, things do not appear to go well in Jacob's attempts at reconciliation.

Jacob's servants returned and told him they met Esau and gave him the news. Esau was coming to greet Jacob but he had 400 men with him. Presumably they are not wearing birthday hats and blowing party streamers. These are armed men. This is the size of a militia in the ancient world. Things are not good. It looks like heads are going to roll.

Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. This means Jacob was totally shaking in his boots. He can't retreat to Laban because they made a boundary line they agreed to not cross. He is only 16 miles south of his boundary with

Laban. If he goes backwards, he faces Laban. If he moves forward, he faces Esau and 400 armed men. He is totally sweating this one. He is literally between a pile of rocks and a hard place. Jacob is wits end, as we will see, that is actually what he needs.

This weekend, I was in Sioux Falls. I had my wife snap a picture of this billboard. I cracks me up.

This is the first time I saw Atheists recruiting for something that doesn't exist. Very interesting.

There is a famous saying that there are no atheists in Fox Holes. Put an atheist in a tough situation and they will call out to God and learn to pray. Jacob is in one of those situatuions. He is between two armies that want to destroy him. He learns to pray in a jiffy. He offers one of the only prayers in Genesis and the longest prayer in Genesis.



The same is true for us. We get so busy we forget to pray. God brings us to the end of ourselves and circumstances start to fall apart around us. What do we do? We pray. We turn to God when we come to the end of our wits. That is what is happening.

And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,' I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. But you said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'" Genesis 32:9–12 (ESV)

I like Jacob's prayer. First he tells God he is in this crisis simply because he is obeying God's word. God told him to return to the Promised Land and promised to do him good. This is not what Jacob expected. He is returning to the Promised Land but life is falling apart. Has this happened to you? As we will see in a moment, in the big picture, God is doing him good. The brokenness of his life and his circumstances are the tool God is using to mold his character and get him to the end of himself so he learns to rely on his God rather than himself.

This is not just true for Jacob but it is also true for us. Sometimes obedience to God's words puts us in a situation where life starts to fall apart financially or relationally. Part of us is crying out to God wondering if he forgot us. In reality, God has not forgotten us. He is using the tough times in our life to bring us to the end of ourselves so we learn to rely on him. He is doing us good.

The other thing Jacob does in his prayer is he acknowledges that he is not worthy of all the good things God gave him. When he left the Promised Land, all he has with him was the stick in his hand. That is not too valuable. Sticks are not hard to find. If you lose it, I can find you another. God is faithful and made him into two camps. He has so much stuff, he needed to divide it in half to keep it organized.

The other things I love about Jacob's prayer is he is not just praying for himself. He is praying for the mothers and the children. Jacob was thinking about other people and how to protect and care for them.

This prayer gives us a window into Jacob's heart. A spiritual transformation is taking place. He is becoming more humble and concerned for others. He is looking for God to be the one to save him, not himself.

So he stayed there that night, and from what he had with him he took 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 calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. These he handed over to his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass on ahead of me and put a space between drove and drove." He instructed the first, "When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, 'To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these ahead of you?' then you shall say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a present sent to my lord Esau. And moreover, he is behind us.'" He likewise instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, "You shall say the same thing to Esau when you find him, and you shall say, 'Moreover, your servant Jacob is behind us.'" For he thought, "I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterward I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me." So the present passed on ahead of him, and he himself stayed that night in the camp. Genesis 32:13–21 (ESV)

Instead of waiting to see Esau and give him a present, he sent the present ahead of him. For those of you who didn't have a chance to do the math, that is 550 animals he sent to Esau. He divided them into groups. It was wave after wave of presents. The size of this gift is fit for a king.

Interestingly in Hebrew these gifts are called *minchah*. That means it is a gift that is given from an inferior to a superior. Usually these kinds of gifts were given by a conquered people to their overlord but they could also be given by some to another to compensate for what they did wrong. Jacob sends these gifts ahead of himself to Esau to say, "What I did when I stole your blessing was wrong." I am not just saying I am sorry but I am willing to do the hard work of trying to compensate you for how I hurt you. I am putting my money where my mouth is.

This is important. When we sin against someone, do we just feel bad and repent to God or do we do the hard work of actually going to their face and asking forgiveness? If our sin cost someone or hurt someone are we willing to try to compensate them? It is only when you are trying to actually pay something back that people know you are truly sorry. That is how Jacob has changed. He left a prideful deceiving man. He returned seeking restoration with his brother even if it cost him.

The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh. Genesis 32:22–32 (ESV)

At this point, you know Jacob was in a panic. In the middle of the night he sent his wives and children across the Jabbok with all of his remaining stuff.

Jacob was alone. I am sure he was in prayerfully dreading the next day as he imagined Esau would turn his family into a bloodbath.

Can you feel the tension? Jacob wanted to be left alone. He can't handle being around his family. In his darkest moment, God jumped him.

You need to remember this is under cover of total darkness. There were no street lights. Jacob can't see a thing. This unexpected assailant was pulling his hair and putting a choke hold on his throat. I can tell you from first-hand experience that wrestling for six minutes is not easy. Wrestling until morning would be a killer. At this point Jacob was approximately a hundred years old. Wrestling a guy until morning when you are a hundred is an incredible feat. He might be strong, but his unknown assailant was just as strong. It was an even match of bloody noses, fat lips and rolling in the dirt with sweat and bruises all night long. In the middle of the night, this mysterious opponent touched his hip socket putting it out of joint. As a former wrestler, I can tell you that when you can't use your hips, your match is over. While most of us would have called it quits, Jacob continued to wrestle. Jacob would not let his opponent go. Even though he was helpless, he would not let him go. His opponent said, "Let me go because day is dawning." but Jacob would not let him go unless he blessed him.

Later we learn that Jacob realized he had a special opponent. It was God in the form of an angel. In the Old Testament, this is often called The Angel of the Lord. The angel of the Lord was Jesus showing up in the Old Testament. Jacob gets jumped by Jesus. Jacob gets beat up by Jesus. I know this sounds really strange but Jesus had a good reason for beating Jacob to a pulp.

For all of his life Jacob was a proud self-sufficient man. He tricked his family into getting the birthright and the blessing. He had worked hard to make Laban's business a raging success. Jacob was the self-man man. While he worshipped the God of his fathers, he considered himself the secret to his

success. God brought him to the end of himself with Laban's army on the back side and Esau's army of 400 men on the front side. Then Jesus jumped him and beat him up all night long. Jesus took his hip out of joint to bring him to the literal end of his strength and ability. At some point in the wrestling match Jacob realized it was God fighting him. God put him in this mess. Here is where it gets interesting. This passage is talked about in the book of Hosea.

He strove with the angel and prevailed; he wept and sought his favor... Hosea 12:4 (ESV)

Jacob literally came to the point of utter brokenness that night. He came to the end of himself. He finally called out to God in tears asking for God to bless him and God to take care of him because he had no strength or strategy left.

Have you been there? Have you been in circumstances that are hopeless so you are driven to prayer? Have you become so sick it feels like God is beating you up? You can give up on God and run away or you can hold on like Jacob and in between your tears say, "God, I don't know what you are doing in my life but no matter what happens I am holding on to you until you bless me. You need to take care of me because I can not take care of myself."

In God's gracious love for us, there will not just be a point of conversion in our life where we trust in Jesus to forgive our sin but for many of us there is also a point in our life where it looks like our life is lost and our family is lost. We are at the end of ourselves and we can no longer trust our strength and resources to save us, the only one we can trust is God.

The mystery man, who turned out to be Jesus, asked Jacob for his name. Why did he ask for his name? This was an opportunity for Jacob to confess.

Jacob confessed what his name means. Jacob confessed to being a deceiver and trickster. God changed his name to Israel, which means, “God wins.”

That day, when the sun rose, it rose on a new Jacob. A Jacob that was no longer the deceiver who did everything with the strength of his own hands and his own power. He was Israel. The man where God won. He realized any success he had in life came from depending on God, and not himself or his own strength.

To remember that day, for the rest of his life, he walked with a limp. It was the day he came to the end of himself and declared God the winner.

Have you come to that day? We worship Jesus but we are about our own ways, our own plans and we think we can solve all our problems. Rest assured, God in his grace may bring some of us to a Jacob moment where we get to the end of ourself. That is not because God hates us but because he loves us. There is no better place to be than that spot where you have come to the end of yourself and you have to hang on to God for his blessing to save you.



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