

VICTORY IN DEFEAT  
Genesis 32:22-32

Intro: F. B. Meyer wrote in his introduction to his book on John the Baptist,

I know of nothing that makes so pleasant a respite from the pressure of life's fret and strain, as to bathe mind and spirit in the translucent waters of Scripture biography.

We can be grateful to the Lord that so much of the Bible, in the OT and the NT, is given to biography--the greatest having to do with the life of our Lord Jesus Christ while He was here on earth!

Tonight, before we come to the Lord's Table, I want to take you to just one episode in the biography of Jacob, that man who was to be honored by God in having his name placed upon the nation which was uniquely a nation chosen by God, the nation which was to give to the redeemed of all nations, our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

This episode would not be in the Bible if it were not of great spiritual importance to us. There are some important lessons for all of us to learn from God's dealings with Jacob at Peniel. And this is an important factor in coming to the Lord's Table. We are exhorted in the Word to examine ourselves as we come to the Table. And it may be that a mistake which Jacob was making is a mistake that we are making--and consequently we may be out of sorts with God, a serious thing when we think of coming to the Table of the Lord with such an attitude in our hearts.

Let me remind you of the background of this incident.

Jacob was going back home after 20 years! He had left home because Esau was going to kill him for stealing the blessing which belong to him, to Esau, as the firstborn. It was God's will for Jacob to have it, but not for him to take it as he did.

In returning to his home, Jacob was faced with the dreaded prospect of meeting Esau for the first time in all of those years. As far as he knew, Esau felt the same way, i.e., he wanted to kill Jacob.

And so Jacob had carefully arranged their meeting. Read verses 7 and 8 of this chapter.

And then he sent that amazing gift to Esau. See verses 13 ff. And this was after that marvelous prayer in verses 9 through 12.

However, with all of that done, Jacob's experience at Peniel showed, first of all, that . . .

I. JACOB WAS NOT AT ALL CONCERNED ABOUT THAT WHICH CONCERNED THE LORD.

Jacob was concerned about Esau; the Lord was concerned about Jacob!

The Lord was going to take care of Esau--and He did! The Lord was not going to let anything happen to any of Jacob's family. But the thing that concerned the Lord about Jacob was a matter that was going to be brought vividly to Jacob's attention that night. Jacob was yet to learn that the main purpose for his meeting with Esau was to bring out into the light the greatest need he had in his life in God's sight!

Do you think that might be going on in your life? Do you think that you are concerned about something which really is not God's primary concern for you? I am not saying that the Lord was not concerned for Jacob's safety. He was concerned about that! And He was going to take care of Jacob, as I have said. It was nothing for the Lord to protect Jacob from Esau. Had He not protected Jacob from his father-in-law? You may be worried about something which the Lord can take of in a moment, but there is something deeper, something far more vital to your future blessing which He is seeking to show you. And that is the reason for the delay in what He intends to do for you.

Let me point out a second thing.

II. JACOB DID NOT KNOW WITH WHOM HE WAS WRESTLING (at least when the struggle began).

As it turned out, he was wrestling with the Lord! Imagine it! This was the Lord Jesus Christ, and Jacob was trying to subdue the Lord of heaven and earth, although he did not know that it was the Lord.

He undoubtedly felt that it was one of Esau's men. And so Jacob was fighting furiously to protect himself and his family. To him it was a matter of life or death!

And so let me ask you another question: Have you ever stopped to realize that it is the Lord you are struggling against? Your struggle, and my struggle, can be just as really against the Lord as Jacob's was.

How gracious and longsuffering the Lord is! He could have ended that match as it first began. Instead, He let it go on all night!

Illus: I had a friend who lived next door when I was young. He was five or six years older than I was, but he

was a friend I liked very much. His name was Clarence Magnusson. There were other boys in the neighborhood about my age, and one thing that we like to do was to wrestle Clarie (as we called him). He was a big, strong Norwegian, and three or four of us would take him on at the same time. Sometimes the wrestling matches would go on for 20 or 30 minutes. But then, when Clarie had had enough, do you know what he would do? He would stack us up in a pile, and sit on us, until we would give up! Now he could have done that at the very first, but he didn't. He liked the match as well as we did, and we kept hoping that some day we would win. But we never did!

The Lord was like that with Jacob. He could have ended the match with Jacob at the first, but he let Jacob struggle on throughout the night. And the Lord often deals with us in the same way. And we somehow do not realize that we are not struggling with men, but we are struggling with the Lord. How wise is the person who recognizes that, whatever the circumstances may be, we are dealing with GOD!

You may be afraid of someone tonight. Or you may be resentful against someone. But just remember that the Lord could put an end to the battle this very moment if He chose to do so. And perhaps the reason He has not is because you have not discovered yet what the battle is all about!

This leads me to my third point. I hope that the battle does not go on this long with you.

### III. THE OPPOSITION AGAINST THE LORD CONTINUED UNTIL THE LORD AFFLICTED JACOB PHYSICALLY.

At this moment all of the fight went out of Jacob. And it must have been about this time that he realized that he was not fighting with one of Esau's men; he was fighting with the Lord! It had been a long night, a wearying night, but the Lord had finally gotten the message across.

Jacob limped for the rest of his life. It was God's way of keeping him reminded of what he had discovered at Peniel.

The Lord does not always touch us physically (although sometimes He does); sometimes He strikes a blow against us in other ways. But, whenever He deals with us like He dealt with Jacob, we can never really be the same again. Jacob learned that night that the main problem was not Esau, but it was JACOB!

What a blessing for us when we learn this about ourselves!

But is that the end of the story? No! This was only the path to victory. Jacob was defeated by the Lord, but the Lord had determined that Jacob, after all, would be the victor. And so what happened?

IV. JACOB QUIT STRUGGLING AND BEGAN TO CLING TO THE LORD.

Look at verse 26.

What blessing did the Lord give him? He changed his name. What did that mean? It meant that the Lord was changing HIM! That was what was needed all along.

You see, the lesson is that we do not win with the Lord by struggling against Him, but you win with the Lord by being submissive to Him. We can never overpower the Lord by resisting Him. It is the defeat of submission that brings the greatest blessing of the Lord.

What happened about Esau?

The change in Jacob was not immediately apparent (as it may not be in you or in me), but read Gen. 33:4. Jacob had nothing to fear!

Concl: As you come to the Lord's Table tonight, are you still struggling with the Lord, or are you submissive to Him? Perhaps it will help you to hear again those words of submission which our Lord Himself uttered as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, words of surrender to the will of the Father.

O my Father, if it be possible,  
let this cup pass from me:  
nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt  
(Matt. 26:39b).

Victory with the Lord comes not through struggling against Him, but by yielding to Him. He may not always give us what we want, but if not, it will be something even better. May the Lord enable each of us to come to the Table tonight with hearts surrendered to Him. Let the struggling cease so that you can taste the sweetness of victory.