

“WRESTLING WITH GOD”

Read Genesis 32:24-30

Late that night, Jacob stood on the bank of the Jabbok River; troubled, frightened, and sleepless. Those dearest to him—his wives, Leah and Rachel; his children—had, at Jacob’s insistence, already crossed the Jabbok, along with his servants, livestock, and possessions. Now Jacob was entirely alone. Somewhere in the darkness, Jacob’s vengeful brother Esau approached with four hundred armed men. Would Esau kill Jacob? Would he spare the women and children?



In his distress Jacob prayed to God; and God delivered him. But first, God wrestled with Jacob, *literally* wrestled. At times, in spiritual sense, God also wrestles with us. Haven’t you struggled with God through a long, lonely night of prayer? Just because the bumps and bruises are not visible, they are nonetheless real and painful. What do we learn from wrestling with the Almighty?

God Is Involved

I can’t imagine a more personal competition than wrestling: two opponents nose to nose, shoulder to shoulder, one on one. Perhaps we don’t think of God wrestling with us as “personal involvement,” but it is. Jacob prayed for God to deliver him. That is exactly what God did. God came to Jacob as the patriarch fretted and worried by the Jabbok River.

God comes to us in the same way, if not in the same place—as we lie sleepless in bed; as we wait for the results of a medical test; as we struggle to improve a troubled relationship; as we worry about church attendance and budgets. But should we be surprised by God’s involvement—that He cares enough to wrestle with us—when He also came to share in our humanity and to suffer and die for our sins?

Human Weaknesses

As a boy, I loved to wrestle with my dad. Somehow, despite my diminutive size, I almost always won the wrestling matches. Imagine that! Afterwards, I danced around the arena, our living room, and raised my skinny arms in victory. But sometimes, if I strutted too much, dad pinned my shoulders on the ground and held me there despite my wriggling, giggling, and eventual complaining. Why? To keep me grounded in reality. To remind me I had weaknesses and limitations. To teach me I could not do everything on my own.

Jacob learned the same lesson from wrestling with God. So do we. As humans, we have many limitations and weaknesses, but God has none. And if God teach us this important lesson by wrestling with us or placing us into a submission hold or putting His omnipotent hands on our head, while we spin our arms and fists in desperation; is He not to be praised? The fact is, there are times when we need to wrestle with God in prayer; times when God must tenderly hurt us in order to heal us. Yet, He always knows how much to hurt; how long to wrestle; and how far to push us backward before boosting us forward into His embrace—just as He did with Jacob.

God's Infinite Strength

God graciously wrestled with Jacob from darkness to daybreak. But let's be honest: God could have won the wrestling match without wrestling at all. He proved that by dislocating Jacob's hip with a single touch. For anyone to purposely oppose such power is foolish and destructive; the reason why the author of Hebrews warned: **"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,"** Hebrews 10:31. Conversely, to rely on God's infinite strength is to undertake every God-pleasing endeavor with absolute confidence—from crossing the Jabbok to repairing a marriage.

Victory Through Faith

According to Genesis 32:25, **"When the Man saw that He could not overpower him, He touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the Man."** This is a remarkable verse. Is it teaching us that the omnipotent God was unable to overpower Jacob; a mortal man with a sinful nature and a past history of personal schemes and failures? Of course not. Rather, through that long night of wrestling, God was teaching Jacob that the way to hold onto Him was by faith, not by human strength or ingenuity.

Jacob said to God, **"I will not let You go unless You bless me."** Surely, this is the language of faith. Faith which trusts in God despite outward appearances. Faith which says "God loves me" in the good times, and goes on saying "God loves me" during the bad times. Faith is what enabled Jacob to 'win' his wrestling match with God. It's not that he overpowered God, but that God in grace allowed him to win. The same is true of us. John wrote: **"This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith,"** 1 John 5:4.

Becoming Better Wrestlers

I can't say I've ever enjoyed wrestling with God. However, I can say that each time He has wrestled with me, called me out, crouched into a wrestling stance, and pinned me down, I have become a better wrestler. Better by realizing how involved He is in my life. Better by relying on His strength. Better by remembering He is in charge. And better by expecting that, in the end, no matter how long the match or how fierce the bout, God will let me win. And if it takes a 'limp' to remind me of this, praise His holy name.

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