

Last week we began a new sermon series for the Fall called, “A Beatitude Legacy,” which is a follow-up to our summer series on the Beatitudes. We’re going to continue exploring the idea of having a Beatitude impact by looking at some characters in the Old Testament who, in a way, foreshadowed Jesus’ teachings.

Characters who didn’t conform to the patterns of the world but rather were acting and speaking out of a desire to live under God’s Kingdom realities. Characters who allowed the Kingdom of heaven to break through them.

Characters who—unknowingly—foreshadowed the coming of Christ Himself.

So we’re turning again this morning to a story in Genesis. **Genesis 32:22-32.**

Now, this is a fairly familiar passage, but key to understanding it is knowing what came before.

Just prior to this passage, back in Gen. 32, Jacob has sent messengers over to his brother Esau, with a message that’s basically meant to butter Esau up. I’ve got cattle, donkeys, sheep, and goats to offer you, and I’m sending this message ahead of time so that hopefully I can find favour with you.

Because remember—Jacob has no reason to think that Esau wants anything to do with him. Back in Genesis 27, Jacob stole Esau’s birthright blessing in collaboration with his mother Rebecca. And the text says (v. 41) that Esau was planning to kill his brother after the death of their father, Isaac.

Now, you don’t easily get over wanting to kill someone. That’s pretty angry. It’s been years since that event, but Jacob has not seen Esau since—and so the desire for revenge could still be very real.

So when Jacob hears back from the messengers that Esau is coming to meet him with *400 men*, he likely had a mild panic attack. So what he does is he splits up all of the people who are with him—family, servants, etc.—into two groups so that if one is attacked the other can escape. He’s assuming the worst here.

But then look at what he does. He takes his grief before God.

*“Then Jacob prayed, ‘O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, LORD, you who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper.’ I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant.... Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’”*

Have you ever noticed how often in Scripture people repeat back to God what He’s promised them? Almost like they’re trying to remind themselves, or to even remind God, *this is what you said.*

You said, “I will make you prosper.” Twice Jacob says that. In Beatitude language, Jacob comes before God with a poverty of spirit and with meekness, but most notably he comes hungering after righteousness with God. Hungering for right-relationship with God. (Hold onto that.)

And what’s the result? Now we get to today’s text. Jacob sends everyone on ahead of him so that he’s alone. And then *God comes to find him*—in the form of a man—and wrestles with him.

Why does God come to wrestle with Jacob. Because I don’t think we’re talking about a playful kind of wrestling, or even the kind of wrestling we see on TV.

According to Old Testament scholar Claus Westerman, the tone here is meant to suggest a surprise attack resembling almost a robbery or murder. In other words, the man didn’t casually come up to Jacob and say, “Hey, you wanna wrestle?” It’s very possible that he actually keeps his identity secret.

And perhaps—at least at the start—Jacob really didn’t know who it was who had approached him. There was no such thing as light pollution back then, and if the moon was behind the clouds, it was probably pretty dark.

Maybe Jacob thought it was Esau. I mean, if you didn’t know this story and didn’t have the subtitle giving information, you might very well think that it was Esau too. That would be the logical assumption, right?

Maybe Esau had secretly crossed the Jabbok River and surprised Jacob with a sneak attack in order to catch him off guard. And maybe that’s why Jacob says in v. 26, “*I will not let you go unless you bless me.*”

He wants to find favour with Esau. He thinks he needs this from Esau, in order for there to be peace between them.

Regardless, whatever is going through Jacob’s mind in these hours of wrestling, it does seem clear that the man’s identity is a gradual revelation. Because when the mysterious figure asks Jacob for his name, and then gives Jacob a *new* name, Israel, which means ‘he struggled with *God*,’ all of a sudden Jacob needs some clarification.

Vs. 29: “*Please tell me your name,*” he says. But very likely, by now, he already knows the answer. The one who he truly needed to wrestle with and gain a blessing from wasn’t Esau, but God. God, who took the initiative to come to Jacob when he needed it most.

As OT Scholar Joyce Baldwin put it, “When it comes to dealings with God, though we may think that we took the initiative, we find that He was there first....”

Jacob needed to know that God was all over this situation with his brother Esau. Jacob's fear of Esau was overwhelming him. All of the goats and sheep and cows in the world couldn't fix what Jacob had done to Esau.

He needed, once again, to receive affirmation of *God's* blessing. He had prayed for it earlier and reminded himself of it. But the prayer clearly wasn't enough.

Jacob had not yet fully surrendered himself to God's faithfulness. His trust needed to be sharpened. It had been twenty years since he last saw Esau, and his life had now come to this climactic moment.

Would Jacob walk away in fear, or would he wrestle it out? Similar to the question we asked in our story of Abraham last week, who's really on trial here? Is it the Lord's faithfulness that's really in question? Or is the focus on the transformation that happens in Jacob?

Because what ends up happening? Jacob had sought and hungered for right-relationship with God, in his prayer, and in-so-doing he received three things: 1) a limp, 2) the courage necessary to approach Esau, and 3) the blessing of seeing God face-to-face.

Why does God give him a limp? Well again, this whole encounter seems to be a way for God to really get at Jacob's fears and confront them head-on.

You've been jostling with me in prayer long enough. You've been carrying the weight of your betrayal for twenty years. Your fear has been festering for twenty years.

Now I need you to *actually* wrestle with this. Will you trust me?

Wrenching Jacob's hip was like the last trial, the final effort to test Jacob's trust. A very painful lesson, but if you know the story of Jacob, you know that he was a stubborn man. And it sometimes takes dramatic events for God to get through to us.

Jacob walks away from this encounter with God with a limp—which doesn't *feel* like a blessing, but it was perhaps the only way that Jacob could truly realize that he was *not meant to do this in his own strength*. And there are plenty of other instances in Scripture where God acts this way, so it shouldn't really surprise us.

God never asked Jacob to approach Esau on his own. And his limp is now the physical and constant reminder that God is in fact with Him. It's the evidence of what God has done *in* him. Of the effort it took to re-focus Jacob and put him in the right wrestling match.

His fight, ultimately, was not with Esau. He needed to wrestle with *God*. And it took a wound in order for that message to get across.

Are we okay with the idea that sometimes God allows us to experience pain in order for us to recognize that our struggle is really with Him? That pain, as C.S. Lewis once put it, is “God’s mouthpiece to the world,” a tool that God uses in order to get our attention?

There’s a book in the Chronicles of Narnia series called “Voyage of the Dawn Treader.” And in the book, there’s a character by the name of Eustace, a little snot of a child who doesn’t ever want to help his friends or do any work.

And at one point, Eustace—in his stubbornness—goes off on his own, against the wishes and warnings of his friends. He comes across the skin of a dragon, and he puts it on himself in order to play a prank on his friends. But he ends up actually transforming into a dragon—as if the dragon skin is indicative of his inner spirit which has now overcome him.

Now, what happens is that Aslan the lion—who represents the character of Christ—needs to intervene and slowly scrape off with his claws the dragon’s skin, which is an incredibly painful experience for Eustace. Aslan has to slowly and painfully peel it off of Eustace’s body. But as he does so, the young child underneath is slowly revealed.

And once the peeling is complete, Aslan puts Eustace in a well of water, and he comes out of the water clean and glowing. He’s a new and transformed version of himself.

Was it painful? Yes. But it was the only way.

Just like a Potter needs, on occasion, to smush the clay down in order to reshape it, similarly God is not content to leave us stuck in our ways and overwhelmed by our own versions of stubborn fear.

Jacob walked away from his encounter with a limp. And he was nearer to God because of it.

Because the very next thing that happens in the next chapter is that Jacob’s fear has been overcome. He isn’t waiting for Esau to come to him, with his army of 400 men. Jacob goes on ahead to Esau, limping—of course—as evidence of his wrestling with God, and demonstrates again a poverty of spirit in bowing down before his brother—on the ground, not just once but seven times.

*Now* he knows that as he walks in obedience, God will take care of the rest. *Now* he has the courage to trust God fully with the outcome of this situation. *Now* He can fully depend on God’s might to handle the might of his brother Esau because he’s relying on *God’s* blessing over him rather than trying to figure this out on his own.

*Now* he’s prepared to be a peacemaker and to have a Kingdom of God impact.

This past week, there was a terrible tragedy that happened down on the States. A young man by the name of Charlie Kirk—a political activist and husband and dad of two young kids—was assassinated while speaking on a university campus. It's been all over social media.

And over the last few days, I have literally read posts or news feeds that span all the way from absolute vitriol against the man because of his right ring views, all the way to heralding him as a modern-day Christian martyr.

Now, when these kinds of events happen, and opinions are all over the place, it's very easy for us to react or repost something that aligns with whatever our own views are. Whether that's wanting to grieve the accident itself, grieve the violence in the United States, or grieve the different ideologies.

But this is where we have to draw to mind the importance of seeking a Beatitude logic. Right? Those steps that we talked about a number of weeks ago. To go through the series of eight Beatitudes and ask ourselves, "Okay, now how do I approach the situation?"

Because it's very easy for media to shape the way that we think. And these days the culture wants us to be reactive. That's why social media continues to be the main means of communication and journalism. Because everything now is about getting a response or a reaction.

But *how* are we called to react according to the Beatitude logic that has been given to us? What does having a poverty of spirit look like? Or a heart that mourns and grieves before God, a heart of meekness and hungering for righteousness, for purity, for peace no matter how much we might get push back simply because it's strange and not how others do things?

I mean, look at Jacob. Jacob—in an incredibly vulnerable and frightening situation—sought to understand his situation from the perspective of God. To look at it with the Lord's eyes. To wrestle until he could truly and courageously act in a way that was in alignment with God's will.

And look at how Esau responds as a result. In 33:4 – *"But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept."*

It kind of reminds me of the story of the prodigal in Luke 15, where the disobedient son who completely betrays his father and squanders his money comes home in grief and is met by a merciful father, rushing at him and embracing him.

Esau, in a small but beautiful way, has been inspired to demonstrate the love of God to his brother, something that Jacob would never have expected, but God already knew.

Proverbs 3:5 says this, *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding...."* We often have no idea what leaning on and submitting to God's understanding can do for our own

spirits, not to mention what God may already be doing to pave the way for things to just work out.

And it's this kind of reliance and dependence and obedience on God's way of understand that opens up heaven's gates and let's Christ's Kingdom realities break through.

Because look at what Jacob says to Esau later on. *"If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face [Esau] is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably."*

Jacob had just seen God face-to-face during the night, back in chapter 32. That's what the text says. He saw God face-to-face. And now to see Esau receiving him with such mercy is like seeing that same face. God's face. God's favour.

Right there is the evidence that *God has been all over this situation*. God has done it. Heaven's realities have come down and had an impact.

Which is why at the end of chapter 33, Jacob sets up an altar and calls it *El Elobe Israel*, which means, "Mighty is the God of Israel." Mighty is the God of Israel. 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of armies in Zech. 4:6.

This is Jacob's legacy for us today. That he sought and sought and sought after God with everything—holding out the fear and the unknowns—and seeking after *God's* blessing. Hungering for *God's* blessing. Knowing all that God had promised, he kept making himself available to the only One he knew was mighty enough to handle the situation.

And God met him in that place. Yes, it took some wrestling. Yes, he was wounded as a result. And yes, he wore the scars of that encounter for the rest of his life.

But by those scars he was healed. In woundedness and pain there is opportunity for transformation.

And so my encouragement to you today is this: don't be afraid to walk with a limp. Don't be afraid of weakness or fragility. It is God's might, not your own, that matters. Whatever it is that is causing you fear today, let Him meet you in that place and wrestle with you.

Because your weakness or your limp could be the very thing that God uses to bring healing. It does seem to be a key principle in Scripture that scars have the capacity to heal.

By *His* wounds, *we* are healed. Know what Jesus' might has done for you. Let Him do His work. Because by His might, the mountains will move. By his strength the conflicts will see peace.

In Him, your fear will see God's face.