

Jesus, the Great Hunter

by Gayle Erwin

Jesus is a great hunter who seeks and saves the lost, and his love and forgiveness can change our lives and lead us to serve others.

Duration: 56:22

Scripture: Genesis 2:8, Matthew 6:33, Luke 19:1-4, Luke 19:10

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Jacob wrestling with an angel. Jacob wrestles with the angel all night and neither of them prevails. The angel shrivels Jacob's hip, but Jacob refuses to let the angel leave until he blesses him. Jacob then confesses his past wrongdoings and promises to make amends. The preacher emphasizes that Jacob's encounter with the angel shows his transformation and salvation, as he chooses to prioritize eternal things over worldly possessions.

Transcript

There is a verse of scripture that I think ought to be at the beginning of every book of the Bible. In fact, I really think it ought to be at the beginning of every chapter of the Bible because it so thoroughly, so well condenses what God is up to. And it's the 19th chapter of Luke, verse 10.

You know it actually by heart. Luke 19.10 says, for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. Oh, he's come to seek.

He's a hunter. Well, we could have known that. After all, he is the lion of the tribe of Judah.

And lions are pretty good hunters. In fact, one great poet described him as the hound of heaven. I like that.

A friend of mine told me that a bloodhound can track you if there's only one part per million of odor in the air. I think I lay down more odor than that. Now, I doubt very seriously, it would seem incredible that there could be anybody here tonight who is running from God.

If you are, what a strange place to hide. He knows you're here. He followed you.

In fact, it may even be as you drove here tonight, in the distance you could hear him. Maybe even as you came in the door, you heard him. He's a good hunter.

Well, just how good a hunter? Well, let's find out. Let's read a hunting story in the scripture. I love the Bible.

It is so complete. Whatever you need, there it is. Tonight, it's field and stream, okay? Go back to Luke chapter 19, verse 1. A hunting story.

Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. Now, that's the Bible's way of saying he was hot on a trail, okay? Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. Ah, now we know who the prey is.

Who was a chief tax collector. Our favorite sort of person. And he was very rich.

You might know. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. Now you know why I've chosen to speak of this man tonight.

So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was going to pass that way. Now we've got him treed. I want you to put yourself in for a moment in Zacchaeus' shoes.

Just think about this. This is an incredible moment. Here you are.

You're wealthy. Probably the wealthiest man in town. You're unquestionably the best dressed man in town.

You certainly are the best known man in town. You're a man of dignity. You are suave and debonair.

Maybe even suave and deboner. I don't know. And you're up a tree.

I've never thought of that with such dignity. Here I am up a tree. I don't believe this.

What am I doing in this tree? Well, I'll climb high enough. Maybe nobody will notice me up here. Now, I don't believe this tree was in the middle of the road.

Roads and trees don't tend to get along with each other very well. It was probably over to the side, and he thought, ah, here's a good safe place. I can observe what's going on and not be observed.

And so here comes Jesus, the great hunter, walking along the street, and Zacchaeus says, all right. Yeah. And then Jesus turns, and uh-oh.

He's headed my way. I can see Jesus stopping under that tree and going, I smell a sinner. And then, and I love this, it says, when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and saw him and said to him.

Now, before I read what he said, I just want you to notice what he didn't say. He did not say, to whom it may concern in trees, nor did he say, if you're up a tree today, I'm speaking to you. He was such a good hunter.

He was very specific. He says, Zacchaeus. Now put yourself back in Zacchaeus.

I mean, you can't even say, who me? That's how good a hunter Jesus is. In fact, think about this. I don't know your story.

Each of you is a book and a trophy of the Lord. But what about the story of how you became a follower of the Lord? Maybe it was here. And maybe you came some service, perhaps in the week, maybe on a

Sunday, and you came under protest.

You didn't want to, but your friends said, come and you just didn't have a way out. Or your spouse said, this is it, you're coming. You come in and you find a safe seat somewhere.

And then Pastor Chuck gets up, opens the word and starts reading. And you think, somebody told on me. How did he know? At least he's not using my name.

It's as if the word of God is this huge gun, man. And when you get here, it goes off. And here comes this great big bullet right at you.

And it's slow, but it doesn't fall. It keeps coming. And as it gets close, you look and your name is written all over it.

He looks up, Zacchaeus. Is he a hunter? Is he a hunter? Make haste and come down for today I must stay at your house. Now, put yourself back in Zacchaeus' shoes.

You're a man who is wealthy, well known, well dressed, man of dignity, suave and debonair. You have just been caught up a tree. And you've been invited by an itinerant evangelist to come down so he can go home with you.

Not your normal first order of business. But something happened. It says, so he made haste and came down and received him joyfully, gladly.

I don't know why, but somehow it seems to me that there must be a space of time within this word, and. What was it about Jesus? What was it that caused even the worst of sinners to say to him, boy, I'm glad you're here. There was something about the way he treated people, something about the way he viewed them, something about the way he approached them that the worst of people would say, boy, I'm glad you're here.

They don't always say that to me. But I want them to. Somehow I want the nature of Jesus working in me in a way so strongly so that I view people the way Jesus views them, love them the way he loves them, see them the way he sees them, so that I treat them in ways that even the worst of sinners would say to me, boy, I'm glad you're here.

I want that. Well, Zacchaeus was not the only person in this story. There were some others here.

Have you ever wondered who they was? Have you ever heard someone say, well, they say? And you wonder, well, who is they? Well, now we know. We have a they in our story. It says, but when they saw it, they all complained, began to mutter and complain, saying he's gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.

Isn't gossip wonderful? Now, come on, folks, we may as well admit it. We kind of like gossip. Come on.

If someone says to me, hey, Gail, have you heard the latest? I'll say no. What? It is amazing how we like to latch on to the latest thing and hear these people are talking. We had such hopes for him.

We thought maybe he would be the Messiah boy. And now he's gone to be the guest of a sinner. Who can you trust anymore? Folks, I don't understand this, because frankly, if there's anyone we want to have get saved, it's a tax collectors.

Well, meanwhile, back at the farm. Verse eight, then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor. Wow, this was a very present thing.

He says, I'm doing it right now. Incredible. This lets me know that this man had been in the presence of Jesus.

When have you ever been at a party where the host got up and said this has been such a great party? I think right now, in honor of all that's going on, I'm going to give half of my goods to the poor. You've never been at such a party, have you? This man has been in the presence of Jesus. This man had touched eternity.

For the first time in his life, he was interested in others. Always before it was how much can I get? What can you do for me? How can I gain this? But now for the first time in his life, he's thinking, how can I help someone else? That lets me know that he had touched Jesus. Because something happens when you get to know him, your value system changes, doesn't it? Can you remember how it was for you before you became a Christian? Remember what you thought of Christians? Remember how absolutely unbelievable you thought it was that someone would take Thursday to come to church? And then you met the great hunter and suddenly you love these people that you once thought were wimps.

You can't understand it. You can't wait to get here. Something messed up your value system, didn't it? This man, Zacchaeus, had been in touch with Jesus because for the first time he was thinking servant.

He was thinking other-centered. He wasn't thinking about himself. And do you realize when he gets up and says, here and now, Lord, right now, I give half of my goods to the poor.

This man who before had been the most hated man in town is now the most loved man in town. Amazing. But he's not through.

He's not through. He says, and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, you know he had. I restore fourfold or I'll give back four times the amount.

Well, there goes the other half of his goods. Folks, this man got saved. I mean, seriously, saved.

See, he knew that some things are not as valuable as other things. And in the presence of Jesus, there are some things that are eternal and there are other things that burn. And he chose to go for the eternal.

Well, Jesus said to him, today bankruptcy. No, no, no, no, that's not what he said. It's not what it says.

He says, today salvation has come to this house because he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. Is he ever a hunter? In fact, let me tell you another hunting story.

It's a personal one, a true one. My father was a pastor and he was where we lived at that point, taking some flying lessons at a little community airport because he wanted to go back into the interior of the state where we lived to begin some additional churches. One day when he went to the little community airport for his regular lesson, a training plane from a nearby air force base landed there.

It wasn't supposed to do that. The pilot got out, chatted with my dad and the other fellows in the hangar, said to my dad, have you ever rode in one of these training planes? He said, no, I haven't. Would you like to? Well, sure.

Hop in. He wasn't supposed to offer my father a ride. My father was not supposed to accept it, but he did and he did.

Well, this hotshot pilot did not use adequate amount of runway, but he did manage to get airborne but was unable to clear the top of some trees beyond the end of the runway. He hit them and the plane crashed. Life was changed for us all at that point.

The pilot was not badly injured, but my father was. From then on, his left side was paralyzed. His brain was badly damaged.

Well, the air force was upset by this and they were going to throw this pilot into prison for 25 years for having done this, but my dad was cut just a little different from the average and he went to bat for the man and said to them, look, I got into the plane voluntarily. Don't be so rough on him. So they gave this pilot a dishonorable discharge, which is pretty bad in itself.

Well, we were penniless. So we went to the air force and said, can you help us? And they said, no, this man was not doing air force business when this occurred, so we're not responsible. Now it became a civil liability case.

The pilot was responsible and he knew it. So he disappeared. Well, my parents began to hunt him.

It took a year before they found him and we needed the help of our congressmen. You see, this was before the days of computers. They know where you are now.

Finally, we found him and they wrote him a letter and it went something like this. Sir, it seems to us that you are running from us and we really don't want you to live that way. Please know that we forgive you and we hold you to be without liability.

You owe us nothing. My wife and I have both signed this letter so that you can live free. We only ask that you let us know that you received it.

There was no answer. A couple of months later, they wrote him again, another letter, just like the first one. This one, though, came back stamped across the front, moved, left no forwarding address.

He was running. Well, they started hunting him again. Took another year.

Once again, it took the help of the government. We finally found him and he had moved quite a distance away. My parents wrote him another letter.

Sir, obviously you are running from us and we really do not want you to live that way. Please, please know we forgive you and we hold you to be without liability. You owe us nothing.

We forgive you completely and my wife and I are signing this one again so you will know. We just ask that you respond. Let us know you've received it.

There was no answer. Two months later, they wrote him again, just like the first. This one, like the other, came back stamped on the front, moved, left no forwarding address.

He was running. That was the last time my parents ever tried to find him. So somewhere in this country, someone is still running, terrified that I might find him.

Maybe you're here tonight. And yet you hold in your hands all you need to live free, written over and over, and yet you don't believe it and won't receive it. As I pondered that story, it dawned on me that there are millions more in our land running from God, terrified that God might find them.

And yet you hold in your hand all you need to live free. You just don't believe it and won't receive it. The Bible.

Well, there is a question and it's a good question and one we need to deal with. What will he do to you if he catches you? That's a valid question. Maybe where you work, when you became a Christian, you know what your co-workers likely said? Oh, you got religion.

See, they never say, oh, you became a Christian or you're a follower of God now. No, they don't say words like that. They say, oh, you got religion.

Well, now they're going to scrunch your face up so that you look like all those other Christians out there. They'll say that, won't they? Well, they'll say something like this. Uh-huh.

Got religion? Oh, well, the party's over. You've been having fun till now, but now no more fun because you got religion. They say that, don't they? Fun.

Fun. I was flying back from London recently and on the plane was a football team. For some reason or other, I took up with them.

Got involved in a conversation. They were telling me about how much fun they had in London the night before. Man, they said, did we have fun? We had fun.

I mean, we had so much fun and I thought, fun? Fun? Man, I had so much fun last Wednesday. Of course, my wife's left me and I've lost my house and my family, but boy, did I have fun. Fun? Fun? Folks, it's hard for us to explain this to people, isn't it? But we have a secret.

We know that when you become a follower of Jesus, that's when the fun begins. That's when the party starts, you know. I find myself sometimes at night, I have to massage my cheeks, man, because I've been smiling so much, you know.

And when I wake up tomorrow, I don't have to think, boy, what did I do yesterday? Oh, man. No, I know, and I can massage them again. I'm so happy.

We tell the world that, but they don't believe it, do they? Well, it still is a valid question. Just what will he do with you if he catches you? You see, Satan has managed to give God all the bad press, even an insurance. Have you ever heard of acts of God? What are they? Earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes.

Way to go, God. So it's understandable that people might be just a little terrified about what he might do if he catches us. Well, let me tell you another story.

That will help you understand. This one is also a true story, even more personal than the other. I must confess something to you now that I don't want to, but I have to.

There have been two people in my life whom I hated. I hate to admit that, but it's true. They were uncles of mine.

One of them was named Raymond, and the other one was named Austin. What can I say? I hated them. Now, the problem with hatred is it's a form of bondage, and God doesn't want his kids in bondage.

He wants us living free, and so if there are areas of bondage in your life, he goes to work on them. But, you know, something else I really love about God is he works with you, and he loves you, and he sticks with you even when you resist. Have you noticed that? I tried to resist, but I found it difficult.

The Lord's prayer was a real problem to me. Oh, most of it I liked, especially, forgive us our debts. As we forgive those who are debtors who sin against us? And Raymond and Austin would pop into my mind.

And you know, there are certain portions of scripture you just know, don't read that. You avoid it. Oh, I managed to avoid it as much as possible, and then there's another thing that happens.

Sometimes you accidentally read the Bible. Love your enemies. Oh! Do good to those who spitefully use you.

Oh! Pray for your enemies. Oh! Well, I knew I had to do it. I knew I had to pray for them.

But I must also confess to you now that my early praying was not very mature. It went something like this. God, you said vengeance was yours.

You would repay. Get him! But God wouldn't let me get away with that either. And I knew that I had to pray the kind of prayer for them that I would want prayed for myself.

So I began to pray, Oh, Father, do good things for these men. Draw them to you. You see, Austin had been the first Irwin ever to become a Christian, but he had drifted away from God.

And his third state was worse than his first. And Raymond too had been a follower of the Lord, and he had drifted away. And so I prayed, Father, just draw them to you.

Fill them with the knowledge of you and your will. Just shower them with your love. Bless them, God.

Overwhelm them with how good you are. Prosper them. He did.

Both of these men came back to the Lord. There was reunion and reconciliation in our family. It was an awesome thing.

I'm overwhelmed by it. But one thing I noticed is that as I began to pray this, I didn't hate them anymore. I could say the Lord's prayer.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And I would have to think, who are they? Raymond and Austin would no longer pop into my mind. In fact, to my absolute amazement, I discovered that I loved them.

I knew that was God. Well, I thought the story was over. But it wasn't.

You see, a few years later, God had called me into this kind of ministry. I was graduating from college. I was married.

We had a one-year-old daughter named Gloria. I made a dumb decision. It wasn't my first dumb one or my last dumb one, but it was a dumb one.

I decided that we would travel across the United States and I would preach at churches for a week at a time. Now, folks, there's not a heavy demand for a kid fresh out of college to come and teach for a week anywhere. What I'm trying to say is I was basically unemployed.

You know who saved my life? It was Raymond. Raymond was a farmer and he said, Hey, Gail, I need help on my farm. You can plow for me.

I'll pay you. I've got a place for you to stay. You can eat at my table.

I'll take care of you until somebody wants you. And I thought, this is incredible. God, here you've let Raymond save my life.

Wow. What a beautiful symbol of your restoration. You did this, didn't you? Yep.

I thought so. Well, I thought the story was over, but it wasn't. About 16 years ago, my father passed away.

A couple of years later, my mother married again. I performed the ceremony, by the way. And at the close of it, I wanted to say, I now declare you mom and dad.

She married one of the finest men I have ever met in my life. He is a jewel. He is so much like Jesus.

It's scary. I love this man. He's about six feet, six inches tall, too, and very slender.

And when I introduced him as my dad, they look at him and they look at me and then they look at me and say, what happened, Gail? Radiation, radiation. That's all I can say. His name happens to be Raymond.

Not the same Raymond, but it's Raymond. And I thought, this is incredible, God. Here you've given me a man whom I call dad, whom I love deeply, and his name is Raymond.

What a beautiful symbol of your restoration. You did this, didn't you? Yep. I thought so.

Well, I thought the story was over. But it wasn't. You see, there's Austin.

Now, we had been reconciled, but I had lost track of Austin. He had moved to Northwest Arkansas, and I never got into that area. Didn't know exactly where he lived.

Hadn't seen him for years. One day, I happened to be teaching in that area. I didn't even know how to get in touch with him.

Had no idea if he knew where I was. But when I stood up to speak that night, there he was. I couldn't believe it.

He had never heard me teach before. When I finished, we made a beeline to each other, and you could hear that bear hug for miles. Man, I can feel it even now.

All that was past was past. We were brothers in the Lord. It was awesome.

It was awesome. Not long after that, Austin died, and I thought the story was over. But it wasn't.

You see, about two and a half years ago, my oldest daughter, Gloria, gave birth to her fourth child, a son, whom she named Austin Gale. She put our names together. I thought, this is incredible, God.

Every time I pick up this handsome, intelligent, outstanding young man and hold him, I think, Austin Gale. Oh, a grandson named Austin Gale. What an incredible symbol of your restoration, God.

You did this, didn't you? Yep. I thought so. You see, folks, when my daughter named him Austin Gale, she did not know the story that I just told you.

So a few months after his birth, I said, honey, sit down. I got to tell you a story. She said, okay, Daddy.

And I told her what I've just told you. She cried. She said, Daddy, I didn't know.

I said, I know, I know. That's what makes it so beautiful. This is God.

This is God. And I have these symbols of God's restoration in my life, and the freedom that he's given me. This is awesome.

Well, I thought the story was over. But it wasn't. You see, a few months later, I dedicated Austin Gale to the Lord.

I'll never forget that day. As I stood in front of the church where they attend and held him, I said, folks, all baby dedications are great, but this one has some special elements about it, and I need to tell you. And I told them Austin Gale's story.

When I finished, something dawned on me. You see, standing three steps to my left was my stepdad, Raymond. He had flown out for this event, and he did not know his story.

So I said, there's another story I want to tell you. And I told them Raymond's story. Folks, we were melted cheese all over the floor.

And I said, I just want you to see what happens when the great lion of the tribe of Judah, when the hound of heaven catches you, when you give up, you discover what happens. It is an amazing thing when you say to him, I give up. He lunges at you, this lion, with that mouth wide open and those horrible teeth come at you, and you hear this sickening crunch.

And then you discover he just ate my chains. He eats chains. So that's what happens when he catches you.

Yes. It's called freedom. Let me tell you another story.

Is it okay? It's a Bible story. You'll find it in Genesis. It's a guy there in Genesis with a terrible name.

They named people back in Old Testament days in keeping with who they really were. So that if you knew a person's name and the meaning of the name, you knew the person. We don't do that anymore today.

We just sort of flip through baby books until we find a name that sounds good. And we name our children that way. For instance, my parents named me Gail, which means a big win.

So obviously parents. Well, anyway, this guy's name, and I want you to know that if you're named anything like this fellow, that we've redeemed the name. It doesn't have that meaning anymore.

But back then, it was a terrible name, loosely translated. His name meant dirty, sneaky thief. Now, how would you like to grow up with a name like that? You go to school and they call the role dirty, sneaky thief.

You grow up and go to the bank to get a loan to go into business. And your name, sir, a dirty, sneaky thief. Now, you know who I'm talking about? Jacob.

And he lived up to his name and dirty, sneaky thief, his brother Esau out of the birthright. Esau is furious. He's going to kill him.

Now, where does Jacob go now? He has one name on his resume. Esau, just check with him. He can tell you about my work habits.

Well, he went to live. He ran away and went to live with his uncle Laban, who was just like him. It was perfect.

They deserved each other. And for 20 years, they dirty, sneaky thief each other to a fare thee well. Laban had to be pretty good to sneak the wrong wife in on him after seven years of hard labor, you know.

But finally, after 20 years, Laban says, that's it. I can't stand it anymore. Leave me.

So Jacob left him and took just about everything Laban owned with him. And his wife Rachel, who had learned from both her father and her husband very cleverly, escaped with the most valuable item in the house. Now, where do you go? Where do you go? You've got two names on your resume.

Esau and Laban. Just check with them. They can tell you about my work habits.

Well, God had said to Jacob, go home. I'll bless you. That's all God said.

Has God ever spoken to you and you wished he'd give you more details? He always tells us as much as we need. He says, go home. I'll bless you.

I'm amazed, though, at how... I want details, God. I want more specifics. It's amazing to me how we want... I want all the rules.

I just want to hear all the rules. And there's some people that won't read the Bible because they say, well, there's too many rules in there. You expect me to read all those rules and learn those rules and I get tired at the begins anyway.

You know, there's something about us human beings. I'm fascinated. How many rules does it take before we break them? You go back to the very beginning.

Wasn't it beautiful? Oh, it was beautiful. God plants this incredible garden. The Garden of Eden.

I don't know how big it was. Let's assign a size. A hundred square miles.

Okay. Just for the fun of it. How many trees can you get in a hundred square miles? Billions.

And folks, they were all edible. They didn't have to worry about it. God says everything, everything in the garden is edible.

In fact, he says it's all for you. And in the whole... with billions of trees, there's only one tree. Just one that I don't want you to eat.

That's all. I said, really? Where is it? Now, folks, it can't get any simpler than that, can it? One rule, only one rule. The very next scene in scripture, Adam and Eve are sitting under that tree.

Doesn't want us to eat that, huh? I wonder why. I have some dear friends who told me this story. The man and his wife were going out for an evening together.

Much needed evening together. They had left their three-year-old daughter with a babysitter or had hired a babysitter for her. And my friend says, I don't believe I said what I said.

He says, I'm an intelligent man. I know better than to say this. But he says, as I walked out the door, and I can't believe I said this.

I turned to my daughter and said, don't push any beans up your nose while we're gone. She wouldn't have thought of it. But now, now she's thinking, why? And you know the rest of the story.

When they get home, the first item of business is to hurry to the emergency room to get beans out of her nose. There's something about us human beings. When someone says, don't, we say, don't what? So Adam and Eve really had it simple, folks.

And I want you to understand that when the Bible says, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, it knows what it is talking about. Well, anyway, back to Jacob. He heads home.

But just before he gets home, his scouts come back with some news. Your brother Esau is just over the hill with an army. Now, that's known as bad news.

Here he is caught between the FBI and the IRS. Life is over and he knows it. There is no place for him to run.

This is it. This is it. You ever been at a place like that in your life? Well, he sends gifts over to Esau.

He sends his That night, Jacob was alone with himself. What a thing to be alone with when you're a dirty, sneaky thief. I had a philosopher once ask me, have you ever knocked at your own door and found yourself not home? That was the situation with this guy.

As we say, the lights were on, but nobody was home. Now, put yourself in his shoes. Life is really over for you.

You have messed it up as thoroughly as it can be. You have no options. You're alone in the wilderness.

It's dark. And suddenly, into your scene, an angel. Now, when I say the word angel, what tends to pop into your mind? Do you see big, bright? Well, the Bible never really describes angel that way, but it's okay.

Except now, I need to play with your thinking just a little bit. I want to say another word, and what pops into your mind? Wrestler. Different, huh? Cauliflower ears, tank top, shorts.

Well, this angel was a wrestler, see? So you have to adjust your view of angel a bit. I don't think he had wings. That wouldn't have counted.

That wouldn't be fair. Oh, but I need to play with your thinking a little bit more. When I say the word Jesus, what comes into your mind? Do you see just like the angel, no wings? Well, many people believe, and I believe this, that this was a pre-fleshly appearance of Jesus.

So now, can you see Jesus? Tank top, shorts, cauliflower ears. When I get to heaven, I hope they have an instant replay machine up there. I want to see this.

I want to see what made Jacob take him on. See if it were me, and I'm there as despondent as that, and a wrestler suddenly shows up and says, let's wrestle. I'd say, you've got to catch me first.

But he took him on. Any of you guys here wrestle in high school or college? Any old wrestlers here? Okay, when a match goes the distance, how long does it last? Six minutes. How do you feel at the end of six minutes? Dead.

Wasted. These guys wrestled all night long, and it was a draw. Neither prevailed.

The angel had even shriveled his hip, and Jacob's still fighting. Come on, I'll fight you. Finally, Jacob did what might have been the most intelligent thing he did in his whole life.

He gave up. Now, you can miss this if you're not careful in scripture. You see, the angel was prepared to leave, and Jacob said, no, you must not leave here until you bless me.

Now, in that day, a contest like this, the winner would give a gift to the loser, because the giving of gifts was a show of strength. And the winner was the stronger, so he would give a gift to the loser. So that back then, if you had a trophy case full of trophies, well, here's where I lost to so-and-so, and here's where I lost to so-and-so.

And so, what Jacob is saying is, you win, I lose, and you must not leave here until you declare yourself winner and give me a gift. Bless me. The angel said, okay.

What's your name? Oh, man. Dirty, sneaky thief. You hate to admit it when you've fought that hard, you know.

The angel said, no more. From now on, your name is Israel, Prince of God, because you have wrestled with God and man and won. Wait a minute, Mr. Angel.

I just gave up, didn't I? Right. And now you're telling me I won, right? Right. Let's go through this one more time.

Folks, I have just shared with you one of the greatest secrets of Scripture. If you want to win with God, give up. I am amazed at how many times we wrestle with God, man.

It's just simple what he said for us to do, but we're going to wrestle as hard as we can and wrestle. And then we say, okay, I'm just coming on Easters and Christmases, all right? And we get all exhausted. What a waste of energy.

All we had to do was give up. And God says, congratulations, you won. Israel, Prince, Princess of God.

Any of you wrestling with God? Is he giving you a leaning or a push or a little word and you're saying, okay, God, have to talk this over. Maybe for 30 years, okay. There's a simple way to win.

Give up. What a waste of energy to wrestle with him. It may be that some of you here are running from God.

It's possible. Now, you need to know two things. First of all, you need to know that Jesus is not the only lion in the Bible.

There is another one. Peter tells us about him. He says, watch out, beware, be on your guard.

Your enemy, your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, goes to and fro seeking, aha, he's a hunter too, whom he may devour. So you have two lions chasing you. One wants to save you and the other one wants to devour you.

Which one do you want? The other thing you need to know is that the lion of the tribe of Judah, the hound of heaven, if you'll let me mix these together, is a lot more persistent than my parents were. He keeps hunting. He loves you so much, he will hunt, he will chase, he will follow you.

But you also need to know that he loves you so much, he will not catch you. You have to surrender. He does not violate people, but he does chase.

And you may run as far as you can. I have a friend, he got mad at God. I know that you never would, but he did.

And he got so mad at God, he says, I'm going to go and sin every sin I can think of. And he went out and he sinned every sin he could afford. And then he said, now, God, you'll leave me alone.

And then he heard it. And he discovered that the hound of heaven is so persistent. The guy's a pastor today.

I want you to know that if you're running from God, what a terrible thing to do with your life. Just run. You do strange things when you're running.

Nobody quite understands it. You don't even understand it. All you know is you do weird things when you're running all the time.

And the hound of heaven, the lion of the tribe of Judah, is chasing you. He knows what you smell like. You can't get away.

He will be there. And he simply waits for you to say, I give up. Yes, Lord, I give up.

Save me. And you know what? When you say that, you'll hear a roar. And you'll see this open mouth and these horrible teeth lunge at you.

And you'll hear a sickening crunch as those teeth chomp on your chains. And suddenly, you're free. Don't run.

Give up. Don't wrestle. Give up.

And then you will discover not only is he a good hunter, he's a good healer. In fact, there just isn't anything he can't do. And the only way you know is you give up.

Oh, Father, you're so good to us. Oh, I am overwhelmed, Father, that you would chase and chase because you love us so much. And yet your great love for us says you will not violate us.

We have to give up. Oh, Father, on behalf of myself, and I think I speak for these people, we give up. We ask you now to be king in our lives.

We're tired of running. We're tired of wrestling. We want you to be in complete control and charge.

We give up. Take over and make us like you. Amen.

God bless you. Have a great week. Post Office Box 219, Cathedral City, CA 92235 Or, you may call Servant Quarters toll free at 888-321-0077 You may also visit our website at www.servant.org

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