

Jacob - Gods Unchanging Grace - Genesis 25 - Sermon 4 of 5

by Roy Hession

Roy Hession's sermon on Jacob emphasizes the transformative power of God's grace through the struggles of life and the importance of surrendering to His will.

Duration: 47:57

Scripture: Genesis 32:26, Genesis 32:28, Matthew 15:23-24

Topics: "Grace"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the story of Jacob wrestling with a mysterious figure. Jacob wrestles with this figure, who is later revealed to be the Lord Jesus, and refuses to let him go until he receives a blessing. The speaker emphasizes that Jacob's determination to hold on to God and seek His blessing is a reflection of his understanding of God's grace and his own sinfulness. The sermon also touches on the importance of acknowledging our brokenness and relying on the blood of Jesus to prevail with God and with others.

Transcript

Genesis 32, 24 And there wrestled a man with him that night, until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh. And the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him.

And he said, the angel said, let me go for the day breaking. And Jacob said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. Extraordinary thing to expect blessing in situations like that.

We shall see what that means in a moment. And he said unto him, what is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel.

And the meaning of Israel is given in the next sentence. And I think we have to resort to the revised version here. It's quite obviously more accurate, it would seem, to the whole context.

For thou hast striven with God, and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him and said, tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, wherefore is it thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.

And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, which means the face of God. For he said, I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Peniel, the sun rose upon him, and he limped upon his thigh.

Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh unto this day. Because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, in the sinew that shrank. And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men.

And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids. And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, the least precious. And Leah and her children next.

And Rachel and Joseph, his most precious ones, hindermost. The idea being that they might possibly escape in the terrible conflict he was expecting. But oh, look at his action.

And he put himself last, so if anybody else gets caught, he'll be free. No, no, he would have done that in the old days. I wonder if he might not have even sacrificed Rachel for his own skin, but for what had just happened between him and God.

And he passed over before them. And look at this posture of his towards Esau. And he bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

And the result? And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept. And he lifted up his eyes, and he saw the women and the children. He said, Who are those with thee? He said, The children which God hath graciously given thy servant.

Then the handmaidens came near, they and their children, and they bowed themselves. And Leah also with her children came near, and bowed themselves. And after came Joseph near, and Rachel, and they bowed themselves.

And he said, What meanest thou by all this trove which I met? And he said, These are to find grace in the sight of my Lord. He could have spared himself it, because it wasn't necessary. God had done the work.

And he said, I have enough, my brother. Keep that that thou hast done to thyself. And Jacob said, Nay, I pray thee.

If now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand. For therefore, I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me. He had just seen the face of God, and was amazed that his life was preserved, that he was blessed.

And now he is seeing the face of man. And not only now is the face of God turned towards him, but to his amazement, the face of his brother too. Take, I pray thee, my blessing, my present that is brought to thee.

Because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough. And he urged him, and he took it. Now, I think the key verse in this big meeting that Jacob had with God face to face, is in verse 28, and the sentence that explains the new name.

For thou hast striven with God, and with man, and hast prevailed. Striving with God, and with man, had been what Jacob had been doing all his life. Striving to get blessing from God.

To get that birthright. And also striving with Esau, for when he was first born, trying to get one up on him. Striving with man, with Laban.

He'd been striving with God, and with man, all his life. But he had never prevailed. All he produced for himself by his efforts, were troubles.

And he made bitter enemies of others, by this striving about which we've been thinking in a previous morning. But now God says, you've got it. Jacob, you've got it at last.

You've striven with me. You've striven with men. And what you never found before, you've got it.

You have prevailed. What's happened? Has there been some extra special striving on Jacob's part? Has he tried harder? Has he thought up a better plan? Someone has said with Jacob, his first thought was always a plan. Ah, that he's got a better plan this time.

He's thought of all sorts of plans for getting through with God, and getting through with Esau. What is it that's different? It is different. It's striving, all right.

But it's the striving that does prevail with God, and with man. And if the story of Jacob has so much to teach us of the striving that doesn't prevail, it has tremendous lessons to teach us of the striving that does prevail. That striving with God that prevails with him.

And we win the blessing we've missed so long. And that striving with men, who've given us such trouble, and we prevail. Now there are two parts, I think we shall see, of this striving that does prevail.

And we're going to seek to see them as we look more closely at the story. Well, he'd sent his present on, and about all he could do. He was alone that night.

And suddenly outside his tent he hears a footfall. He goes out to see who it is, and there's a great shadowy figure there, who encompasses him in his arms. And this man is wrestling with him.

And Jacob being Jacob, he wrestles back. Who's this man? What's he doing here? And he wrestles. But he's meeting his match, almost.

There wrestled a man with him, till the breaking of the day. I believe this passage has challenged Bible students for many years. It's challenged me.

It's an extraordinary incident. Quite obviously it was meant to be symbolic to Jacob. Now there are many incidents in the Old Testament, which were strange plain incidents to the person's concern.

We preachers, centuries afterwards, see precious symbols and types in them. But of course it didn't mean that to the person concerned. But I'm quite sure God intended this experience for Jacob to be symbolic, as well as to us.

I think it literally happened. But it was obviously symbolic of something that God was doing in that man's life. Symbolic to Jacob, as well as to us who read the story afterwards.

And we're going to seek to see what is the symbol of, for Jacob as well as for us. But will you please notice how it begins. There wrestled a man with Jacob.

It wasn't Jacob wrestling with this man. But this man, utterly unsought, taking the initiative with Jacob. It doesn't teach how to be persistent in prayer, how to wrestle with God until you get the blessing.

It isn't us wrestling with God, it pictures, but God, all unsought, wrestling with us. There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. This fits my experience.

I used to think I had to wrestle with God. And there was a time when I was always pleading for God to work and for God to take the initiative, for God to do things and God to use me. I find much more, it's not me wrestling with God, it's Him wrestling with me.

All unsought. And I don't like it. And almost each week of this time at Clevedon, God's had something about which He's had to wrestle with me.

Maybe you've already been conscious of being in the arms of this divine man. And He's been wrestling with you. And like Jacob, you've been putting up, as I had so often, a pretty stiff resistance.

And there's been a wrestling match going on. With many of us, I'm quite sure. I also often seem to find myself in the arms of this man.

There are big jabox, but there are many subsequent jabox, I find. There wrestled a man with Jacob. This is the God of grace.

This is the one who's been putting His protective mantle over Jacob in spite of all his wrongs and not letting others touch Him. But grace is at last catching up with him. But it is grace.

It's not law. It's not the big stick. But Jacob knows little of that.

And he's putting up a resistance to this one. Now, who was this man? Well, Bible students, almost unanimously, have thought it could possibly be the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. There are strange appearances of the angel of the Lord, or the man here, in various parts of the Old Testament, as, for instance, that one who appeared as captor of the hosts of the Lord to Joshua before Jericho.

And it is thought very likely that these were occasions when the Eternal Son, the Lord Jesus, anticipated His incarnation. I believe it was. It's Jesus.

And the one who wrestles with me is Jesus. That helps me because the one who's wrestling with me, and whom so often I'm resisting, is the one who has marks of the nails in His hands. The one who saw me in my deep distress and died on Calvary to save me.

The one by whom grace has come for sinners. But not only grace. Grace and truth.

And He must help me to face the deep truth about myself. And so we see this man, this angel man, the Lord Jesus, wrestling with Jacob. Now, what was His purpose in wrestling with Jacob? It was to overcome Him.

If you like, to break Him. To render Him weak and helpless. And that was a thing that Jacob resisted.

He didn't want to be overcome. Now, what is that a symbol of? Not only for us, but for Jacob. Well, I got a little extra light on that some time ago when I was in Liverpool Cathedral.

And in one of the corridors there, I saw a hideous piece of statuary. It was, I discovered, done by a friend Epstein. And two bulky, ugly figures locked in one another's arms.

And I said, whatever is that? And then I looked at the caption. And it was meant to be the angel wrestling with Jacob. And I was interested in how the caption put it.

It talked about the angel of his conscience wrestling with Jacob. Now, that helped me. I could see the point of the conflict.

It was to get Jacob to see that he was wrong. It needs something more than conscience to do that with us. We're adepts at manipulating conscience.

It needs Jesus. Left to myself, I shall never see, in a given situation, that I'm the one who's wrong. It's always the other person who's wrong.

It's absolutely inbuilt in us all. We must be right. We hate to be wrong.

But as we shall see, God can only bless us and change us when we admit we are wrong. And this is the great battle of the Christian life. It's not the battle to improve, but the battle to be willing to say, oh God, on another issue, you're wrong, you're right, I'm wrong.

That's my battle. You needn't worry about improving. Just let this man wrestle with us on any point he wants.

And he's out. He was out to show Jacob, in this matter, it's not Esau. It's being you.

And you all along. And not only on this issue, but on issue after issue. I believe that's what it was symbolic of for Jacob.

And it's certainly the reason why this God-man wrestles with me. On this point. On that point.

And you see, it so often arises over a situation such as we've got here, with me. It is so often something between me and somebody else. I've had to put things right.

But only put those things right with somebody else, because first of all, there was this wrestling match between me and Jesus, and I deferred it to the last minute. I hate to be wrong. And I hate to admit not only to God, but before others I'm wrong.

If you and I are going to go on the Christian life, you've got to be willing to make that place almost your home. And I believe we've got to come to a place where we say, you know, really when all's said and done, it's easier to be wrong than to be right. C.S. Lewis says, humility, I don't know what he means by that, perhaps brokenness, what we're talking about now.

After the first shock, it's a cheerful virtue. Wrong again. Norman Grubb says that in his walk with the Lord, he has to say, Lord, caught out again, Lord.

And oh, when these issues arise, there is wrestling a man with us. The Lord Jesus. And this is the end.

To take away our resistance, to humble us, and to say, oh God, it's me. And will you notice that this angel prevailed not against Jacob? Extraordinary. When God is unable to prevail against man, it is like that.

He's not going to violate our free will. He'll bring pressure to bear upon us. He'll take away our peace.

He'll convict us deeply. We find we won't be able to look at somebody now. Why can't I? He's the one who's wrong.

Well, why can't I look at him? Because I'm wrong. His action may be wrong, but my reaction is wrong. Oh, I know this so much.

And yet I won't admit it. I won't do anything about it. Goes on wrestling.

He prevailed not against him. Almost the omnipotence of man. Defying God.

Being unwilling to break and say, oh God, I'm wrong. And will you see what the Lord Jesus, we'll assume that that's who he was, what the Lord Jesus did to Jacob. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, what did he do? He touched the hollow of his thigh, that strongest part.

And Jacob was wracked with pain and became a limp, weak man that couldn't wrestle, couldn't resist any longer. I wonder what that's a symbol of. When he sees that he prevails not against us, he touches the hollow of our thigh.

For some it is when he sees us resisting, he knows how to bring back the memory of a dark thing in our lives that was in the past, may still be in a cupboard now. And here we are, not agreed, not giving in. And somehow he knows how to bring to light that thing in our hearts.

And you say, if there's anything that needed the blood of Jesus, it's this. A very dear brother of mine, I don't think he'll mind me telling you this, years ago came to our conference at Abageli. And as he himself told me, he came really largely to correct us.

And I remember on one occasion, him drawing me aside, he said, Roy said, the emphasis of this conference is all wrong. Sin and the blood, sin and the blood, day after day, sin and the blood. What about the victorious life? What about the risen life? All we hear is sin and the blood of Jesus, sin and the blood of Jesus.

So I said, well let's just sit down and talk together, perhaps look at the words. And I hadn't been talking very long when suddenly he said, Roy said, stop. I need this message.

And there was a dark thing that had been haunting him. And if anything needed, the covering of the blood of Jesus that was there. And suddenly, the Lord touched the hollow of his thigh.

Sometimes it's other things that are symbolized by the touching of the hollow of our thigh. A man is unwilling to see himself to be wrong. He's right, he's a Christian worker.

But he may find himself one day, standing by the sickbed of a darling child. It's touch and go. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh.

God loves us so much, and designs our blessings so much, that he prepared to touch our dearest sometimes, in order to speak to them. Sometimes it's a collapse of hope, in business, our finances. And God's seen that he can't, he isn't prevailing against us.

And he knows how to touch the hollow of our thigh, whatever it may be. It may be along that line, things go wrong. I believe when things are difficult, we ought to ask, what is God teaching me in this? It may not always be the same thing, but it may.

And you won't need to ask very long, you'll know. This is the finger of God, but please, never think that these things are punishments. They're never punitive in their intention.

For the simple reason, they aren't severe enough to be a punishment for sin and unbrokenness. The only adequate punishment for sin, is what Jesus bore on the cross. When he said, my God, why hast thou forsaken it? But he's finished it.

What I may have, by way of humbling or trouble or discipline, no punishment, never punitive in its intention, always and always, always restorative. To restore me, to humble me, so that I become a candidate for that grace that was all the time waiting for me. And will you notice that along with the touching of the hollow of his thigh, that bringing Jacob to weakness, came the question, what is thy name? I think that throws light on what is meant by the touching of his thigh.

What's your name, Jacob? And Jacob said, it's Jacob. And I believe he meant, it's what that name signifies. Lord, I've been a striver, I've been a supplanter, I've been a cheat, that's what I am.

He wouldn't have admitted that before. Symbiotically, he'd been brought to a place where he's prepared to admit what he is, and now he does. You see, it wasn't really merely that he had to admit he was wrong with regard to Esau.

God said, what's your name? It's something bigger than this thing. It's a trade that's been with you all along. And at last, he admits it.

And I have to see the same. Yes, it arises over certain Esau, with me, this month. I've had to see, Lord, there's a habitual way I have of reacting to people, to situations.

For long, Lord, you've put the mantle of your protection over me, and you've not allowed that to cause too much difficulty. You've extricated me sometimes, but now, Lord, it's catching up with me. You'll want me to face it.

Or it may be, as we've been thinking, a deep striving that doesn't trust God, and is prepared to resort to all sorts of things less than the highest to gain its aim. Yes, it's worked out in the case of Esau, but there's something deeper. And this is what he wants us to own up to, to see.

And this is why he wrestles with us. Now, this, then, is the first part of the striving that does prevail. It is allowing ourselves to be overcome by the Lord Jesus.

It doesn't sound much like striving, but you'll see in a moment. As I understand it, the victorious life is me, not me overcoming sin, but me letting Jesus overcome me, whatever sin and self comes in, and bring me to his cross. It isn't me being victorious over sin so much as letting Jesus be victorious over me.

That's the very basis of it. I remember when I was in Brazil years ago, Dr. Church and I, no, William Magendra and I, I think it was then, we were having meetings at a certain conference, and a number of other speakers were taking their turn speaking. And it was true, our message and testimony seemed to be rather swamped by all the various emphases that others were giving.

And there was a dear American missionary, who had been largely responsible for getting us there, and shared our vision, who was very worried about this. And we sat down with some of the organizers, and he was telling them, now, you're mixing up, mixing it all up, by bringing in this emphasis and that emphasis, and so on, and our brothers, we're not getting their message as we want to. And the organizers were saying, oh no, no, no, no, no, it's not so, not so at all.

And there was a little bit of tension. And I remember turning to my friend, whispering in the middle of the conversation to Ernie Gilmore, and saying, Ernie, I think you need to repent. Although he was going into battle on our behalf, it was the wrong way.

And he went quiet, and the conversation went off, and they were explaining how right they were, and so on. And suddenly, at a later point, he said, brothers, I've been wrong in my attitude. Would you please forgive me? Oh, I had whispered that to him, but it wasn't easy.

He had a struggle. For a minute, for minutes, there wrestled a man with him, and he broke his brother's umbilical cord. And oh, the whole atmosphere of the round the table completely changed.

I believe that's victory. It wasn't his victory over sin, my victory over sin. No, something bigger, his victory over me.

And there wrestles a man with him, and I take a sinner's place. On a new issue, willing to see what is the basic trade that I need to acknowledge. But that's only the first part of this striving.

Having been brought to that place, the angel, the Lord Jesus, said to him, let me go, for the day breaketh. And Jacob says an extraordinary thing. He who had been trying to get away from this man says, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

How do you know he wants to bless you? How do you know he can bless you? This is no ordinary man, this is God. And he somehow got to know that the God that was his God, was a God of grace, was a God who had something for Jacob, something for sinners. And at last he's admitted, that's what he is.

And if the God he's wrestling with is the God of grace, then this new sinfulness he's seen and acknowledged, only qualifies him for that. If that's the case, I'm not going to let him go. Here's my chance that I've never had it before.

This is the heart of the striving that does prevail. Please turn the cassette over now. Do not fast wind it in either direction.

This is the heart of the striving that does prevail. First the willingness to be overcome, and be brought to the full acknowledgement of wrong. And then to see that the one who's wrestling with me, and who has broken me, is the God of grace for sinners, is the Jesus that gave himself for me at Calvary, who's nothing but mercy for sinners.

And then to see that the very sinfulness I've come newly to acknowledge, only qualifies me for that which comes from Calvary. Well then Lord, I qualify. And I'm not letting you go until I get that which grace has got for sinners like me.

I never thought I was wrong, but the moment I see I'm wrong, I see you've got something for those that are wrong. You know that? He's got something for those that are wrong, when he hasn't got it for those that

are right. It was the publican who went down to his house, declared right, rather than the Pharisee.

The Pharisee said, I'm right. God says, you're wrong. But the moment that publican said, oh God, I'm all wrong, Jesus said, I've waited a long time for this.

I've had to wrestle with you, Mr. Publican, for a long time, before you said you were wrong. But now you're broke, and I want to tell you, you're right. You're as right as the blood of my Son can make you.

And when I begin to see this extraordinary paradox of grace, I find that when I come to a sinner's place, I have got the right to come to lay hold of a sinner's righteousness, and a sinner's peace. You know what I mean by sinner's righteousness? You're declared right when you admit you're wrong. Marvellous grace of our loving Lord.

Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt, and I've just seen it. But this grace that exceeds it, in this one has brought me to this place. And I'm not letting it go, until I get what grace has got for me.

I think perhaps another lovely illustration of this same truth is the story of a Syrophenician woman in Matthew 15. And she has this daughter grievously tempted with the devil at home. And in verse 23, she pleads with him.

But Jesus says, he answers her not a word. And the disciples said, send her away, for she crieth after me. In other words, Jesus is saying to that woman, let me go.

Oh my child, let me go. And as she keeps on persisting, he says, I'm not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel, not to Gentiles. He says, let me go.

Oh Lord, help me, help me. He said, it's not neat to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs. Let me go.

This is for Israel, not for Gentiles. For the children, not for dogs. Somehow or other, she's got a sight of the heart of the Lord Jesus.

This heart that's full of grace for those that haven't got anything. That goes out to the underprivileged. And she says, alright Lord, I won't resist what would appear to be racial discrimination.

Do you think Jesus Christ might have been had up under this new racial bill? Calling her a dog because she's a Gentile. She didn't resent it. She said, alright Lord, I'll accept my doghood.

I admit, I'm not in the favoured circle of Israel. But she said, dogs can expect crumbs. And I know your heart.

There's something for the unprivileged. This is grace. And my very doghood qualifies me for what falls from that table.

Do you know what Jesus said? Oh woman, great is thy faith. He only did what he did to encourage this faith. Be it unto thee, even as thou wilt.

Now whenever you come across this word faith, always ask yourself, faith in what? Faith in God isn't quite enough. Faith in what aspect? Faith in Jesus. What? Did he have faith in his power? No.

Faith in grace. And again and again you'll find it's faith in grace which is referred to in the New Testament. Not merely in his power.

What's the use of thinking Jesus is all powerful if you don't qualify? I'm not good enough. I'm always failing. He's powerful for good people but not for a failing Christian.

But if you understand, are beginning to understand Jesus as he really is, this grace as it really is, we shall see that this very thing that the devil told us disqualifies us actually qualifies us for Jesus. And that was the reason why he brought us down to admit it. And Jesus just couldn't resist it.

And I would say this, grace can never resist faith in itself. Oh, I've proved it. And instead of troubling me to have a tremendous time of prayer, I've taken time out bringing need, bringing wrong, and saying, Lord, I qualify.

I'm so wrong here, so wrong there. And I find I'm learning to do it in confidence. This is the sort of person for whom Jesus came.

This is the sort of person for whom the blood was shed. This is the sort of person for whom the risen life of Christ is available. This is the striving that prevails.

And I want to tell you it's possible to let God go. You could be brought down to admit you're wrong. You may always be mourning you're wrong.

Oh, I'm no good. You're letting him go. You're letting him go.

Some people are always on the negative. They're letting him go. I'm to see that my negative is all that Jesus wants.

That he's just the one that suits people no better than me. Wrong again, Lord, but hallelujah. You've got something for such who admit it.

And you know it's precious in his sight, this admission. This is morality. Who do you think was most pleasing to the Father? That elder son who said, I've served thee, never transgressed any time thy commandment or that younger son who said, I've sinned.

Where was the greatest moral content? It was much more moral content in that deep brokenness, oh, Father, I've sinned, than the pride that said, I've never done anything wrong. Oh, it moves, God, it moves Jesus towards us. And I've got to see it, Lord.

I'm qualified, surely. I'm a candidate at last for that grace. We're not a candidate for the grace of God until we're in the place of the sinner.

Grace is only for the unworthy, only for the wrong, only for the sinner. And once he's overcome me to bring me to that place, then I say, thank you, Lord. Thou hast died for sinners, therefore, Lord, for me.

Thou callest burdened souls to thee, and such, oh, Lord, am I. Do you specialize in such people, Lord? Is it a fact you specialize in failures? Are people always doing the wrong thing? You don't take a stick to them, but you die for them. You've got everything that makes them new. Well, then, Lord, do I qualify? You call burdened souls to thee, I'm one of them.

And you don't go away unblessed. You're met. I'm met.

Heaven's open to me. I'm washed. I'm in fellowship.

And I find I prevail with God. This is the striving that prevails. And he had his name changed because he was going to be changed.

No more Jacob. But Israel, the one who's a prince, strives with God and knows how to prevail. No more.

In fact, you'll see tomorrow that it didn't happen straight away. But there was the great basic change. He had to have that name conferred to him again.

He didn't fully enter into it, but this was the turning point. I wonder if I've made that clear. Then may I go on quickly to the last part.

God told him that he not only prevailed with God in the place of brokenness, in the place of faith in the grace of God, but as you've prevailed with man, you've been trying to do that all your days, Jacob, but you haven't succeeded. But you have today. And the morning showed it.

Esau was still coming, but Jacob had had this deep meeting with this God of grace. And you know the very time that Jacob was giving in to God, saying, oh God, I've been so wrong. It's me, not Esau.

Me, me, me, it's me, like this, and all sorts of areas. God was working in Esau's heart. How often that happens.

I can't promise you exactly it'll happen that way. God knows how to work. But it has and does.

I remember a few years ago, a minister's wife coming to our conferences here. She had booked to come with her husband. She came by herself.

And she said to me, do you know why my husband hasn't come? Love has flown out of our home. And she told me a sad story of estrangement between husband and wife. So much so he didn't want her to come and hear him preach.

He said, oh, you must stay at home with the children. Any excuse. They hadn't prayed together.

He was coming in increasingly late at night. And she feared there might be another woman in it. And now, he wasn't going to come with her.

And he'd gone off with some other ministers to the Holy Land. We talked together. She was the spiritual one, it seemed, the one of prayer, the one of spirituality.

But somehow, as we talked, I just said to her, when he comes in late, how do you greet him? And I gathered, and she told me the way she greeted him. I said, is there any encouragement for him to come back the next time? I wonder if that's been going on for quite a time. Nothing more than that.

And our conversation parted. That night she went up to her room. There was nowhere quiet, so she shut herself in the bathroom for hours.

And there wrestled a man with her. And she didn't see his fault, she saw her own. The pointing of a finger.

The nagging. The blaming. And much else that she never shared with me.

And the next morning she came and said, God met me last night, Jabba, face to face. But there wasn't sorrow, there was peace. Extraordinary.

And especially when she said this, God showed me that if my husband has gone to the arms of another woman, I've given him that. And yet she was blessed. She was in the enjoyment of the sinner's peace.

She was walking with the sinner's saviour. All the Godhead was bent to comfort the poor and the conflicted heart. It was quite spectacular.

But almost the same time, God was dealing with her husband. And a few days later, she said, I've just had the most wonderful letter I've ever had from my husband. I'm dying to get home and tell him my testimony.

And I went to that home later. I went to that church. I tell you, God was moving mightily in that church.

People were being saved. And the heart of it was a manse where Jesus was in the centre. A manse where there was new life, revival.

What a wonderful thing. Will you notice how Jacob approached his brother Esau? He went first. If the worst came to the worst, then may the children despair, but I'm going to meet him.

Oh, Jacob, you've changed already. And will you notice every few steps that he went near his brother, he bowed down to the ground. He bowed down to the ground.

Seven times. Don't you think that's symbolic? Symbolic of saying, oh, Esau, it's me who's been wrong. It's me who's been wrong.

It's me who's been wrong. I'm the one. I'm the one.

I've been the cheat. And he did it seven times. And I believe, as we saw last night, Naaman dipped himself seven times.

Jacob bowed himself seven times. It's a number of perfection, a number of completeness. In other words, it was a real repentance.

It's so easy for it to be only six times. By that I mean, dear brother, if I have offended you, will you please forgive me? Now that's about three times only. Not four, five or six.

If I've offended you, brother, God show me I was wrong. No, no, we don't say that, if we can help it. And oh, I'm an adept at bowing, but not seven times, in the sense of the real thing.

I remember trying to get right with the brother, writing a letter, and I had to rewrite it several times, because though I said I was wrong, I was implying he was wrong too. And peace didn't come, and I'm sure it wouldn't have done anything to have brought us together. In one of our first weeks, someone was also talking about Naaman, Ken Moynihan, and he said, if Naaman hadn't dipped the seventh time, he'd needn't have dipped at all.

It was as if he hadn't dipped at all. Nothing would have happened. And our partial repentances, our guarded acknowledgements of blame, don't do a thing.

We may as well give it up, and not even begin. Unless we're going to take wholly and solely the sinner's place. We needn't worry about anything wrong in the other person.

Were my reactions wrong? That's it. And did those reactions influence my attitude, and words? I'm the sinner. He bowed himself seven times.

But it wasn't merely this repentance on the part of Jacob that changed things. God had gone before. But this, of course, finished it off.

And Jacob, Esau, ran to meet him and embraced him. What a wonderful reconciliation between those two brothers. And I want you to notice that when they were reconciled, he said, I've seen thy face as though I'd seen the face of God.

And Baal was pleased with me. At Jabbok, I've seen God face to face. And I was spared and blessed, not slain.

And now, having found God's face towards me, I've found that your face is too. Do you know that verse in Proverbs 16, 7? When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. How do our ways please the Lord? By reading our Bible lots and praying lots and doing our best? No, no.

What happened to Jacob? That's the way to please the Lord. Nothing pleases him so much as see us willing to take the place of the wrong one. And then you have this wonderful peace that comes from Calvary.

This restoration to God. Oh, you say, praise the Lord. My ways are pleasing the Lord because I've been willing to say I'm wrong and the blood is clean.

And God knows how to deal with my enemies, provided I'm prepared not to skip the bowing seven times. Oh, what lovely reconciliation. How many such I've known.

Some of those I'm closest to, I find, I have to repent to most. It's so easy. One resents or doesn't want to do what they want you to do.

It's so lovely to say, Lord, thank you for resting me afresh on that thing. I come to the cross. This is victory.

The basis of any victorious life is this, being overcome and then seeing that I qualify for Jesus. It's like the piernocchisi. They go down and up they come.

Down in repentance, up in praise for the precious blood. And my last thing to say is simply a little point about that present. It was sent to appease.

He didn't even send it for that reason. Esau didn't make any impression on Esau. God worked in Esau's heart and in Jacob's.

And the present that was meant to appease became just a thank offering for a peace that already happened. They almost quarreled about it. Who was going to have it? Oh, I've got enough, I've got enough.

It isn't often people say they've got enough. But at the place of the cross, you just want that other person to have all he can give him. No longer worrying about rights.

And maybe we had a little present, a peace offering. It'll be turned into a thank offering. You want him to have it.

You want her to have it. Not in order to patch things up, but because they've already been gloriously put right and more at the cross. But this is a thank offering.

And what generosity is shown one to another among brothers when they meet at the cross. And he's discovered how to prevail with God and how to prevail with man. How shall we sum it up? Do you like little phrases? Through brokenness of the blood.

That's the way to prevail with God. And that's the way to prevail with man. I wonder, is there something he's wrestling with you about? Not just the situation, but something deeper.

Not what you've done. What you are. Shaken.

Shaken. Shaken. It may cause you to shed tears.

But those tears are going to be wiped away when you find Jesus not taking a stick to you, but loving you and expressing that love as never before. And giving you peace as a sinner which you never seem to get when you were saying it was only the other person. God knows how to do it.

And this is what glorifies him most. Mending things. Mending things.

Much more rewarding than ending things. For a world at war or a mother-in-law we need someone for mending things. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we do want to thank thee for thy love for us that doesn't let us down and that doesn't let us off. Thank you Lord Jesus for wrestling with me so often and helping me to let you overcome me and bring me to that cross of thine again. Lord Jesus, do it for lots of us.

Bless Lord, wrestle thou with us. If need be to the breaking of the day how strange we are to resist the one who loves us so much that's got such marvellous things for us when we say yes to thee. Interpret all this to each one of us individually in our various situations in our lives.

We ask it in thy name. Amen.

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