

The Divine Wounding

by Watchman Nee

The sermon explores the transformative journey of Jacob through divine discipline and the significance of surrendering to God.

Scripture: Genesis 32:24

Topics: "Divine Discipline", "Transformation through Weakness"

Description

Watchman Nee explores the contrasting lives of Isaac and Jacob, emphasizing that while Isaac's life was peaceful, Jacob's journey was fraught with struggles and divine discipline. He illustrates that God's work in Jacob's life was necessary to transform his natural strength into reliance on God, culminating in a pivotal moment of wrestling with God at Peniel. This encounter led to Jacob's ultimate surrender and a change in identity, highlighting that true strength comes from weakness and dependence on God. Nee encourages believers to recognize their own 'Jacob' nature and the need for God's transformative touch in their lives. The sermon concludes with the reminder that those who are touched by God may not fully understand the change, but the evidence will be evident in their lives.

Transcript

Issac's life was peaceful, with no strivings. Jacob's way was Issac's long struggle throughout. For Isaac everything went easily; Jacob found even the simplest things presenting difficulties. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, all three; so we cannot have Isaac without Jacob, nor, praise God, Jacob without Isaac.

We ourselves are in the position of both. From the Lord's side we are rich, complete in Christ. Yet because of our own natural strength, God's hand has a chastening and formative work to do upon us. We cannot escape the discipline, but equally surely we shall never be without the absolute fullness of divine bestowal. If there is a difference in the discipline it is because some of us have more of Jacob to be dealt with than do others. That is all!

Proverbs 13. 15 tells us that, 'the way of transgressors is hard', that is, tough or rugged. Jacob's way was like that because he was like that. The hard, rugged self in Jacob required a lot of time for God to deal with it, and many of us will be little use unless God has taken that time to handle us. Jacob was a usurper and a cheat. God will not let such a man escape.

Some ask why God spent so much time on Jacob, as though it were an easy thing to deal with any man! To receive, as Isaac received, is something done in a minute. We enter into the inheritance immediately our hearts respond with a Thank - you to what God reveals. But Jacob's difficulty is a lifelong thing. As long as we live, our natural strength pursues us. It is always being dealt with by God, though there is a time when this is specially true.

Those who do not know themselves do not know Jacob. We need to be aware how the flesh always takes care of itself, cheating others to do so and being cheated-if we are going to understand this man. For with all God's dealings with him in Laban's home, still Jacob was largely unchanged. Cheating, scheming, planning, were still in his character.

But as we have seen, after twenty years and with the birth of Joseph, Jacob bethought himself of home (30. 25). Then it was that for the first time in Haran God spoke to him. 'Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.' 'I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst a pillar, where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy nativity' (31. 3, 13). So Jacob prepared himself to go.

But Laban was not likely to let him go easily. In spite of everything, God had blessed Laban for Jacob's sake. So Jacob left secretly, and Laban followed him. But it was God who had sent Jacob back, and God protected him. At God's time He sets us free. When the testing has accomplished its purpose, God lets us go, and no man, not even Laban, can keep us.

When Laban eventually caught up with Jacob they made a covenant together. Laban was respectful and he swore by the God of Abraham and of Nahor. Jacob swore, however, by the God of his father Isaac (31. 51-53). He bore witness to the fact that God's promise was according to God's choice.

Then Jacob offered a sacrifice (31. 54). Laban had none. Something surely had happened to Jacob. When he went out first it was his mother who sent him. Now God sends him home, and he goes. He has learned to recognize God's voice. Discipline had not changed him much, but he had at least advanced into wanting God. In his early years he had wanted only God's purpose, because it fitted in with his desires. He wanted God's will, but not God Himself. Now at last he had some desire for Him. He had heard His voice, and now he sacrificed.

'And Laban departed, and returned unto his place. And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And Jacob said when he saw them, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim' (31. 55 - 32. 2). Jacob had left Laban, having been protected from him by God. Now angels met him. God had opened Jacob's eyes to see that just as He had delivered Him from Laban, so He would deliver him from everyone else. The name Mahanaim means 'two companies'. Not you alone, Jacob, one company-but always God's company with you. It was not that the angels had just arrived, but that Jacob's eyes were at last opened to see them. 'Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha' (2 Kings 6. 16, 17).

At this point we may well ask, Could all the conditions possibly be more favourable for Jacob? He had God's command, God's promise, God's protection, and now a vision of the angels with him. Surely this was enough to make anyone trust God! But Jacob was still Jacob. God's grace does not alter the flesh. So in the following verses he sends a very lowly, flattering message to his brother Esau. 'My lord . . . thy

servant . . .' he says (32. 3, 4). He had already forgotten God's call and His grace and His protection. He thought his own specious words could somehow change Esau. That was Jacob still, just the same as he ever was!

But Esau started out to meet him with four hundred men. What did that mean? Good or bad? It struck dismay in Jacob's heart. Clever people have many worries; schemers pile up troubles for themselves. Those who think and contrive, and do not trust and believe, find themselves like Jacob, 'greatly afraid' and 'distressed' (32. 7).

Jacob's one problem, as always, was what to do! But, trust him, he still had plans! God had sent him now to Canaan, so he could not flee back to Mesopotamia. Yet he dare not let God look after the results of his obedience. How many of us obey God by the front door, and make preparations to retreat by the back! Jacob tried both to obey God and at the same time to escape his brother.

In his fear and distress, we are told that Jacob 'divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and the herds, and the camels, into two companies' (32. 7). Here we find the same word mahanaim that occurred in verse 2. Jacob has substituted his Mahanaim for God's. There had been one earthly company and one heavenly one, but he divided his earthly company into two ! So, perhaps, he would impress his brother, who would scarcely have eyes for the unseen!

Now in verses 9-12 we have Jacob's first real prayer. He has made some progress, though it has not yet reached a high level. In his early years it was all scheming and bargaining, and no prayer. Now it is both scheming and prayer. Yet if we pray we need not scheme. If we scheme there is often no meaning in our prayer. But Jacob still did both; on the one hand he trusted God, on the other hand he did the work himself! To trust God completely would be too reckless, for suppose God's words fell empty to the ground! How like us he was! Of course I am a Christian, so I must trust God; but to trust Him fully and completely is taking too great a risk.

So Jacob elaborated his plans (32. 13-18). Remember, this man had just prayed! This stratagem, however, was to be his masterpiece. Of course he knew his brother, that he was a hunter, so he truly faced the most dangerous crisis of his life. Never before had he expended so much thought and effort as he put into this. After all, more than his possessions, his very life itself depended on the outcome.

But Jacob was equal to the situation. He who had been through all these years of God's discipline could still summon the wits to produce an answer. In a series of mollifying gestures he would let everything go if necessary to Esau, and so at least save his skin. It was a great scheme, the best he had ever made. Moreover, he believed in his own plans and trusted to them-and yet he had prayed! He looked to God and made the most elaborate preparations.

It was on that night that God met him. There had never been a night when he was more afraid. On previous occasions it did not so much matter whether he succeeded or not. This time it was a matter of life and death to him. He had used all his wits, all his strength, to meet a most difficult situation, and everything hung on the outcome.

All the others had passed on across the ford. Remaining behind on this side, 'Jacob was left alone' (32. 24). Here at Peniel God met him face to face. 'There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.' Now it was that Jacob put forth his utmost strength.

It was not Jacob who wrestled, but God who came and wrestled with him, to bring about his utter surrender. The object of wrestling is to force a man down until he is unable to move, so that he yields to the victor. Yet of God it is said that even here, 'He prevailed not' (v. 25). Jacob possessed tremendous natural strength. Many of us know all too well what this means. We can still do so well ourselves; we employ all sorts of natural skills for our self-protection. It is as if God were defeated.

Defeat is defeat. When you or I are defeated it means 'I cannot', 'I yield'. Yet being as we are, we have another try. God may overthrow our plans again and again, but we don't admit defeat, we do not give up. We just think we have not planned well enough, and the next time we must do better. 'Is any thing too hard for the Lord? the angel had exclaimed to Abraham (18-14). But it is almost as if we say to the Lord, 'Is anything too hard for me?'

One day we must acknowledge defeat, confessing that we know nothing at all and can do nothing at all. Jacob had not come there, and still thought he knew Esau! For this last step therefore, something more than discipline was necessary. Discipline brought him as far as Peniel, and it brings us to the place where God can touch us fundamentally. But beware of boasting of God's disciplinary dealings, for until the question of our natural strength is finally settled, this kind of talk can only increase our pride.

Wrestling illustrates God's method of dealing with us. It is finally to weaken us so that we cannot rise. God has His way of doing this with each of us. Jacob was stronger than most, but God conquered. Had He used other means it might have meant a further twenty years. But when Jacob would not yield, God 'touched him'. With a touch He did what great strength would not do.

The thigh is the strongest part of the body, a fitting type of our point of greatest natural strength. There must come a day when God dislocates that thigh, totally undermining and undoing our strength of nature. Your strong point and mine may be quite different from Jacob's. Ambition, boasting, emotion, self-love-each of us has his own, but for each of us this dislocating work is a definite crisis of experience.

With some of us, as we said, the trouble is a readiness to expose spiritual things. In all our work and life and conduct, the fruits are brought out on the surface and displayed. Exposure is in such a case the nerve-centre of our natural strength, and God must touch that. Self is dominant there. People's mistakes vary, and many of us have never seen where our nerve-centre is. But generally all our mistakes spring from one inner principle, and when all symptoms point to one disease, that is our 'thigh'. May God open our eyes to see the nerve-centre of our natural strength, for when that is touched, then there will be fruitfulness.

One touch-and Jacob was lamed. He could no longer wrestle; he was powerless. Dawn came, and he said to God, 'I will not let thee go.' But when any member, even a finger, is dislocated, the whole body is put out of action. Speaking physically, if God had wanted to go, He could perfectly well have gone off and left Jacob there. Jacob could not possibly have held Him.

But now that Jacob was truly weak the Wrestler could not leave him. For Jacob depended on Him. It is when our thigh has been touched that we can hold God the closest. We are strongest when we are weakest (2 Corinthians 12. 10). From man's standpoint this looks impossible, but it is divine fact. It is small faith that accomplishes great things. 'I cannot hold thee, but I can plead with thee! I can scarcely even pray, yet I can plead. I have no faith, yet I believe!'

With an abundance of natural strength we are useless to God. With no strength at all, we can hold on to Him. God's response to Jacob was amazing. 'Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed' (32. 28). Ten years experience looked like defeat for Jacob, but God said he had prevailed. This is what happens when we surrender, beaten, at God's feet.

'And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.' Jacob wanted to know who had done this, but he was not told. Jacob did not know who the Wrestler was when He came, and he knew no more when: He went. He just knew that his own name had been changed-and that he limped! This is the only time in Scripture when God declined to reveal His name to a servant of His.

Those touched by God do not know what has happened. When it really takes place, we don't know what it is. That is why it is so difficult to define, for God does not want us to wait for an experience. If we do we shall not get it. God wants our eye fixed on Him, not on experiences. Jacob only knew that somehow God had met him, and that now he was crippled. The limp is the evidence, not merely the witness of the lips. We are to look to God to do the work in His own way and time. The result will be evident in us, and there will be no need to talk about it.

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