

**Introduction:** Why do people struggle to be in control of their lives? The Bible does not give an answer. \*\*\* But, through stories of the lives of many people from the creation of the world to the establishment of The Church of Jesus, God shows the experiences of people who strived with Him to be in control of their lives. And He also shows that those who finally surrendered control of their lives to Him received His blessing. \*\*\* Jacob, who cooperated with his mother Rebecca to steal the blessing of the firstborn of his father Isaac from his twin brother Esau, is a classic case study. His name means ‘supplanter’ because he was grasping the heel of his firstborn twin brother at their birth. He schemed to get what he desired to the point of taking what was his brother’s and his uncle’s. Yet, Yahweh worked to reveal Himself in Jacob’s life, even when Jacob was unaware of Him. The first revelation happened the night Jacob fled from his brother to his uncle Laban’s house. He had a vision of a stairway to heaven with angels going up and down it as Yahweh stood above it speaking to Jacob the Covenant of multiple descendants, blessing to all peoples, protection and presence. (*Genesis 28:10-22*) Today’s passages tell us that, as Jacob is returning to the Promised Land, he was changed and surrendered his desire to control to Yahweh. \*\*\* In The Gospel passage, God’s Son, Jesus The Savior, in His full humanity, desperately petitioned His Father God that He would not have to die on The Cross to reconcile broken and burdened humanity to God to receive the blessing of Yahweh’s initial Word to Abram. (*Genesis 12:1-3*) Yet Jesus concluded His petition to be released from His Mission with: ‘Yet, NOT what I, Myself, am willing; but, what You (will)’. \*\*\* We are now ready to learn from the details of this morning’s stories.

**I. Jacob seeks to manipulate his estranged brother; but, before they meet, he wrestles with God and is changed.**

(*Genesis 32:9-13, 22-32*)

A. Jacob humbly prays to be delivered, but takes a present to his brother. (*Genesis 32:9-13*)

1. Jacob prays, ‘God of Abraham and Isaac who said to me: return and I will do good to you’. (*Verse 9*)

**Relationship:** He prays to the God of his grandfather and father, in accord with His Word to them.

**Word:** He repeats God’s Word to him to return to his land and kin-folk, and He will do good to him.

2. I am less than The LOVE and Truth You have show to me, I had nothing and now I have much. (*Verse 10*)

**Humility:** He confesses his smallness in relation to what he has experienced of God and been given.

**LOVE and Truth:** This is God’s strong Life-giving, Life-changing LOVE and uncompromising Truth.

The experience of these qualities of God should move us to praise and worship Him.

**Two camps:** Jacob has become ‘two camps’, counting the angels he recently met. (*Verses 1-2*)

3. Tear me away from the hand of Esau, I fear he will smite me, the mothers and the children. (*Verse 11*)

**Prayer:** Esau swore to kill Jacob (*Genesis 27:41*). Jacob asks God to deliver him from Esau’s hand.

**Family:** By this time Jacob had two wives, two concubines and eleven sons. (*Genesis 29:31-30:24*)

4. You said You would certainly do good to me and make descendents as the sand of the sea. (*Verse 12*)

**Good:** First Jacob said God would do good to him. He now says this was a double-word to do good.

**‘Sand of sea’:** Yahweh used this phrase with Abraham after he offered Isaac. (*Genesis 22:1-18*)

5. During the night Jacob took from what had come to his hand as a present to Esau. (*Verse 13*)

**Still scheming:** After his humble prayer of faith, Jacob now selects 550 goats, sheep, camels, cattle and donkeys to give to his brother, hoping to win his favor. This is essentially a bribe.

B. Jacob sent his family over the Jabbok River, then wrestles a ‘man’ until dawn and receives a new name. (*Genesis 32:22-32*)

1. That night he took his full family, and what was his, over a ford of the Jabbok River. (*Verses 22-23*)

**Jabbok:** The Jabbok was a tributary flowing west to the Jordan River opposite Shechem and Shiloh.

They crossed from north to south.

2. Jacob remained alone and a ‘man’ wrestled with him until dawn; and, when he saw he could not prevail,

he dislocated Jacob’s hip socket. (*Verses 24-25*)

**Wrestle:** The word for wrestle comes from ‘dust’. This was down and dirty grappling!

**Disabled:** As Jacob more than held his own, the ‘man’ disabled his leg. This ‘man’ was probably the pre-Bethlehem Jesus!

3. As dawn came up, the ‘man’ commanded to be let go, and Jacob said ‘not unless you bless me’; and,

when asked his name he said: Jacob. (*Verses 26-27*)

**Blessing:** Jacob schemed with his mother to steal Esau’s blessing. Now he pleads for a blessing.

**Confession:** He gives his name which reflects his true character. He supplanted his brother, deceived his father, and did not act towards his uncle with full integrity.

4. Then he said you will no more be called Jacob, but rather Israel because you have strived with God and

with men and prevailed. (*Verse 28*)

**New name:** Now we know Jacob had been wrestling God. And, God says his consistent contending with Him

has resulted in a change in his character. Confession of truth is surrender to God.

*God changes those who surrender to Him*

5. Then Jacob pleaded to know His Name and his request is denied, but he is blessed! (*Verse 29*)

**Not speak Name:** God Himself would not speak His name to Jacob. The Covenant Name, Yahweh, was revealed

to Moses some 400 years later. (*Exodus 6:1-4*) Later rabbis strictly interpreted the death penalty given to an Israelite

with an Egyptian father who blasphemed as grounds for only the high priest pronouncing the Covenant Name of God.

(*Leviticus 24:10-16*)

**Blessed:** But Jacob-Israel now receives a gracious blessing from God because, in striving with God, he would not let Him go without a blessing.

**People strive with God before blessing**

6. Then Jacob named the place Penuel ('face of God') because he had seen God and his soul was delivered. (Verse 30)

**Torn away:** He had prayed to be torn away from the murderous hand of his brother. Now, he has been torn away from the wrath of God he deserved for who he was and what he did.

7. When the sun rose, he limped on his thigh as he crossed over; therefore, to this day, descendants of Israel do not eat from the hollow of the thigh, because that is where God touched Jacob. (Verses 31-32)

**Limp:** Every step Jacob-Israel takes for the rest of his life will remind him of this night with God.

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**Memorial tradition:** All who use this tradition to strive with God in honest humility will be blessed.

**II. In great distress, Jesus prays His 'hour' be taken from Him, then surrenders to His Father's will. (Mark 14:32-36)**

- A. As Jesus begins to pray in Gethsemane, He commands His disciples to wait and watch. (Verses 32-34)

1. They were coming to Gethsemane, and He was saying to His disciples, 'You all must sit here until I shall pray'. (Verse 32)

**Gethsemane:** 'Olive press' in English, it was on the Mount of Olives where Jesus prayed every night of Holy Week. (Luke 21:37).

**Command:** Because of what He was about to do, Jesus needed the presence of His disciples.

2. He is taking Peter, James and John with Him, and began to be amazed and to be distressed. (Verse 33)

**Inner three:** These three disciples were part of Jesus' 'inner circle'.

**Great distress:** Amazement mixed with fear came upon Him, and His distress was very great.

3. He is saying, 'My soul is being overcome with sorrow to death; you all must wait here and watch. (Verse 34)

**Death:** He knows He must die for the sake of every person who was born or will be born.

**Wait and watch:** He is commanding them all to both wait for Him and watch with Him.

- B. Falling on His face He prays for His 'hour' to pass from Him, but concludes, 'NOT what I, myself, desire'. (Verses 35-36)

1. Having gone forward a little, He was falling upon the earth and He was praying. (Verse 35a)

**Face to ground:** Jesus shows us it is always fitting to pray with a posture of humble worship.

2. That, if it was being possible, that it might pass from Him: 'The Hour'. (Verses 35b)

**'Hour':** This refers to the time He would be dying on The Cross to cover over the sins of all who turn to Him to receive forgiveness from Him.

3. He was saying: Abba, Father, all things are possible to You. (Verse 36a)

**All things possible:** This is taught in the story of a father with a demon possessed child (Mark 9:23) and after Jesus said it is hard for the rich to enter God's Kingdom (Mark 10:27).

**Not die:** As a fully human Man, Jesus did not want to die.

4. Nevertheless, not what I, Myself, am willing, but what You (are willing). (Verse 36b)

**Father's will:** In His troubled prayer Jesus surrendered as a Man to God's will, and died for us.

Let us live in faithful obedience to Him as an expression of our gratitude. Then we will be changed with Him.

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- C. Striving with God for blessing: Gospels and New Testament.

1. Jesus blessed a mother with faith that was not afraid to contest His answer. (Matthew 15:21-28)

**Possessed daughter:** A Canaanite woman kept crying to Jesus to have mercy on her demon-possessed daughter.

He told her it was not right to toss the bread of the children of Israel to dogs. When she countered that dogs eat crumbs that fall from the table, He blessed her by granting her request.

**People strive with God before blessing**

2. An official of Herod from Capernaum came to Jesus in Cana on behalf of his son. (John 4:46-54)

**Parental petition:** This father walked over twenty miles to beseech Jesus on behalf of his dying son, Jesus spoke The Word and he was healed.

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3. When Herod intended to kill Peter, the church prayed for him without ceasing. (Acts 12:1-19)

**Prison release:** So God sent an angel to miraculously free Peter from prison.

He then went to the house of the prayer meeting

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**Conclusion:** After Jacob humbly prays Yahweh would take his brother's wrath away from him, he seeks favor from his brother by sending 550 choice animals to him. Then, that night he wrestles with a 'man' who is God.

After Jacob refuses to let go, God dislocates Jacob's hip joint, changes his name – signifying Jacob has been changed, and finally blesses him. So, we should not be surprised when we struggle with God to understand His will for us.

**People strive with God before blessing**