

Wrestling Your Blessing

Genesis 32:1-33:10

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Peter Hiett

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Transcript document prepared by: Brett Eades (brett@thesanctuarydowntown.org)

This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!

Message

Have any of you ever felt like you just got beat up by a set of events, or circumstances, and you just didn't know why? Have any of you ever gone to church at a time like that, just hoping for a blessing... thinking, "If I do what God wants, maybe he'll get me that promotion, heal my marriage, or make life a little easier?" Have any of you ever done that, and felt like it didn't get easier, it only got worse, perhaps even what I call, "miracle bad?"

In 1984, I decided to forego a promising career in geology, take my new bride move to California and pursue a career in ministry. I thought, and do think, it was what God wanted, but I didn't think it would be so hard: both cars broke down repeatedly on the way there, the bank wouldn't transfer our money, our contacts all fell through, the housing we'd arranged fell apart. When we finally did get a place, it was a complete dump, in the worst part of the San Fernando Valley. Life was hell.

And then this one night, I just heard all this banging coming from the apartment directly above ours. I finally lost it, went upstairs, knocked on the door and when the door opens. No kidding, there was this guy in his underwear speaking some foreign language, and like four other guys in their underwear running around the apartment (it was a hot summer night). And there was no furniture in the entire apartment, except for a full drum set in the middle of the floor. I just remember thinking, "God, what the heck? This is miracle bad."

That's a silly example, but all that first year of seminary, it was not just bad; it was miracle bad. I can't tell you how many nights Susan just fell apart sobbing in my arms, in that dingy little apartment, with the foreign exchange student drummers drumming away directly overhead, "miracle bad."

Sixteen years ago, in 2007, I remember sitting in my office, thinking, "God this could happen; this looks like the perfect storm; I don't think I've ever been more obedient to you, but it looks like this church is about to explode, and it's miracle bad." And now I'm not talking about foreign exchange students in their underwear who won't stop playing the drums on hot nights in Southern California. I'm talking about an entire church being ripped apart, my children losing all their friends, and outright demonic and satanic activity. Some folks will argue, That's not God's

fault. But like Martin Luther said, “Even the devil is God’s devil.” And during that time, God made it clear to me that he was in charge—So I may have been battling against principalities and powers, and the world rulers of this present darkness, but in the end, I was wrestling with God.

When I first started preaching, I kind of thought my job was to be like a spin doctor for God and God would at least help, you know? It’s hard to put a good spin on a statement like “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, pick up a cross, and follow.” It’s even harder when St. Paul adds, and “All things—all things—are yours.” So listen up: “All things are yours” and “Present your bodies a sacrifice.” And we’re like, “Um I’m not asking for all things, just a raise (a little blessing). How about I give up chocolates for lent and you get me the raise: fair trade?”

Sometimes when things are really tough, I’ll get desperate and watch evangelists on late night TV and then wonder, “Am I even a Christian?” “Christian” is a fine name, except Christians look so little like Christ. You know “Christian” is a name that we gave ourselves, in Antioch, in Acts 11. But in Genesis 32 God, himself, gives us a name, and the name is “Israel.”

In Romans we learned that we are Israel, by marriage or by virtue of being grafted into the family tree, “Offspring of Abraham through faith by Grace.” There is a country named Israel, that, if anything, is actually Judah. And Judah is part of Israel, but definitely not all of Israel. Paul refers to us as Israel—“the Israel of God.” And it means something. So many times, I’ve watched Christian TV and thought somethings wrong. But then, I’ll remember my name, “Israel,” and realize that what is wrong is actually what is right. And then I’ll realize that the name “Christian” also fits, for it’s not only me that wrestles with God; in fact, Christ wrestled with God in a garden, on my behalf, until he finally said “nevertheless, not my will, but thy will be done.” You see “Israel,” means “wrestles with God.”

We find the story in Genesis 32, but it’s in Genesis 25 that we begin to read about Jacob who is predestined to become Israel. Jacob means “heal grabber” and something like “cheat,” for when Jacob is born, he’s born grabbing the heel of the his twin brother Esau, who is the first born. It’s just as God told their mother while they were still in her womb, “the older will serve the younger.” Esau is Red, which is a play on the word Adam, which means “man.” And Esau is a proverbial man’s man, and his Father’s favorite. Jacob is a mamma’s boy; Rebekah’s favorite, “A quiet man, dwelling in tents.”

You’ll remember that Jacob extorts Esau with a bowl of soup in order to obtain the birthright—the birthright was a double share of the inheritance which was given to the oldest son. Esau may have thought it was only some tents, servants, and camels, but we know that it was also The Promise made to Abraham. Years later, when Isaac is very old, blind, and about to die, Rebekah helps Jacob pretend to be his brother, Esau, and thereby deceive his father, Isaac, into blessing Jacob instead of Esau. Isaac blesses Jacob with the blessing of Abraham—that’s no small blessing—it’s the birthright (all the real estate that Abraham was promised) and the blessing (That in Abraham all would be judged and then blessed).

When Esau finds out and informs his father, Isaac is deeply shaken, but tells Esau that Jacob already received the blessing. Esau replies, “He was rightly named Jacob for he has cheated me twice.” Esau weeps. And Isaac blesses Esau with all that’s left. Then Esau plots to kill Jacob

once Isaac is dead, but Rebekah find out and helps Jacob flee to Paddan-aram in modern day Iraq. It's on the way there, and while Jacob is clearly just a turd of a man, that God gives him the dream of a ladder to and from heaven, and then, unconditionally promises to bless him with all the blessings of Abraham. Basically, Jacob learns that he's been saved but he still needs to wrestle.

When he gets to Iraq, Laban cheats him, and he pretty much cheats Laban, and his wives basically cheat each other, and their slave girls—by making them sleep with their husband, and bear babies, that become the nation of Israel. Jacob is still quite a turd of a man, and yet, God still blesses him, promises to be with him, and even helps him despoil Laban, who doesn't like being despoiled. After twenty years, Jacob flees from Laban for God promises to go with Jacob and bless Jacob in the Promised Land.

Jacob approaches from the North and sends messengers to Esau in the South—messengers who return to Jacob with news that Esau is coming with 400 men; that's an army. He's at the edge of the promised land, with Laban behind him, Esau in front of him and nowhere to flee. He devises a plan to appease Esau with gifts, and then prays the most dangerous prayer: he asks God to save him and he claims the blessing.

Genesis 32:22-24:

The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants [slaves], and his eleven ~~children~~ [sons], and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. [The Jabbok is a stream that empties into the Jordan from the east at the edge of the promised land]
²³ **He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had.** [We don't know why... perhaps he was using them as a buffer; perhaps he just wanted to be alone] ²⁴ **And Jacob was left alone...**

I strongly suspect that Jacob was having one of those late night, anxiety-produced, devotional quite times, just like the ones that I have so often. And so, he recited the 23rd Psalm “The Lord is my shepherd... he leads me beside the still waters...” But this night things felt more like “The valley of the shadow of death...” So, he read the footprints poem that he had downloaded from the internet. And then he began to sing

*I come to the garden alone/ While the dew is still on the roses
 And the voice I hear, falling on my ear/ The Son of God discloses
 And He walks with me/ And He talks with me/ And . . . BLAMO!!!*

Right there, at the start of the 3rd line of the refrain, out of nowhere, this guy just nails Jacob in the dark, literally knocks him to the dust (*awbawk* at the Jabbok) and starts wailing on him, *awbak*, wrestling. At his lowest point, in the middle of the night, when Jacob is calling out to God to “send his blessing,” Blamo! Unexpected, confusing, passionate, painful, violent wrestling. Not just bad: miracle bad, all night long.

And somewhere during that crazy night, Jacob realizes, “This guy isn't just good; He's divine!” And maybe he realizes, maybe it's this guy that I've been wrestling all along. Whatever the case, if I'm Jacob, I'm thinking, “It's time to check out a new religion.” But Jacob can't flee as he has

before. Instead, Jacob hangs on, and even “prevails,” he endures. And yet, it’s clear that the God/man lets him, for as the sun rises the God/man touches Jacob’s hip [*yarek*] and the bone rips right out of the socket.

In the book of Genesis, men grab each other by the *Yarek*—which apparently means what you think it means—they grab each other by the *Yarek* to confirm covenants.ⁱ Well, this covenant just about kills Jacob; he can no longer run, he can no longer flee—exhausted, depleted, and defeated, all he can do is cling to the God/man—You see? Jacob is aware that this man is God. And so, all he can do is cling to God and beg him for a blessing. And I’m convinced that’s exactly what the God/man wanted:

- A Jacob who could no longer take the blessing, con his way into the blessing, no longer pretend to earn the blessing by pretending to be someone that he was not.
- A Jacob with the self-centeredness, self-sufficiency, self-absorption, and self-deception, the hell beat right out of him.
- A clinging defeated Jacob.

You know I used to take Susan to scary movies just so she’d cling to me and yearn for me to bless her with my presence? I used to take the kids camping for the same reason, and for the same reason, they’d love to go camping—they’d listen to the wind blowing through the trees outside our tent, hear wild animals roaming about the woods; they’d feel their own vulnerability, and then snuggle up next to me as I hugged them tight and gave them my kisses. You, see? I exposed their weakness and then I became their strength. And more than anything—especially the boys—they just loved to wrestle. Wrestling is like #1 on a Dad’s job description. There was just something about testing their strength, feeling my strength, knowing that I could beat them, and yet, I always loved them—something about that, that made wrestling their very favorite thing to do.

But sometimes, I’d wrestle even when they didn’t want to wrestle. My daughter Elizabeth had a particularly wonderful and very strong will. Not recently, but several times in the past, I’ve heard Christians say something like “God would never violate your will.” And I’ve thought: Surely, they don’t mean that, and if they do, they can’t be talking about the all-powerful, all-knowing, sovereign God of Scripture. Surely, they don’t mean that they get whatever they want whenever they want, and therefore will stay forever young and never die. Surely, they mean something like, God loves you.

But if God loves you, or even relates to you at all, he’ll have to violate your will. In fact, you constantly violate your own will, unless your completely pure of heart, always wanting what you will and willing what you want. I’m saying, you each have a good will, and a bad will, and you’re constantly violating one with the other—you wrestle with yourself constantly—don’t you? Self-discipline is your good will wrestling your bad will into submission. And every good parent will help their child do that wrestling when they can’t do it themselves. For any child that’s entirely undisciplined becomes a prisoner to their own bad will, unable to even perceive good will. If a child always gets whatever they think they want whenever they want it, they can no longer want anything that they get for they render themselves unable to receive the one thing that they really want, and that thing is Love. We’re all born ignorant of Love; we don’t know

what it is or he is. If we're true to Scripture we really ought to replace the doctrine of original sin, with the doctrine of original ignorance.

Every little Adam, every little man, every little baby, is born without the knowledge of Good and evil. So, when a baby sins, no one blames the baby. But soon a child gains some knowledge of good, and knowledge of evil, and good parents will help that child will the good, because every child is made for the good and so, desperately longs for the Good, even when unaware of that fact about themselves. Well like I was saying, my kids loved to wrestle. But sometimes I would wrestle when they didn't want to wrestle. For they each had their own will and Elizabeth had a particularly wonderful and very strong will, a good will and sometimes a bad will. On four or five occasions, when she was about three, she didn't get what she wanted or didn't want what she got: a doll, a piece of candy or whatever. And she worked herself into such a frenzy, that in order to protect herself and her brother and her mother, I had to just wrestle her down kicking and screaming... until she finally just passed out and fell asleep.

I'd be a basket case, lie awake all night worrying, but in the morning, she'd come running into the kitchen, jump on my lap, and say "I love you, Daddy." You see, in her rage she didn't know what she wanted, but what she wanted was me, and Jon, and Mom, we were the blessing—she wanted Love. But that's the problem with Love; you can't take love, Jacob, you can only receive Love—for God is Love. That's why an undisciplined child who gets whatever they want, can never want anything they get, for what they really want is Love—Love is not just the gift, but the Giver, not a created thing but the Creator. And that's why wrestling is #1 on every good daddy's job description.

My favorite thing as a child was wrestling my dad. He'd let me win, and then I'd say, "Daddy you're not trying." Then he'd say, "You want me to try?" And I'd yell "Yes!" Then he'd wrestle me to the ground and then cover me with sloppy wet kisses. I have to tell you that the greatest supernatural miraculous gift that I've ever received was the day that God literally wrestled me to the ground in Toronto Canada, pinned me to the floor, and I thought he was going to literally break my arms. I tell people that, and I watch the fear come over their faces. And then I have to say something like, "Oh no, you don't understand. It was the greatest experience of my life. He was breaking my arms and simultaneously showing me that he was everywhere always loving me. And you see, I had asked him repeatedly, 'Lord if I'm out of your will please break my arms.'"

You see the thing I fear the most, apart from God, is not the Devil—I know he's lost—it's not the devil, taxes, or Vladimir Putin; it's my own bad will, my own selfishness, insecurity, arrogance, and lust. That day he showed me that even if I made my bed in hell, he'd find me, wrestle the hell out of me and wrestle his home into me. He loves me that much and he's that good. He is the Good and the Life.

Genesis 32:24-28:

And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled [awbak] with him until the breaking of the day. ²⁵ When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket [yarek], and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶ Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But

Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”²⁷ And he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” Now, that’s a confession, isn’t it? “I’m the cheat, that took the birthright and stole the blessing from the firstborn... I’m Jacob.”^{ii v. 28} Then he [the God/man] said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven [*sarah*: struggled] with God and with men and have prevailed [*yakol*: endured].”

That’s a pretty good definition of any healthy relationship—don’t you think? You have wrestled and endured—you didn’t cheat, you didn’t flee, you didn’t quit, you wrestled and endured. All of those whom I love the most are those with whom I’ve wrestled the most and we’ve endured. In high school it was literally some friends with whom I wrestled: tackle football after church, wedgie wars at church, Charlie Horse Wars at the theatre until we literally couldn’t walk without a limp. But people often flee as soon as the wrestling starts, and so they end up alone. But, to wrestle and endure—That’s the definition of a great friendship. That’s the definition of a healthy small group or church. That’s the definition of marriage.

Every weekday at 2:00 p.m. in Gering, Nebraska, Martha Gertson lowers the shades, disconnects the phone, and turns on the TV. Martha and Chris Gertson watch All Star Wrestling. Martha says that when she gets sufficiently worked up, she throws a step-over toehold on her husband Chris. And then it begins. In the living room, they try to pin each other in front of the TV. Martha says, “Those romantic soap operas are fake; But the wrestling is real!” According to Paul Harvey news, “Martha usually wins. But Martha Gertson is only 76. Husband Chris is 82.” (At least they were when I heard their story). You probably know that the Church is called The Bride of Christ. But you may not realize, that according to Scripture—specifically Isaiah and Hosea—Israel is the bride of God: a harlot that becomes his bride.

Well, I’m here to tell you: Those Romantic Soap Opera’s that you see on Christian TV, they’re often just fake, but the wrestling is real. So, when times are tough, and you think “This isn’t just bad, it’s miracle bad,” don’t give up on Jesus, your name is “Israel” It means “God wrestler” and even, “wrestler god.”

God wrestles you in several ways:

1. He wrestles you with circumstances... He’s all powerful, all knowing, and absolutely sovereign; He isn’t evil, but he arranges for you to encounter evil and even consigns you to disobedience (which is evil) that you might know Mercy (which is the Good). He wrestles you with circumstances, and...
2. with his Word. Jacob not only wrestles with the circumstances all around him, but the Word that’s been spoken into him. (We’re going to talk about that more next week.)
3. And three: God wrestles you with The God/Man. Who is the God/Man?

Genesis 32:28-30:

[The God/Man] said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.”²⁹ Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him. [Notice that there is no mention of words, but

maybe HE is the Word and the Blessing]. ³⁰ **So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel...**[Penial (or Penuel), comes from two Hebrew words: *panah* which means “turn and look” and *el*, which means “God.” It’s as if Jacob had been running away from God his entire life, but at Peniel God turned Jacob’s face to face himself] **saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered [natsal: saved].”**

And that is utterly fascinating. It seems that the sun had dawned upon the face of the man who is God. And as God makes clear to Moses, “No one can see my face and live.” Which clearly implies that Jacob had not been saved from death, but he had been saved through death, as if he died and rose with the God/Man. In other words, He lost his psyche and found it for the sake of the God/man; no longer Jacob, but now Israel. To come face to face with the God/man is to lose your life and find it.

Genesis 32:31-33:4:

The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.
³² **Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip on the sinew of the thigh. And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants. ² And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. ³ He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. ⁴ But Esau [the firstborn] ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.**

Renowned Evangelical Bible Scholar, DA Carson, points out that Jesus likely drew on this story, when telling the story of the Prodigal Son, which means that Jesus would be comparing God the Father, or himself, to Esau. And that makes complete sense in light of what Jacob says next:

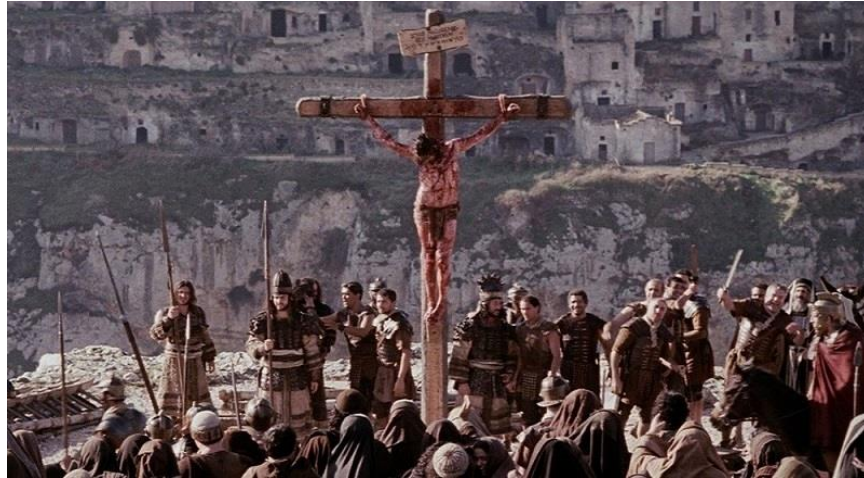
In verses 5-7 Esau asks Jacob about his family, the Israelites, and why Jacob sent all the presents, and Jacob answers,

Genesis 33:8-10:

“To find favor (literally, “Grace”—“to purchase Grace”) in the sight of my lord.” But Esau said, “I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.”
¹⁰ **Jacob said, “No, please, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand. For [now] I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me.**

Did you get that? Jacob (that is Israel), just told Esau, that he looked like God. And he had just wrestled the God/man as the sun had dawned upon his face. Ancient Rabbis really struggled with this story, and we really struggle with this story. (I have so much respect for the Bible, because this clearly isn’t the kind of stuff that religious folks would just make up).

The Rabbis struggled with the story, because they couldn't believe that a man like Jacob could even appear to prevail against God, and so they would argue that the God/man wasn't actually God but just an angel, a messenger. But the text clearly says, God, God, God; God that's a man, and a man that's God.



Gibson, Mel (Director). (2004). The Passion of the Christ [Motion picture]. USA: Icon Productions.

Can you conceive of a man that's God and God that's man, and a moment in which it appeared that mere humans or, more specifically, Israel prevailed against that God/Man and yet that God/Man blessed Israel and all nations? And the Rabbis really struggled, and we really struggle because Jacob/Israel said to Esau, "You look like the God/man." The Rabbi's hated Esau (which is Edom), and Christians know that the God/man is Jesus. Jesus who is the "firstborn of all creation," and "firstborn from the dead." Why did we crucify Jesus? Scripture says that we were Jealous. We wanted his birthright and blessing "Behold this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased;" "The perfect image of the invisible God."

- We have all tried to purchase his birthright with soup, or whatever is at hand.
- We have all tried to fool the father into blessing us by pretending to be him.
- And we all took his life on the tree in the garden trying to become him, because he's the perfect man—The Eschatos Adam—the Super-man

It's all so obvious, and yet we struggle with these ideas because of this prophecy in Malachi 1, that was quoted by Paul in Romans 9, which we studied extensively. Malachi 1:2-3, "I have loved you," says the LORD. But you (Israel) say, "How have you loved us?" "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated." NOT hate, but "have hated." Perfect tense, as in "It is accomplished."

We struggle with that, and so reply "God is Love. So how could Love hate anyone?" I suppose that part of our problem is semantics. But God doesn't just hate someone like Esau, according to Scripture, God hates everyone, like Jacob and apparently, you.

Psalm 5:5 "You [O LORD] hate all evil doers." Have you ever met someone who never did any evil? Hosea 9:15 Speaking of Israel, his bride, who has become a whore, God says, "There [at Gilgal—it was the first sight at which the children of Israel camped upon entering the promised

land] there I began to hate them.” It’s funny how we make a big deal out of God having hated Esau, when he clearly he hated Jacob as well. Jeremiah 12:8, “I hate her.” Who? Jeremiah 12:7, “My beloved.” God hates “all evil doers.” That is “His beloved.”

And now you may say, “Well, Jesus never did any evil, when did God hate Jesus? And furthermore, God was (and is) in Christ, so when did God ever hate God; when did God ever wrestle with God? Do you remember what Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane as he sweat great drops of blood? “Nevertheless, not my will but thy will be done.” As we preached in Romans, in that Garden, God in Christ Jesus gave us his will—his Good will—and bore our bad will. He descended into us, to bear the pain of our bad will, and give us his good will. He descended into us, to help us surrender our bad will, even as we receive God’s good will. In the Garden he descended into us to help us wrestle with himself.

- He is the good free will of God in you.
- He is love wrestled into you and wrestling for you against the old you ⁱⁱⁱ
- He only “hates” you, because he cannot stop loving you, and you are your own worst enemy.”^{iv}

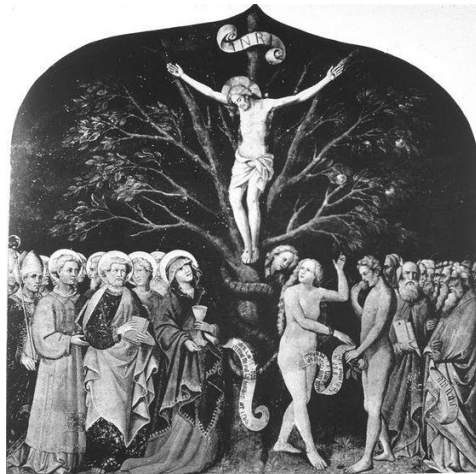
And now the story really gets trippy, for not only had the birthright and blessing belonged to Esau, the first born, who looks like Jesus while we look like Jacob—[which means we are like twins in the womb with Jesus, and “the older will serve the younger,” because that is who God is—God is relentless sacrificial love] It gets really trippy, for not only had the birthright and blessing belonged to Esau, who looks like Jesus, now the birthright and blessing belongs to Jacob, and is even in Jacob, FOR as we know the birthright and blessing is the Promised Seed—Jacob’s great, great, super-great grandson: Jesus.

So, do you see that when Jacob wrestled Jesus at the edge of the Promised Land, he was wrestling his own blessing, for the blessing always wanted to bless Jacob far more than Jacob could even conceive of being blessed?

Genesis 35:9-11:

God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. ¹⁰ And God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.” So, he called his name Israel. ¹¹ And God said to him, “I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply...

Do you understand? Jacob/Israel is us: He is the Old Adam, transformed into the New Adam, the Eschatos Adam, because he wrestled the God/Man at the edge of the Promised Land, which is the location of the Garden of Eden. Adam is coming home. The Garden of Eden, which becomes a city, that is a harlot, which is then transformed into the Bride, for in the heart of the city there is a garden and in the garden a tree—the tree of life for the healing of the nations. And do you see what’s hanging on that tree?



"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

The Blessing: The Life, who is The Good in Flesh. You know I used to hate that hymn “In the Garden,” but now it’s my favorite. This week I learned that it was written by a pharmacist in 1935 who was reading the Gospel of John in his basement when he had a vision. John 19:41, “Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb...” When he got to John 20:1-18 “Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early...” he had a vision.^v As he read the story, he became Mary—the harlot, like us, who becomes what she truly is—The Bride of Christ.

*I come to the garden alone...
And he walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own,
and the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known...*

He’s talking about the garden on Mt. Calvary, with the cross in its midst. And he’s talking about the garden of Eden on “the Holy Mountain of God”^{vi} with the tree of the knowledge of Good and evil in its midst. And he’s talking about the garden city of the New Jerusalem on Mt. Zion with the tree of Life in the very same place. And he’s even talking about the garden of Gethsemane at the base of that very same mountain, where Jesus joins us on the way up. And now, I know that we’d all love to experience the blessing of Easter Morning in the way that Mary Magdalene did in that garden long ago.^{vii} But, let me ask you: Did she experience some wrestling on the way there?

Yeah, Jesus had cast seven demons out of Mary; she’d likely lived as a harlot, been spurned for most of her life, and just the day before this day she had watched Jesus get crucified in that same garden—It had been “miracle bad.” And now let me just suggest an idea. At the start of the message, you all appeared to indicate that you had felt pretty beat up at times, and sometimes it even seemed miracle bad. Well, maybe, it’s all miracle bad. Maybe God is All-Powerful and All-Knowing and All-Good, which means that all bad is “miracle bad,” which in reality is “miracle good.” Maybe all things work together for the good for all things are called according to his purpose

God is not evil, and Jesus is no demon, and yet they allow us to wrestle those things, and sometimes we see that it’s Jesus himself that we in fact are actually wrestling, as if we ourselves

had become the demonic and the evil. And why would God even allow for such a thing? Well maybe your story is Mary's Story, and Mary's story is Jacob's story, and Jacob's story is Adam's Story, and miracle of miracles, God has made Adam's story his own Story. Take a look at the tree in the middle of the Garden. Maybe we all begin our life in the garden—we're born ignorant into a world of sin, but that's not original sin; that's original ignorance, which leads us to sin. For we each look to the tree—it grows all around us and in the sanctuary of every human heart. We each look to the tree and see that it's good for food, delight to the eyes, and to be desired to make one wise.

- In other words, we see the Good and the Life...
- In other words, we see the Blessing, and so we attempt to take the Blessing; we take the Good, the birthright of the firstborn, and we take the Life who is the firstborn—the Blessing.
- In other words, we sin.

We take the Life, thinking it's simply our own life and everything dies. We take the Good and come to know evil. And then we flee to the far country, terrified of the very blessing that we most earnestly desire. But the God/man in whom all things are created and sustained, he finds us and

- He wrestles us through all the circumstances of our life...
- He wrestles us with his Word spoken to us and implanted within us...
- He wrestles us back to the Garden...

He wrestles us with us, and even in us and for us, in the garden, until with him we pray, "Nevertheless not my will but thy will be done." "Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit because I want to." That's what every father longs to hear, "Dad, I'm home because I want to be home." That's the Good.

Do you realize that God wants to give you the blessing, far more than you ever wanted to take the blessing. But you cannot receive the blessing, if you're under the illusion that you have stolen the blessing, earned the blessing, created the blessing, or obtained the blessing by anything other than Absolute Grace. God himself is the Blessing and "all things" are your birthright but to inherit all things, you can no longer believe that you have earned anything. And to know the Creator, you can no longer pretend to be the Creator. And to be the Bride of Jesus, you have to surrender Me-sus, for although Jesus will wrestle the hell out of you, he refuses to violate your heart.^{viii} Do you see Jacob?

- He lets you prevail; every time you sin, you prevail.
- He lets you prevail, but he will not stop wrestling, until you plead for Mercy.
- He lets you win, in order that he might win your Heart.

This is a mystery, but he himself is your new heart. He is good will imprisoned in your bad will. He is the Promised Seed of Abraham: your Birthright, and your Blessing. And he is not a small blessing. Thirty some years ago, I read the following news story in the San Francisco Chronicle as I was drinking my morning coffee. Fifty-three-year-old Giuseppe Pennesi and his crew were

netting rock cod and sole about forty miles southwest of San Francisco on their eighty-one-foot commercial fishing vessel, the Diana. It was their livelihood; They were fishing for a blessing. It had been a normal day, a tranquil day, when all at once BLAMO! The two 5/8” steel cables that held Diana’s 7,000 pounds of net lost all slack. And suddenly, they were being pulled out to sea.

As the winches began slipping, Giuseppe shut down Diana’s engines. But they were still being dragged, about five knots backwards into the ocean. Bubbles were coming up all around the boat. One of the steel cables snapped like a rubber band. At this point they knew whatever they were wrestling had the power to drag them into the abyss. In desperation and terror, Giuseppe frantically radioed the Coast Guard. And then all at once, the struggle stopped.

And this is the scene I’d just die to see: These old fishermen watching to see what they’d caught in their nets. When suddenly, out of the depths, right next to their boat, longer than a football field, displacing 6,500 tons of water, rises the USS Parche—nuclear attack submarine, actually the most decorated submarine in US Naval History—loaded with warheads, capable of starting World War III, a virtual Armageddon Machine. It was the catch of the day or maybe Giuseppe Pennesi was the catch of the day.



Communion

On the 6th day of the week, the night he was betrayed, and it seemed as if the children of Adam had prevailed against the God/man, the God/man took bread and broke it, saying this is my body given to you, take and eat. And in the same manner, and having given thanks, he took the cup saying this is the covenant in my blood, drink of it all of you.

- This is not a small blessing.
- This is an Armageddon Machine.
- This will cause you to lose your psyche and find it.
- This will annihilate your bad will and He is your good will.
- This little bit of faith is the presence of God, and the door to the Age to Come.

Don't be surprised if you experience some wrestling. Nothing's wrong; everything's right. So, don't cut bait, Jacob; hang on. Your name is "Israel."

Benediction

It looks like we're getting the snot kicked out of us. Just look around. These people did not look this way twenty years ago. The longer we wrestle the more obvious it becomes... so see, we already knew we were getting beat up. We just forget who it is that we're wrestling. A voice says, "cut bait and flee." Instead, hang on and believe the blessing; believe the Gospel. You have been predestined to inherit the God/man, and all things with him.

Endnotes

ⁱ Genesis 24:2, 47:29

ⁱⁱ It shouldn't escape our notice that the name Jacob literally means "heel grabber" for Jacob was born holding the heel [aqeb] of the firstborn. But this is the second time we've read about a heel [aqeb]. In Genesis three God tells the snake that the "the Seed of the Woman" (That's Jesus, the firstborn of all creation) will bruise the serpents head, but the serpent will bruise the heel [aqeb] of the Promised Seed.

ⁱⁱⁱ God only has only hated you because he cannot stop loving you, and you are your own worst enemy.

^{iv} In John 12:25, Jesus says, "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life [*psyche*] in this world will keep it for eternal life." We're, even, in some sense, according to Jesus, in this world, hate ourselves [our *psyche*] because we love ourselves [our *psyche*]. If you ever just get sick of yourself . . . maybe this is good news!

^v <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-i-come-to-the-garden-alone>

^{vi} Ezekiel 28:13-14, Palm 48:1-2, See also: St Ephraim the Syrian, Hymns on Paradise (Popular Patristic Series), pp. 50-51

^{vii} She was the very first to know the resurrected Messiah—Can you imagine?

^{viii} I wish I had more time to explain this idea, but I think have in other places. I mean to say that God will violate your bad will, and your body of "sin and death," as Paul calls it—we all die. However, God will not violate your good will, for it is his own will, imprisoned in your "body of sin and death," your flesh. Of course, there is a profound mystery here... But God will violate your bad will, to free your good will, which is his will.