

Prevailing With God • Genesis 32:24-32

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Gus Bendix*

1. I wrestled in HS • Did okay / most matches pretty even / placed in a few tourneys
2. Guy in my weight class everyone knew – Gus Bendix! The Undisputed King of Wrestling.
3. Only time I wrestled him @ the Fullerton Invitational Tourney, I looked at the list of matches to find that I had a 1st round bye, but second round – GUS BENDIX!!!!
4. His 1st match; decent wrestler; pinned in 30 sec.
 - a. he pinned EVERYONE! His rep.
 - b. previous year when he took CIF, only a few in over 30 he didn't
5. I knew I would lose – not by a pin!
6. Shook hands – metal vice! Wicked grin
 - a. take down to back – “bridged,” kept one shoulder up
 - b. maneuver, switch holds – couldn't get both down - end of 1st period; neck felt like a jar top!
 - c. 2nd period, me up, reversal to back; whole period on the top of my head and nothing else
 - d. 3rd period, Gus up, picked me up and spun me over like a dummy!
 - e. then – he grunted, made strange noises, he was really trying!
 - f. said, “Come on!” as if I knew I was SUPPOSED to let him pin me.
 - g. buzzer sounded – I had made it!
 - h. the score was ridiculous: but no pin / nowadays (points ahead) - not back then.
 - i. I lost – but felt like I'd won.
 - j. turned out to be only one of a handful he didn't pin that year on his way to being State Champion.

B. *Today – A Wrestling Match Between Badly Mismatched Contestants*

II. TEXT

A. *Set The Scene*

1. Jacob returning home after 20 years.
2. Fled from his angry twin brother Esau whom Jacob had swindled the family inheritance from.
3. 20 years w/relatives in Mesopotamia –very same area we're seeing in the news right now.
4. Acquired a huge family and tremendous wealth.
 - a. but it appeared he'd acquired his fortune through clever conniving

- b. when he left to return home with his family and goods, he snuck away
 - c. and when his relatives realized he'd left, they went after him and caught up with him on the borders of Canaan.
 - d. they intended to waylay him and take his stuff back, but God appeared to them and warned them not to.
 - e. Jacob and his relatives set up a boundary marker and agreed each would stay on their side of it.
5. So, Jacob has burned the bridge behind him, and in front of him is his angry twin he hasn't seen for 20 years.
 6. The last time he'd seen Esau, he was vowing murderous revenge on him for stealing his position as the firstborn.
 7. Earlier in ch. 32 we read how Jacob had sent messengers to Esau to let him know he and his family were returning home.
 - a. the messengers came back with the message that Esau and an army of 400 men were coming to meet him.
 - b. Jacob could only assume one thing – Esau was coming to attack.
 - c. so he made some plans for how to deal with his hostile brother and then prayed and asked God to protect him.

B. Vs. 24

24 Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.

1. Jacob had sent his family and all his possessions over to the west side of the Jabbok River. He stayed on the Eastern side for one last night – alone. Compose himself and prepare for Esau.
2. Suddenly, a “Man” appeared – the Lord / Man – real, tangible person • Jesus Christ
3. Before he knew it, this man grabbed Jacob and began tossing him around – Jacob fought back!
4. The bout went on all night and the words convey the idea it was no amiable or playful contest – this was a real fight.
 - a. how Jacob had the strength to go all night is amazing!
 - b. but that's the point and gives us the most important clue we need to understand what's going on here.
 - c. I can say from experience, wrestling is exhausting!
 - d. in high school = 3-2minute periods / even in peak physical condition after a match, you are done!
5. Jacob went all night, not because he wrestled with God, but because God was wrestling with him.
 - a. JACOB WOULD NOT GIVE UP! He wouldn't let God pin him.
 - b. so the night wore on and God just matched His pressure to whatever Jacob could muster in defense.
6. You see, Jacob's nature would not allow him to surrender, to give up.
7. He would keep fighting if all he had left was to lay on the ground and poke his finger in God's side.
8. God's opposition, His challenge to Jacob was to make him realize the stubbornness of his self-reliance.

9. When the dawn finally came and Jacob needed to be about his business of meeting Esau, the Lord finally called an end to the contest.

C. Vs. 25-29

25Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. **26**And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"

1. If Jacob would not give up of his own accord, then God would have to help him come to the end of himself.
2. And that's when God showed Jacob that from the beginning, it was never really a contest.
3. He dislocated Jacob's hip joint and crippled him!
4. How crushing it had to be for Jacob, who realized early on this had to be a manifestation of God, or at least one of the angels.
 - a. but he'd held his own for hours and no doubt Jacob thought he must be something to be able to wrestle so well for so long with such a powerful opponent.
 - b. I have to admit that for the first 2 periods of my match with Gus Bendix I thought I was doing pretty well just not getting pinned and making him work so hard for it.
 - c. of course, I was getting hammered and beat up in the process
 - d. but at the beginning of the 3rd period, when he just lifted me up and spun me around like a rag doll, I was humiliated!!!!!!!
 - e. if I had had thoughts of any skill as a wrestler up to that moment, they were instantly banished.
5. With this simple act of God just touching his hip Jacob was crippled.
 - a. he realized right then it had never been a real contest.
 - b. he was overmatched from the get-go; the Lord had just been playing with him!
6. In a flash, all of Jacob's self-delusion about his ability, his sufficiency, his strength and skill was seen for the paltry and pathetic thing it was.
7. He was crushed; and being humbled he was exactly where he needed to be.
8. There was no where to look but to God. He was defeated, but he still held on and cried out – "Please – bless me!"

27So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob."

9. This seems an interesting way to respond to Jacob's request for a blessing – to ask him what his name was.
 - a. certainly the Lord knew his name – so why ask?
 - b. because the blessing God would give Him was a new name; one that matched the new nature He would bring Jacob into.
10. God asked, "What's your name?" Jacob replied, "Dirty, sneaking thief."
 - a. and that is exactly what he was
 - b. a conniving schemer, an manipulative finagler, a deceptive con-artist.

28And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob [Dirty, sneaking thief], but Israel {God rules}; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have

prevailed.”

11. Israel means God rules.
 - a. the Lord is saying to Jacob that no longer will he be a man who depends on himself and his own devices- manipulating and conniving his way through life, seeking to gain the mastery over every situation and relationship
 - b. from that point on, his name will be Israel, God rules – and his life will be a testimony to the fact that the life that prevails, the victorious life, the successful and full life is the surrendered life – the life that has been conquered by the power of God.
12. God said, “You have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.”
13. Now wait a minute – from Jacob’s perspective, he lost the contest.
 - a. why does God say he prevailed?
 - b. because from God’s perspective, winning isn’t about getting our way – but surrendering to God’s perfect way.
14. Growing up, everyone of my children got to an age where they thought they knew how to get home from some distant place, so I’d let them give me directions as I drove.
 - a. they’d say, “Turn here” and I’d turn. “Turn here,” and I’d turn again. And after a few more turns we’d be lost!
 - b. the next time we’d try this little game, I’d ask, “Want to give me directions home?” and they’d say, “No daddy, you know the way.” They were content to just leave the driving and directions to me and go along for the ride, trusting in my ability to get them home.
15. Here we all are, driving down the highway called life and God has given us the road map [Bible] and the inner compass of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. all too often we grab the wheel and turn it this way or that.
 - b. we say, “Let’s go this direction,” and we end up lost.
16. Years ago, Frank Sinatra sang, “I did it ‘MY WAY!’”
 - a. it was a song celebrating self sufficiency
 - b. it could easily have been Jacob’s theme song
 - c. and it is certainly the main tune of those who end in hell!
17. We prevail in life, we come through into victory, not by doing it our way but by surrendering ourselves to the Lord.
18. For Jacob, it took an entire night of wrestling with God, and even then, he wouldn’t give up until God crippled him.
 - a. but that crippling was essential in healing Jacob! [Again]
 - b. without it, Jacob would have remained self-sufficient and would have continued to trust in his own devices.
 - c. what he needed to do was trust in the Lord and look to Him.
19. What God did to Jacob – He will do to each of us!
 - a. all of us MUST be brought to the place of surrender to God.
 - b. and God will wrestle with us, even crippling us if necessary so that we might realize what is needed to deal with life we do not possess – but God does!
 - c. we prevail in being defeated by God,
 - d. we succeed at living by failing at self-sufficiency,

- e. and we find our victory in surrender to the Lord!
 - f. he who overcomes in this life is the one who is overcome by the Life of Christ.
20. God is wrestling with many here this morning.
- a. the contest is not as Jacob's with the Angel of the Lord but in a different form & venue.
 - b. maybe God is wrestling with you in your marriage
 - 1) you see your mate as your adversary and you're determined to win, so you fight on, for days, weeks, months, years!
 - 2) listen – Jacob's adversary was NOT THE LORD – it was himself!
 - 3) God wrestled with him till he came to the end of himself!
 - 4) and you will find no resolution to the problems in your marriage until you wake up to the fact that your adversary isn't your spouse – it's YOU!
 - 5) now, hear me – I'm not saying your mate is perfect and the fault is all yours;
 - 6) I'm saying that GOD IS USING YOUR MARRIAGE to bring you to a place of surrender to Him! That's how He's wrestling with you.
 - 7) stop thinking things will get better when your mate gives up and does it YOUR WAY.
 - 8) you – surrender to the Lord, and ask Him to bless you with a new attitude and nature about your role in your marriage.
 - c. maybe God is wrestling with you at your job; boss, employees, project.
 - d. or maybe the match is in the realm of your relationship with your children.
 - e. God might be wrestling with you in your lack of contentment at being single.
21. Whatever form the contest takes, realize that what God is after is your blessing, a blessing that can only come when you give up, stop striving, and surrender without reservation to Him.
22. Stop looking at the problem; look to the Lord and for what it is He's trying to show you.

29Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell me Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why is it that you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there.

- 23. God had asked Jacob his name; Jacob asks the same.
- 24. But the Lord tells him he already knows His name – and whereas Jacob has just had a name change, God's name never changes, because He never changes.

D. Vs. 30-32

30So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel [Face of God]: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." **31**Just as he crossed over Peniel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip.

- 1. Peniel is just a form of the word Peniel, which is what Jacob named the river there.
- 2. He knows he's had an encounter with the Lord and names the place by what he experienced.
- 3. As he crossed the river at daybreak that day, he did so with a severe limp

because of his dislocated hip.

32 Therefore to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, which is on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob's hip in the muscle that shrank.

4. From this time on, Jacob walked with a limp, aided by a crutch.
5. He knew as the sun rose that was the day he would meet Esau.
 - a. the day before he'd made arrangements to divide his family and household into different groups and set them at a distance from one another
 - b. the strategy was that if Esau attacked one group, the others would then be able to flee.
6. But a crippled Jacob couldn't run!
7. In Jacob's prayer earlier in the Chapter, he'd asked the Lord for protection.
8. Crippling would not have been the answer Jacob expected!
9. But it was the best answer – because Jacob realized now his protection lay not in his clever strategies of dividing his camp up or sending a big gift before him.
10. His protection was the Lord upon whom he now had to lean, just as he leaned on that crutch.
11. When Jacob was just Jacob, his strength was his weakness.
12. Now that he is Israel, his weakness is his strength.
13. One of the common criticisms skeptics level at Christians is that religion is a crutch; that it's for weak people who can't deal with life.
14. I'm not going to argue with that.
 - a. you see, I've come to realize – I CAN'T DEAL WITH LIFE.
 - b. I've tried to do it my way. I've tried to find success and happiness by doing my own thing.
 - c. and what it got me was pain and sorrow – every success ultimately turned to defeat.
 - d. sin is pleasurable for a time, but it always ends in loss.
 - e. there has been no sweeter moment in my life than the instant God pinned me and crippled my pride.
 - f. I wrestled with Him for years, but the day came when He finally let me know it was really no contest – all along He had only been allowing me to see how utterly foolish it is to oppose him.
15. Call my faith a crutch if you want to – I will gladly lean on Christ!
16. What are YOU leaning on? What do you trust in? Yourself?
17. Where's trusting in yourself got you?