

CHRIST CAME BEFORE CHRISTMAS

GENESIS 32:22-32

JESUS CAME TO SANCTIFY



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

How much do you want to be holy? How much do you want to be sanctified? How much do you want to be free of sin and full of godliness? Grade your desire with a number from 1 to 10.

Now do the same with the question, How much do you want to be saved? From a range of 1 to 10, what would your number be?

If we're honest, most of us have a higher salvation number than a sanctification number. We want to be saved more than we want to be holy. **How do we increase our desire for holiness?**

Last week, we tried to increase our desire for salvation by showing how much the Son of God wanted to save people even before he came to earth as a man. This week we want to increase our desire for holiness by seeing how much the Son of God wanted to sanctify people even before he came to this earth as a man. In Genesis 32:22-32, we'll encounter the Son of God in human form proving how much he wants us to be holy.

BACKGROUND

Jacob had to flee his brother for exile after defrauding him. As he left the Promised Land, the Angel of the Lord met him and gave him promises and assurances (Genesis 28).

After spending 20 years in foreign exile, the Angel of the Lord visited him again and told him to return to his homeland and family (Gen. 31:13).

As he entered the Promised Land, the Angel of the Lord together with other angels met him to give him further encouragement (Gen. 32:1).

After hearing that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men, Jacob sent a large gift to Esau to try to appease him (32:3-21), shepherded his family and servants across the Jabbok ford (32:22-23), and then lies down alone to ponder his likely end the next day. It's in this desperate context that the Angel of the Lord appears once again to Jacob (32:24-32).



What does the Angel of the Lord teach Jacob about the blessing of holiness?



1. WE LOSE BY WINNING (22-24)

The Arena

Jacob lay down on the ground to spend an anxious night in the dark and desolate desert, perhaps his last night on earth. This is the scene for a life-or-death wrestling match that ends up with both competitors winning. Let's take our seats ring side as the wrestlers are introduced.

The Wrestlers

Jacob had certainly lived up to his name, which meant 'heel-grabber' or 'supplanter.' From the day of his birth he had tried to overtake his brother Esau and obtain physical and spiritual blessings by foul means. Having succeeded at Esau's expense, now Esau was heading his way with a 400-strong army.

We're told solemnly and ominously that Jacob was **left alone** (24). He had sent his family and servants on ahead and was now alone with his own thoughts, contemplating the awful day that lay ahead of him—probably the day of his death.

In that fear-filled moment, a shadowy male figure appeared out of the night, advanced towards him, grabbed him, and a life-or-death struggle ensued. Who is this **man**?

This 'man' is called God twice in this chapter (32: 28, 30). When Hosea reflected on this incident, calls the man an 'angel', 'the LORD,' and 'the God of hosts' (Hosea 12:4-5). We therefore conclude that this is the same 'Messenger of the LORD' who appeared to Hagar in Genesis 16, a pre-Christmas coming of the Son of God in human form.

The Contest

The Hebrew verb for 'wrestle' here, indicates that the contest was initiated by the man not Jacob. The man was the instigator, the aggressor, while Jacob was the defender, fighting for his life. The struggle was momentous and long. As we will see, the 'man' could have ended this much quicker, whenever he chose, but (like a Dad with a small boy) decided to accommodate himself to Jacob for the purposes of the matchup.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Jacob had won each human contest up until this point. He had 'beaten' his father Isaac, his brother Esau, and his uncle Laban. He was a winner, someone who won blessings by fair means or foul, usually foul. But his winning ways had brought him to a dead end, an end that looked like death. Many win in this world but lose their lives, both here and hereafter. We can lose by winning.

WE CAN WIN THE WORLD
BUT LOSE OUR SOUL



How do I win from God's perspective?



2. WE WIN BY LOSING (25-32)

The Knockout

When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him (25).

Eventually, the 'man' realized that Jacob would not give up fighting, he would not surrender, he would not 'tap out.' The 'man,' therefore, ended the contest with a simple supernatural touch on Jacob's hip, reducing Jacob to helplessness. After hours of grappling and gripping, he easily dislocated Jacob's hip, ending the contest and ending Jacob's winning run.

The Winners

The contest was over and the 'man' was the clear winner. But Jacob, like a little child hanging on to his Father's leg, refused to let go of the man. "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (26), protested Jacob. He's hanging on helplessly to the one who has defeated him. Jacob is no longer trying to get the blessing but asking for the blessing, he's no longer scheming for a blessing but begging for it from someone whom he recognized as the only source of blessing. Hosea says that Jacob not only grappled with the Angel, but he wept and pleaded for a blessing (Hosea 12:4).

The Trophy

Who won this wrestling match? Both won, but in different ways. The 'man' won by winning, by defeating Jacob, weakening him physically, and weakening him spiritually. He humbled his body and his heart. The 'man's' victory is underlined by his asking Jacob for his name (27). He knew it already, but he's asking Jacob to say his name as a confession, to identify with his identity as a supplanter, a cheat, a conman, a grifter who got his way by beating down others to get to the top. The 'man' gets a trophy of grace.

But, Jacob also won. He won by losing, and ended up with five trophies in his cabinet.

- **A new name.** The Lord blesses Jacob with a change of character, and confirms it with a change of name. **Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed (28).** Israel means 'Power with God' he's given this name because "you have fought with God and have won." Clearly he did not win by winning. He won by losing. His new name would therefore remind him of his new way of getting power from God and winning with God: through weakness. He leaves force and fraud behind in the desert, together with his old name. He goes forward with helpless faith, hanging on to God in great weakness. The way to have power with God is to be broken by God. As Ed Clowney put it: "Faith wins when it knows that all is lost, and clings to God alone."
- **A new blessing.** He asks for the man's name, but the man gives him a blessing instead. **And there he blessed him (29).** Where? In the place of weakness, defeat, injury, and tears.

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- **A new landmark.** Jacob called the name of the place Peniel ('face of God'), saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered" (30). Like Hagar, he's astonished that he's seen God and he's still alive. He had seen God's face and lived and therefore he could see Esau's face and live.
 - **A new limp.** He limped upon his thigh for the rest of his days (31-32) so that Jacob would never forget the strength of weakness. By wounding him, God healed him. Both the sinew and his self-confidence shriveled. Like Paul, Jacob is now going forward in God's strength (2 Cor. 12:7).
 - **A new memory.** The Lord shows his care for Jacob by giving him and Israel a permanent reminder of the lessons of this wrestling match. Every time they set this sinew aside they would remember the path to blessing is through weakness.

Though remnants of the 'old man' would continue, Jacob was sanctified by this encounter with the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ. He learned strength through weakness, and, above all, learned that God was a covenant-keeping God who cared for him and would keep His promises without Jacob's help. Thus, the chapter ends the wrestling bout with two winners.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Strength lies in confessed and felt weakness before God. As Hosea reminded Jacob's descendants many years later (Hosea 12:4-6), this incident teaches us that the way to victory is not in wrestling God to the ground, but in having God wrestle us to the ground. In fact, better just start on the ground in confessed weakness. That's the way to be Christ's trophy and get trophies from Christ. We win by losing.

Christ came before Christmas to save Hagar and to sanctify Jacob. Charles Drew said: "He graciously adopted such methods to indicate how much he longed for the fullness of time when he should put away their sins and bring in an everlasting righteousness for them." Or as John Calvin put it, "For even though he (Christ) was not yet clothed with flesh, he came down, so to speak, as an intermediary, in order to approach believers more intimately." Christ came before Christmas. What an encouragement to us as we seek salvation and holiness from Jesus. He wants this for us even more than we want it for ourselves.

WE WILL WIN MORE TROPHIES
IF WE BECOME CHRIST'S TROPHY



Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell the Story > Change others' stories.



SUMMARY



PRAYER: Messenger of the Lord, thank you for coming to sanctify saints.
Please sanctify me with your desire for my sanctification.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you grade your desire for holiness?
2. What increases or decreases your desire for holiness?
3. When have you seen spiritual losses through winning? What did you lose?
4. When have you seen spiritual gains through losing? What were your gains?
5. How much does Jesus desire our holiness? What effect does that have upon you?
6. What does Christ coming before Christmas to sanctify Jacob tell you about Christ's coming at Christmas?

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