

July 29, 07 Genesis 32:22-32 No. 2

## Heroes- Jacob- And In This Corner

When I was a kid my mom and dad watched wrestling on Friday nights. Those were the days of black and white small TV's without remotes. You really had to get out of your chair, go to the other side of the room to change one of 3 channels, if you were lucky, and turn up or down the sound or change stations. Unbelievable to me, my mom and dad loved wrestling. They enjoyed the tag team matches, the lady wrestlers, and most of all their favorite wrestler Gorgeous George. There were no costumes back then, but the crowds were as wild as they are today. All I remember about Gorgeous George was he had shoulder length blond curly hair and came down the aisle with some sort of a cape like Liberace used to wear, but not as elaborate. My mom used to get pretty excited when her wrestler was getting beat, or they did some nasty stuff to him. Oh it wasn't like some of the stuff they do today, it was a little calmer.

Today we move on to another hero from the Bible that we may know little about, yet he is as important as all the others. He too, had his bad side before he had his good side. This morning we are going to check out a wrestling match found in Scripture. It was an all night match without referees or even an audience. It took place when a man was returning home after spending about 21 years with his uncle. He was returning to see a brother whom he had cheated out of his

inheritance and his blessing. The last he saw his brother his had vowed he would kill him. Now years later he was returning with his rewards of being blessed by God. This man, who wasn't awfully close to God at that time had a dream and God told him he would bless him, if he would follow him. And so for 21 years things went well in the land of his uncle. But now he and his uncle weren't seeing eye to eye. You see, they tried to out smart each other to the point of finding ways to cheat each other. Let's turn to today's Scripture to see this short match that transformed the life and future of Jacob the cheat and schemer. Turn to Genesis 32:22-32.

Let's look at this hero who wrestled more than once in his life. In the first match we have **in this corner Jacob, and in the other is his brother Esau.**

Jacob and Esau were twin boys born to Isaac and Rebekah. Their wrestling match began a long time before while they were still in Rachel's womb. It looks like Esau won that first match as he was born first. But Jacob didn't give up, he came out right behind Esau pulling on his feet as if to try and get ahead of his brother Esau. You see, the place of birth meant where you stood when it came to the inheritance and family blessing. So Esau, being first born would receive the greatest portion of inheritance and that blessing.

Esau was the more rugged type so he was his father's favorite. Jacob, well, he was mom's favorite. Now I know parents aren't suppose to favor any child, but

Isaac, being a man of the wild, so to speak, could see a little of himself in Esau. He was hairy. He enjoyed the outside life. He loved hunting. He often would stay on the hunt until he could find some game to kill and bring home. Jacob, on the other hand, seemed to be an at home type of guy. Maybe even the most studious. He stayed by his mom's side more than Esau did. He became Rachel's favorite.

So one day Jacob was cooking when Esau came in from the field and was hungry. Esau was famished so he asked Jacob for a bowl of soup that smelled so wonderful, especially to a person with an empty stomach. This was Jacob's opportunity. He was going to check out **how really hungry** his brother was. He told Esau he could have a bowl of soup only if he signed over his right of inheritance to him. Well to a hungry Esau he could care less about the family inheritance right then, so he said okay he would trade his inheritance for the bowl of soup. Gong! Round one is over and Jacob wins the inheritance.

Well then in round two of their match dad Isaac was dying and it was time to give the family blessing. Dad, being in bed and just about blind, summons Esau and tells him to go and get some wild game for them to share a meal one last time. Esau got his bow and off he went. Well Rebekah overheard their conversation so she and Jacob connived to trick the blind Isaac and have Jacob receive the blessing. Because Esau was hairy, she had to put fake hair all over Jacob's body in case dad tried to feel to see if it was Esau. Well, Rebekah and Jacob fixed the wild

game while Esau was on the hunt and Rebekah pushed a reluctant Jacob into the presence of his dad Isaac. When he heard his son's voice he thought it sounded different, like maybe he sounded like Jacob, or that Esau had a cold or something, so he asked his son to bend down to kiss him. Sure enough he smelled like Esau the hunter. He felt the hair and he certainly felt like his first born son Esau. So, they ate and he gave Jacob the family blessing that was meant for Esau. Just about that time, in from the fields comes Esau and he hears and sees what is happening and he becomes angry. "What have you done, father? You gave my blessing to Jacob. He already cheated me out of my inheritance when he took advantage of my hunger. Take back the blessing and bless me, for I am your first born son and it's rightfully mine." But since the blessing was already given, a disappointing Isaac said he could not retract the blessing. Now this made Esau all the madder and he swore he would get rid of his brother Jacob. Well, mom knew he would carry out his threat, so she sent Jacob to her brother Laban, in another land with her blessing telling him to stay away for fear of his life.

Jacob set out to the land of his uncle with nothing but a knapsack full of his belongings. On that trip he had his first encounter with God in a dream, who told him not be afraid that he would be blessed in his new land if he stayed faithful to him. A reluctant, skeptical Jacob went on his way after his dream not sure if this had been a dream or a nightmare.

Bout number two. **In this corner, Jacob the cheat. In the other is Uncle Laban.**

Things looked good for Jacob. He met and fell in love with uncle Laban's second daughter Rachel. She was a pretty little thing who stole his heart the first time he saw her. It wasn't long before he knew he wanted to spend the rest of his life with Rachel, so he asked uncle Laban for her hand in marriage. Laban agreed and threw a big party to celebrate their engagement and told him that if he worked for 7 years he would bless this marriage. So for 7 years he worked hard knowing when those years were done he would have the love of his life as his wife. Jacob checked each day off of his calendar and when that last day came to a close he reminded Laban of his promise and so a wedding feast was prepared and guests were invited to the ceremony. After all the celebration and all the traditional stuff, Jacob was allowed to go into the tent to receive his new bride.

When morning came, Jacob came flying out of that tent in dismay, for the woman he slept with that night, the one who became his bride wasn't Rachel, it was her older, perhaps less prettier, sister Leah. He was hopping mad as he traced down Uncle Laban. But uncle Laban could only laugh because he knew the way it was to be. Tradition states the second child can not be married until the first was married, so better be satisfied with Leah. But Jacob argues that he had been promised the hand of Rachel if he worked 7 years. Uncle Laban said, "sue me," or

words to that effect. He promised Jacob, “look if you work for me for 7 more years, well then Rachel will be yours as well.” So being so in love with Rachel, he agreed, as long as he could have her for his bride now. So they sealed the deal. Now he had two wives who were sisters and who, in all reality, had their own dirty laundry to contend with. But that’s another story for another time. Isn’t the Bible full of great mystery and suspense just like real life? What do you know, Jacob has met someone just like him. You know what they say, what goes around comes around. It seems that’s right in the story of Jacob. So, as our story goes, Jacob the cheat, has met his match in uncle Laban the cheater.

Laban realized Jacob’s presence brought with it many blessing from God. His wealth grew. His flocks grew. Jacob had the Midas touch so that wherever he was, God blessed him and those around him.

For 7 more years Jacob stayed with Laban. In total it was 21 years. Finally Jacob felt the need to return home. Both families had prospered, but now Laban was getting to be a worse cheat than Jacob. He tried to cheat Jacob out of some of the herds they shared, but Jacob was wise to the plan and beat old uncle Laban to the punch. Now it was time to leave while the getting was good.

The third and most important wrestling match came the day before he was to meet his brother Esau. After 21 years of separation, Jacob was praying that Esau would not hold a grudge. So he sent him animals as gifts in order to pacify him.

But when his envoy returned they said his brother was not interested in the animals and was on his way to see him with 400 armed men. So a fearful Jacob spent time with his family, divided them, to have a little distance between them hoping it might slow Esau down and maybe even soften Esau's heart.

Meanwhile Jacob stayed on the other side of the river to rest, think, and pray for what would happen with his next wrestling match with Esau.

However, his next wrestling match wasn't with Esau. **For in this corner we find Jacob the cheat, who is scared. In the other corner is God the Almighty One.** They struggled all night that night. In fact, it seems God was allowing Jacob to win. After all, God is all powerful and all knowing, and there was no way he could lose unless he let it happen. So when the morning was about to come into being, after wrestling all night, and letting Jacob think he was winning, God touched Jacob's hip and threw it out of whack. This stopped the fight. The wrestling was over. And when it was over, Jacob realized he had just wrestled with God and he was still alive. And from that day on, when he walked with his limp he remembered his wrestling episode, and smiled, for he did pin God, and he did get a blessing. But little did he know that it was all in God's plan.

I want you to know that this hero of our faith, whom God blessed became the family tree that produced the 12 tribes of Israel. He had begun as a man who was a cheat and a schemer. But when he wrestled with God, God gave him a new

name, the name “Israel” which means ‘he struggled with God.’” Yes, this man had a change of heart, a conversion experience. Now he was not afraid to face his brother Esau. And on that next day he did not send all his family and all the animals ahead of him. Instead he went to the front of the line waiting to see his brother. When Esau arrived Jacob fell on his knees asking his forgiveness. He told Esau he could have all he had to restore his wealth he cheated him. Esau forgave Jacob. They hugged. Peace came to them. Jacob could now continue on to the home land with peace in his heart.

My friends have you ever wrestled with God?

I have. I wrestled with God when he called me into the ministry. When he stood in front of me during that Bible study and pointed his finger at me and said, “I want you in my ministry,” I froze and said nothing. And the days after that I wrestled with God like Jacob did, like Moses did, like Jeremiah did, like Isaiah did. For over 2 years I wrestled with God about my calling because how could he use me, an ordinary guy who was a factory worker and had a wife and 6 kids and was not educated beyond high school, except for a tour of duty in the Navy. But he would not let me go. In fact, the more I struggled the more he assured me he would bless me. Finally, I surrendered all to Him and all the doors opened.

And the wrestling goes on. The wrestling goes on at times with my will and the will of God. I don't always want to do what God wants me to do, and so we wrestle until I realize his way is far better than my way.

Have **you** ever wrestled with God? Oh, I'm sure many of you have. Sometimes it's over a decision that needs to be made. Sometimes it's over something you want and you know God doesn't want that for you. The apostles often wrestled with Jesus as they walked with him. What we find out is, it's easier to wrestle with a human, for when you wrestle with God he will never give up. He will always win. And let me say if you want perfect peace, stop wrestling with God. Moses found out he was not going to win when he told God "here I am, send Aaron." Jonah found it out when he was trying to run away from God's mission and was on a boat on the high seas sailing in the opposite direction of his mission work. He ended up being tossed overboard and found himself in the belly of a big fish, who regurgitated him onto the land of Nineveh, where God had planned for him to go.

You see, wrestling with God can be a good thing at times. How, you might ask? Well, it comes to a time when you finally surrender to God's way in your life. In the hymn, "I Surrender All" we sing, "All to Jesus I surrender, all to him I freely give, I will ever Love and trust him, in his presence daily live. All to Jesus I surrender, humble at his feet I bow, worldly pleasures all forsaken, take me, Jesus,

take me now. All to Jesus I surrender, make me, Savior, wholly thine, let me feel the Holy Spirit, truly know that thou art mine. All to Jesus I surrender, Lord, I give myself to thee, fill me with thy love and power, let thy blessing fall on me. All to Jesus I surrender, now I feel the sacred flame. O the joy of full salvation! Glory, glory to his name!....”

Our hero Jacob, the cheat, the schemer was transformed through a wrestling match with God. God still does the transformation in the hearts that continue to wrestle with him.

Once again what are you wrestling about with God? Are you ready to tell him you give up? You might as well, for I can tell you this. I know who will win your wrestling match. God will! He always wins. Ask Noah. Ask Moses. Ask Jacob!