

A Dislocated Hip

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Text: Gen. 32:22-32

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Last week we learned from Jacob's model prayer. I personally learned that spiritual preparation is quite necessary—that my heart needs to be right with God, and that I need to have consulted with him on the topic of prayer. That last works as a check on spontaneous prayer. I feel the need to be prayed up, or spiritually prepared to pray over a certain matter. Then I am able to proceed in prayer. From the message, I hope that others gathered that a relationship with God, personal and intimate relationship is necessary. Certain things need to be declared: his name, his promises, his truth. That is what follows the words of address! You said, **Return to your country, and to your kindred, and I will deal well, or kindly with you.** I described this as a covenant between God and Jacob. *If Jacob is obedient to do what he has been told to do, then God will treat him well.* This is all well and good for those who are of a mind to be attentive and obedient. Those are the ones who are blessed, **treated kindly by God.** And, finally, we noted the argumentative style of the prayer. This may have sounded odd to some, but it is a form of prayer that entails, taking God at his word, or, as we sang in closing, "Standing on the promises."

Hopefully, you came away with some of that instruction in the manner of praying, the how of it. It is the next element which carries over specifically into today's wrestling match by the stream Jabbok—some 24 miles north of the Dead Sea, along the Jordan River. There is a ford at the confluence of the two streams and Jacob remains on the far, or the eastern side of those streams. I draw your attention to the words: **I am not worthy.** (v.10) Unworthy means humility. Not worthy of what? **Of all the deeds of steadfast love and truth** (I shared in an aside that the Hebrew supports the meaning of mercy and truth. So, praying with faith and trust, the humble man, Jacob, comes before God. He comes in fear, in weakness and helplessness to ask God for *deliverance*. He, knowing he cannot defend himself has "power with God." He doesn't come in his strength, or boasting in his accomplishments but humbly, even meekly, as a child unto his loving father, **Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, Esau.** (v.11) Esau has reason to hate him and in strictly terms of justice Jacob deserves retribution: Jacob stole, deceived and took advantage of Esau. When they were last together, Esau was awaiting the opportunity, following mourning the death of their father, to kill him. (27:41) And, now, having sent everyone and everything else ahead, Jacob remains behind alone. **Who have I in heaven but thee?** (Psalm 73:25) Jacob's defenselessness is increased with the wound he receives in the process of wrestling—a hip dislocation. I find it quite astounding that a ninety year old woman was on our prayer list last week who had just had her hip replaced. May she stabilize and recover despite her isolation. May her fearful heart be reassured of her family's and God's love!

What a comprehensive blessing it is to have power with God? **Your name shall no longer be Jacob but Israel, for you have striven with God and prevailed.** (v.28) Israel means "strives with God" but, again, in a positive sense that may sound strange to our ears. This is from **prevailing . . . with God. Jacob, the wounded, is the victor just as his Antitype, the Lord Jesus Christ.** Despite the setting of an all-night wrestling match, what we mean by power with God is not defined by physical force! No

man is up to the omnipotence of God—the outcome of the match is laughable if it were not the grace of God which allowed Jacob to win! **When the man, the angel of the Lord** meaning God himself, **saw that he did not prevail against Jacob** he performed a little hip surgery, struck his hip socket and put Jacob's hip out of joint. I can assure you this this was a moment of intense pain. Yet he did not cease: **I will not let you go unless you bless me.** (v.26) Hosea 12:2-6 sheds some light on this all-night struggle:

**2 The Lord also has a dispute with Judah,
And will punish Jacob according to his ways;
He will repay him according to his deeds.
3 In the womb he took his brother by the heel,
And in his maturity he contended with God.
4 Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed;
He wept and sought His favor.
He found Him at Bethel
And there He spoke with us,
5 Even the Lord, the God of hosts,
The Lord is His [Memorial]name.
6 Therefore, return to your God,
Observe [b]kindness and justice,
And wait for your God continually. (NASB)**

With every muscle and sinew in his body stretched and strained, with intense exertion **he wept and cried out to God.** (v.4) What a striking resemblance this picture bears to that of our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane, sweating blood and tears in earnest, fervent prayer. An agony of intercession . . . that was Christ's prayer. **The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.** (James 5:16) And those of us who have cried out to God *with tears* for the conversion of our unsaved loved ones know exactly what that demand feels like. God doesn't need our tears, but tears do bear witness to our earnestness—and that *he does require.*

Power with God doesn't come through our intellectual capacity either. If we think about it it is actually lunatic to imagine that our subtle wit and profound reasonings are anything like a match for divine *omniscience*. All of human understanding, taken together, cannot come up to the least measure of divine wisdom! Oh, of course. Now that we think of it the thought is preposterous *but that never deters the presumptuous from thinking we are smarter than God.* In accordance with this, we know that simplicity of the gospel and foolishness of preaching make fools of those who pride themselves on their knowledge, as the Apostle Paul; argues convincingly. The Psalmist declares:

**Psalm 73:21 When my heart was embittered
And I was pierced within,
22 Then I was senseless and ignorant;
I was like [an animal] a beast before You.**

Nor is magic a source of leverage with the Almighty. We still come across those who believe that the vain repetition of mere words, incantations really, or set prayers read from a book by special persons are effective with god. But if these are not utterances from the heart, they are wind in the leaves. Jacob has no magic, no charms—yes, there

are the household gods which he is unaware that Rachel carries—and no enchantments—no such thing as heathens and pagans put their superstitious trust in! And, very close to this misbelief is the idea that human merit has anything to do with effectual prayer *as if* the gold medal winner is more likely to be heard than the bronze medalist, or, for that matter, the last place competitor! So, not physical prowess, not intellect, not magic and not merit!

The power with God does not come from within us, but rather from within God, his nature, his character. Ours is the misery and God's is the compassion and the pity. Because he is love, tenderness, and gentleness, God is susceptible to what we are suffering. We are poor, feeble, needy sons of Adam; he is God Almighty, strong to rescue, save and deliver. Thank God. It is very humbling to remember who God is and how we are related to him as creature to our Creator! Another source of power with God comes from his promises. God has bound himself in certain ways, through express covenants and promises—it is in the nature of his freedom of will that he limits himself. Who would pretend to understand the mystery of God's sovereign self-limitation. But he never lies, never breaks a promise, is always faithful and true and just. He allows evil, but does not do evil. He has the power to make evil work for good—evil is powerless before the Almighty. Again, we are treading on the frontiers of mystery. But we know that because he always prevails, good will triumph in the end—even if we can't see it until we get there.

There are two dependable, eternal and inexhaustible sources of divine power: his nature and his promises. Additionally, a believer may plead the relationships of grace such as divine election, adoption, regeneration and salvation. We have what Jacob related to us: past actions: mercies and revelations of truth given along the way. Would God who purchased us very dearly, abandon us . . . allow us to be lost? No, we know that not one has been, or will be lost! His gift of us to the Son is irrevocable. And, on that basis, we may presume further, future and continued blessings.

Prayer is one form that our power with God can take. It begins with the recognition of our weakness . . . even desperation. Those who think themselves full-sanctified, spiritually perfected are ignorant of their true need and condition. They are self-deceived. Others are waverers—sometimes running hot and other times cold. **Let not such a man think that he will get anything from the Lord**, warns James. The more effectual prayer warrior is one who fasts, and prays and persists through long hours, even whole nights! So caught up in their work that they hardly notice the passing of time until, all of a sudden, dawn's blush lightens the eastern sky. Exhilarated, they truly marvel at where the time went! God, being who he is, deserves a thousand fold more confidence than our prayer life exposes. There is believing God, and believing God more! There's preaching and then there's preaching in faith. Charles Spurgeon shares how one night he expressed his desire for a few souls—and a Wesleyan elder rebuked him: "I wouldn't "amen" your prayer because why ask for a few, Charles, you should ask for all. Lord, save all the unsaved here. Now that I could "amen" to!"

So mindful of our limitations, our weakness, and expressing our full belief in God, are two vital ingredients of a powerful prayer life but both of these want one thing: earnest attention to the Word. Pray with expectations of biblical proportions. Why not? Is that not what it means to pray by the Book? Those who with a pure heart, those who are up

to speed in the confession and repentance business, can expect large returns on that score. That is a matter of record. The praying church in Jerusalem sprang the apostles, and then, again, the Apostle Peter. Fear of God fell on the region and many souls were saved. That's not fantasy, friends, that's sacred history.

If we lack intensity, we can pick up the pace. If we are deficient in earnestness we can ask for heavenly back-up. If we lack persistence, we should note how the opposite is urged upon us: pray, pray unceasingly! Pray with tears! There's no embarrassment in that—quite the opposite. There's appreciation, there's wonder and gratitude. It is prayer like that this that has historically brought down blessings from heaven. There are still more blessings there . . . an inexhaustible supply.

Many professing Christians have a mediocre prayer life, reflecting a complacent spiritual life. Why don't they see how dull, and uninviting . . . how listless and lifeless this is for those who have an everlasting hope and joy abundant? I would suggest that we seek to be a better advertising campaign, each and every one of us. Read the book of Acts and recharge your batteries there! Feed upon the triumphs of the Holy Spirit recorded in his mighty works. *Call down mercy and blessing!* We can't claim that there is no need for intercession—80,000 plus American dead from Covid-19 alone. Overdose deaths have exploded in numbers since the “lock-down.”

I want to leave you with a striking picture from the Old Testament, found in Numbers 16. It concerns the aftermath of the rebellion of Korah—250 community leaders rose up in rebellion, murmuring against Moses and Aaron. **They said, “You have gone too far! For all in the congregation are holy, everyone of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly?”** Of course, nothing of the sort had happened, besides Moses and Aaron did not exalt themselves God exalted them. They confused ethical holiness with priestly consecration—they are not the same thing! God appointed Moses and Aaron to their place and roles.

With rich irony, this judgment passage follows hard on the instruction for the people of Israel to sew tassels on the corners of their garments with a cord of blue. **And it shall be a tassel¹ for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the Lord, to do them² not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after². So shall you remember to do all my commandments, and be holy to your God.** (Num. 15:39-40). Again this is ethical holiness, enjoined on every believer!

¹ This seems an universal provision—circumcision being limited to males—everyone could wear tassels.

² **To go a whoring**, i.e. to depart from me, and to prefer your own fancies before my commands, and to live only by present sight or sense, and not at all by faith in my promises. - Matthew Poole. John Gill adds: which seems to restrain the sense pretty much to idolatry, to false and superstitious worship, which are often in Scripture expressed by fornication and whoredom; though other sins and lusts also are sometimes signified by the same words. The Pulpit Commentary adds: The **office** of the tassels was to promote **a recollected spirit**. As it was, their fickle minds were always ready to stray away towards any heathen follies which their restless eyes might light upon. The trivial but striking peculiarity of their dress should recall them to the thought that they were a peculiar people, holy to the Lord.

There follows this complaint, from Korah, a divine rebuke of the rebelling Levites. God responds, **“You have gone too far.** Then follows the “test of the censers” which, because we do not offer up incense in our worship services, may seem somewhat strange. God collects the rebels by this means, the ground opens up so they and their whole company went down to Sheol, or hell. The deceased dissenters’ censers were collected and hammered into a covering for the altar as a memorial. But the decisive action of the Lord was insufficient to quell the rebellious. **But on the next day all the congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and against Aaron, saying, “You have killed the people of the Lord.”** This is blatantly untrue for it was God who executed judgment against the rebel leaders. **And when the congregation had assembled against Moses and Aaron, they turned toward the tent of meeting. And behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord appeared.** And the Lord, in his anger proposed to consume them all. **And Moses said to Aaron, “Take your censer, and put fire in it from the altar and lay incense on it and carry it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for the wrath has gone out from the Lord and the plague has begun. So Aaron took it as Moses said being the high priest, and ran into the midst of the assembly. And behold the plague had already begun among the people. And he put on the incense and made atonement for the people. and HE STOOD BETWEEN THE DEAD AND THE LIVING, AND THE PLAGUE WAS STOPPED.** (16:41-48) 14,700 died.

You may not know this but the incense of the tabernacle represented *the prayers of the people*, prayers of thanksgiving, praise and requests for forgiveness. We have no high priest, and prayer is the incense we offer up to God, we burn the incense in the censers of the gospel and we are to carry the atonement of Christ to the people—we are to stand between the dead and the living. That is our work, our ministry, our calling. And this is a picture of how vital it all is. Let’s be scattered and let’s be praying.

Amen