

WRESTLING WITH GOD

We are supposed to wrestle with evil spirits face to face, eyeball to eyeball, shoulder to shoulder and assert the victory of our Lord Jesus. Jacob, like everyone of us had to wrestle with God, to enter the prophetic school of maturity. From a split family of tensions, through the 21 year cycle of self-will struggle, he came to Peniel, an isolation corner, to come face to face with the living God. Of all the patriarchs he is the most instructive for us; revealing the way of discipline, and the struggle we all have with self-will. If we wrestle with God we are not fully committed to Him and have areas in our life contrary to His will.

Jacob was a schemer for his own ends, in order to preserve himself from the demands of self surrender. God is concerned with the root of sin, our selfish will that refuses to have the Lord Jesus reign over us. The Lord has to touch us at the self-willed points so we may surrender without struggle. When we insist on our own way it breeds a lack of harmony and a lack of trust. Wrestling is a close quarters contest, like Moses killing the Egyptian. The future leader put the clock back 40 years in his life, because he precipitated the Lord's will, by his own agenda. The enemy seeks to deceive us by causing us to put on a show. Few believers today are honest and real before God and men. We wrestle with God rather than against principalities and powers.

A SPLIT FAMILY

Romans 9 : 13 bluntly shares the divine verdict :

“Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated.”

The division was deepened by Isaac loving Esau for his delicious game, and Rebecca loving Jacob, who stayed nearby rather than going off to hunt all day. However, Jacob was no wimp, but a “complete man, dwelling in tents”, involved no doubt in animal husbandry. Here was a distinction. Esau looked upon the wealth of the field, game to be hunted, but will not process what he gained to make it marketable. Jacob had resources close at hand and made farming efficient rather than daily hard labour.

Proverbs 12 : 27 says :

***“The slothful does not roast what he took in hunting,
but diligence is a man's precious possession.”***

The word ‘slothful’ is a poor translation and should not be equated with laziness. It means the inability to see a profitable end product. Jacob, however, had a long-term plan. Look at nations today. USA has been a leader in marketing resources. Russia has the same amounts of oil, forest, minerals, but has endured long years of human poverty. You could also contrast S. Africa and Congo, who have similar gold deposits. Jacob and Esau were very different : the younger a schemer, fraudster, a supplanter having grabbed the heel of his brother when arriving into the world. Esau was a greedy, sensuous man, a fornicator, marrying a woman outside the covenant, displaying a contempt for the things of heaven. In Jacob, however, there was an inner fire to meet with the living God, which was never extinguished. The dysfunctional

split family experienced mounting tension when Isaac blessed Jacob and not Esau, the firstborn. When the ageing, blind father knew his mistake he trembled exceedingly, knew a shaking of his soul but came from disobedience to faith. He knew it had been Jacob's voice, so of his five senses only his sense of hearing was not deceived. Faith forever comes from hearing the word of God and Hebrews 11 : 20 reports that "by faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come."

Rebecca's promoting of Jacob can be seen as helping God out, rather than true faith. In the rest of faith God orders the circumstances. Some believers are always scheming, pushing, restlessly doing, never resting in the character and sovereignty of God. However, Esau hated Jacob and with murder in the air, Isaac commanded him to go to Laban his uncle to find a wife. This is where Jacob met his match.

BETHEL Genesis 28 : 10 – 22

Jacob ran away but the Lord was waiting for him. Constant communication with heaven. Angels from the realm of glory. The awful stone pillow and the awesome presence of the Lord. The ministry of heaven was directed to the man who thought God was not with him. What an encouragement for us! We are assured by experiences because we believe God has a long term purpose for our lives. Here for Jacob was the DREAM of REALITY. There are two doors for every believer – the word of God door and the experience door. Each door has a voice (see Revelation 4 : 1) that beckons us. The charismatic church is roughly divided at this point, some preferring the experience door and only using the word of God casually. The word of God door is the sure word of prophecy and those who go through it will know God in a deeper way. Remember Adam and Eve walked with God everyday in the cool of the evening and were edified by His words of conviction and comfort. The experience door was the serpent's voice that immediately caused Eve to add to and doubt the spoken word of God. Deceit began at the fall of man when the talking serpent misrepresented God by slander. Too many charismatic believers today walk through the experience door, and fail to test the spirits. Remember the baptism in the Holy Spirit opens us up to the unseen spiritual realm, and is not a hotline to the holiness of God! We need a deeper love of the truth if we are charismatic than even our evangelical friends! The experience door alone will always give the believer a sense of unlimited potential (the very snare that Eve fell into!) Now God does want us to find and live in our inheritance.....but through the word of grace.

Acts 20 : 32 in the context of false leaders tells us :

***"And now, brethren, I commend you to God
and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up
and give you and inheritance among all those who are sanctified."***

Sanctified! This was on God's agenda for Jacob, for him to be set apart for God's purpose. God is revealing the pre-eminence of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph over the people of Ur and Canaan, over Ishmael, over Esau, and over Joseph's brothers. God has chosen Jacob to inwardly change his character. This radical change occurred at Peniel, where the reality of the dream became objective and subjective fact. Between Bethel and Peniel a 21 year cycle of self-will, the struggle for maturity, was the environment where finally Jacob could say "Not I, but Christ." Jacob met his match in sly Laban, who changed his wages ten times, and gave Leah as

wife instead of Rachel. How often, the breaking of the believer comes through relationships. There may be miracles on the way (see Genesis 30 : 37 – 39), but Jacob was unbroken and couldn't see it! How often today we see evangelists with outer clothing of the Holy Spirit, but have inner areas of attitude untouched by the Lord Jesus Christ.

PENIEL

From the house of God (Bethel) Jacob came face to face with God (Peniel) alone. No one else can go through the isolation corner for us. This experience was a real inner character change similar to Exodus 3 or Isaiah 6 or Acts 2 or 1 Samuel 30 : 6, when in the dark night of the soul, David encouraged himself in the Lord. Chapter 32 begins with the angels of God meeting the man who was in fear of meeting his brother, Esau. Jacob had left Laban – a type of man in combat with us. Now it was Esau – a type of evil spirit, who could strike “me and the mother and the children” (Genesis 32 : 11). The mother, Madame Guyon points out, is Jacob's righteousness, the mother of all virtues, and the children, the fruits of the Spirit that are evident in the working out of our position as the righteousness of God. Jacob feared losing his very foundation in his relationship with God, and that somehow Esau could regain birthright and blessing. God is bigger than our fears, and our deep sense of unworthiness (verse 10). After Laban and Esau, the third battle as with God Himself, which is typical of the Man who wrestled with him until daybreak.

He had sent over the brook all that he had possessed (verse 23), which speaks of entire and full surrender. The wrestling with God. Produced a twin permanent change in Jacob. First, God touches the strongest part of our natural life whether it be our loins, our physical life, our intellect, the area of human feeling or sympathy, and so reduces our reliance on the old life inherited by Adam. Secondly, the name change elevates us to a new position in God, walking up Jacob's ladder to know a new vantage point, by seeing life from heavenly perspective. From Jacob (the supplanter) came Israel (a prophetic prince with God, who is strong in the strength which God supplies). This soul, now no longer fears the wrestling with men (Laban) or with demons (Esau), but was capable of wrestling with God. Out of Abram came Abraham – the ha means Holy Spirit. Out of Simon came Peter. Out of Saul came Paul, the master builder of the church!

The length of the struggle is dependant on ourselves. Rees Howells surrendered fully very quickly as a believer, most of us stubbornly take a lifetime, because of fears and inner anxieties and the selfish will. If we truly surrender there is no necessity to wrestle. To come to a genuine Gethsemane is not easy. To proclaim “I am and have been crucified with Christ” will soon be tested by the powers of darkness. God understands our failings, our wrestlings and is the God of Jacob who is our refuge. (Psalm 46 : 11). Will we go through the Cross for real character change? God loved Jacob because he was willing to go through the struggle of self-will and enter the school of maturity. The secret of Peniel was to focus no longer on sin-holiness issues, but on the Lord Himself who is our sanctification. He in me is GREATER than he is in the world! I am a vessel, perhaps with the mark of a limp in some natural area that was still controlling my life as a believer, but a clean container through whom God can come to bless others!

JACOB THE PROPHET

In Genesis 49 we glimpse the outworking of the new name and character of Jacob. Ministry is what we have really become in Christ Jesus, not merely our position as new creations but our performance, abiding in the Holy Spirit. The anointing authority sits in the liberated will, purified heart and clear mind of those who have been changed by the power of the Cross. Jacob knew which of his sons would wrestle with God, like himself, and prevail. Reuben would be unstable as water because he still relied on natural life proceeding from himself. He never got to the place of wrestling with God for the exchanged life! In Jacob's valedictory service Joseph would be the fruitful bough because he had been separated by cruelty and separated by character. He knew the disciplines that were vital to the fruitful issue in his life. Wherever the cross is present in a life, what appears to the natural mind is a disaster, but in reality is the root of blessing. Joseph as far as his brothers were concerned was lost to oblivion. Verse 26 declares heaven's perspective :

***"The blessings of your father have excelled the blessings
of my ancestors up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.
They shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of
him who was separate from his brothers."***

Wherever the cross is absent in our lives we will flounder and go astray. The cross of separation issues out in blessing. Can we perceive the purposes of our sovereign God who always means what we go through for ultimate good?

True prophecy has Peniel at the centre of it's operation – a channel who has known the reality of the unveiling of the Son of God IN me. Waves of false prophecy in recent years has not known this essential grounding and rooting in empirical experience of the Christ within the heart. The Christ who is able to make sense of "blessings of the deep that lie beneath" – the interior hells that the abandoned souls must pass through. The Christ, who will nourish other souls through you – the blessing of the breast being the spiritual milk given to babes in Christ. The Christ, who in regeneration and evangelist, speaks the gospel as the blessing of the womb. The linking of pastor, teacher and evangelist is needed today as never before. Jacob's prophecy is still speaking.