

Contemporary Issues
“Made Ready”
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Genesis 32:22-32

Well, it's good to be with you all this evening. Question? What future are you facing? Is it something unknown? Something new? Maybe something hard in front of you. Char. BB. BB. What future are you facing this evening? And how are you made ready to walk into the future that you are facing.

That is a very important question. And that is a question. The book of Genesis speaks to generally. And chapter 32, verses 22 through 32, speak to specifically. God speaks his truth to you and to me tonight in love. Before we jump into the chapter, let me just orient you a little bit to the book.

It was, of course, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by Moses. He's likely writing to the second generation of Israelites, as they are on the plains of Moab, and they're right on the edge of Canaan, and they are about to go in. And Moses's message, in a nutshell could be summed up like this. My thanks to one of my Old Testament professors, Dr Richard Pratt puts it this way. Here's the message of the book -- leaving Egypt and possessing Canaan is God's purpose for Israel. And how does Moses set forth this message? What is his method? He recounts true stories from Israel's past in order to kindle faith and obedience in the hearts and lives of his hearers.

And we come to chapter 32, and it begins with the pressing need. Jacob is going home to the Promised Land, but he's facing an obstacle, because if you recall, he's at odds with his brother Esau. Now, geographically, Jacob could sneak into the land, go around his brother, but spiritually speaking, he cannot do so. Because to make progress with God, he must make peace with his brother.

So, it begins with the pressing need. It continues with timely help. The angels of God appear to assure Jacob that his camp has the support of God's camp. But then comes a severe test. Jacobson's messengers to Esau -- I'm sending this message to you, my lord, that I may find favor in your eyes. And the messengers come back from Esau saying, your brother is coming to meet you, and there are 400 men with him.

Now, what would you be thinking? Here I am, trying to do the right thing, and I'm about to get massacred. What would you be doing? Would you choose to run away? Or would you choose to move forward into your future?

Well, Jacob does what he can do to make himself ready. He comes up with a strategic defense. He divides his people and possessions into two groups. And then he makes an earnest prayer.

Save me, O Lord, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid that he will attack my family. But you have said to me, you have promised that you will make me prosper, and make my descendants like the sand of the sea. And Jacob prepares a lavish present. He gathers together a whole ranch of 550 animals, and he collects them in herds, five to be exact. Putting space between each one. And he sends forth these waves of generosity. So Jacob does what he can to get ready for his future. But there's more. God will do what God does to make Jacob ready. And not only Jacob, but also you and me.

Tonight's text is Genesis chapter 32, verses 22 through 32.

The same night he, Jacob, arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his 11 children, and crossed the forehead of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream and everything else that he had, and Jacob was left alone. And the man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. And 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. And then he said, let me go, for the day has broken. But Jacob said, I will not let you go unless you bless me. And he said to him, what is your name? And he said, Jacob. And then he said, your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel. For you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed. And then Jacob asked him, please tell me your name. But he said, why is it that you ask my name? And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, for I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered. And the sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel limping because of his hip. And therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip and the sinew of the thigh.

This is God's word. Let me pray for us.

Father, we read. That faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word that Christ speaks. And we pray that your Holy Spirit would work together with and by your word tonight to kindle in us a faith that expresses itself in obedience as we move into our future. And this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

What future are you facing? And how does God make you ready to walk into your future? Our text tonight has a dramatic plot. We'll put it up on the screen. It's called a five-step narrative of resolution. Moses was not only concerned about the content of his message, but the way in which he presented it. And Old Testament writers use the literary conventions of their day to cast the story, and this one unfolds in a five step flow. But of course, what we're most interested in tonight is the message. And I'll put it this way.

Our message tonight is that God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble, to the humble who are made ready. First of all by **isolation**. Second of all, by **confrontation**. And right at the center of the story. Thirdly, by **transformation**. And fourthly, with **commemoration**, and finally unto onward **progression**. Let's consider these in turn.

First of all, the problem. The humble are made ready in isolation. Verses 22 through 24. The same night he arose, and he took his two wives, his two female servants, and his 11 children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and set them across the stream and everything else that he had, and Jacob was left alone. Oftentimes fear in me. Fear in you will likely drive you to action. And Jacob gets up from prayer, from being prostrate on the ground, face down. And he gets up and he gets to acting. He took and he sent his servants and his family. But fear also tends to drive a person into seclusion. And Jacob was left alone.

Now, how would this speak to those in the plains of Moab? The second generation, as they as they hear these words, as they're about to go into the land, Jacob's experience anticipates their experience as Jacob lived in exile. So the sons of Israel lived in exile, as Jacob was exploited in captivity to Uncle Laban. So the sons of Israel were exploited as slaves in Egypt, as Jacob escaped from Laban and plundered his wealth. So the sons of Israel escaped from Egypt and plundered their wealth.

So Jacob's dilemma would speak very powerfully to the sons of Israel as they contemplated their moment. But what about you? How do these words speak to you tonight? Jacob's experience anticipates your experience. Like Jacob and Israel, we, the church of Jesus Christ, have been born again to a living hope to obtain a promised inheritance, a certain future. Our entrance into the land of the living. And the path in front of us is filled with both opportunities and challenges, both trials and temptations. And from where we stand now, it can sometimes feel like, can it not, that we're all in the dark. That we're in the grip of fear. And we are left all alone. This is the first step by which God makes his people ready.

Secondly, notice how the action begins to rise. The tension begins to build. The humble are made ready by confrontation. Verses 24 and 25. Notice how the plot thickens. The solitude is shattered. Jacob is jolted into a living nightmare, and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. A surprise assault from an unidentified man. The literary irony. Jacob feared the confrontation would be on that side of the river. But to his great surprise, the confrontation is on this side of the river. Again, literarily, there's a play on words. The verb. The Hebrew verb translated wrestled actually sounds like the word Jacob. It's as though the text reads so the man Jacob Jacob until daybreak. And it appears that Jacob has met his match. He's grasping. He's straining. He's tumbling till dawn. As he wrestles.

In the ancient Near East. One way to settle a legal case was by a wrestling match. A trial by combat. And Jacob is on trial. But why? What issue needs to be settled? All of his life had been a struggle. You remember his story? A wrestling match with his brother in the womb. A wrestling match, a struggle with Uncle Laban. But all of his life had been a deeper struggle, wasn't it? A deeper wrestling match with his God. What's the issue? Who will reign over Jacob? Will it be Jacob? Or will it be the Lord? How does blessing come to Jacob? Will it be by Jacob's crafty work? Or will it be by God's free grace? How will Jacob move into his future and prevail? Will it be by Jacob's power? Or by God's power? And as the Israelites are camped on the plains of Moab and they hear these words, Jacob's experience anticipates their experience because they

are facing the same sort of trial. And they must answer the same sort of questions. But not only them, but also you and me. We face the same sort of trial. We must answer and wrestle with the same sort of questions. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob he touched the hip socket in Jacob's hip, was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. I remember a long time ago as a biology major, learning about the sciatic nerve, the principal nerve near the hip. And this man's touch is paralyzing. And Jacob falls to the ground, but he hangs on.

In the ancient Near East, the hip represented two sorts of ideas. On the one hand, it represented the foundation of a person's life. And on the other hand, it represented the source of a person's descendants. It was sort of a euphemistic way of referring to a man's reproductive organs as the source of that man's descendants. How would these words speak to those Israelites on the plains of Moab? The wound would strike a chord. The blow to Jacob's hip pointed to a blow to Jacob's descendants. They knew themselves to be a broken people in bondage in Egypt, and in the journey in the wilderness, a very dislocated experience.

But how does this passage speak to you tonight?

The blow to Jacob's hip points beyond Jacob's immediate descendants. And it points to Jacob's great descendant. We live in a personal universe. Meaning this is God's world. And our sin is first and foremost against this person before whose gaze we live and move and have our being. But Jesus, the great descendant of Jacob, has come to receive God's judgment that we might receive God's blessing. There is a legal case to be settled. And it is the vindication of God's justice. As the suffering servant Jesus receives the death blow that we deserve. But now, having been raised from the dead, he comes as the exalted Lord, and he comes to confront us to put to death my trust in me, your trust in you and to raise to life trust in him. We would not choose to fight. Nor could we win the fight. Sheer-will cannot overthrow self-will. Because our self-will is too strong. So Jesus comes by his spirit to confront us in love in order that he might rescue us from ourselves. Is that not the best news?

The problem gives way to the rising action. It begins in isolation. The drama rises with confrontation. But then. ..

Step three. The turning point. The humble are made ready through transformation. Verses 26 through 29 literarily the pace slows down. The camera, as it were, zooms very close. Dawn begins to break slowly. The silhouette of Jacob's opponent begins to emerge, and there's a shift from the writer's description of what is happening to the character's dialog. And that signals the writer's chief concern. He puts his chief concern right at the center of the story. It's the turning point. It's the most important point. Jacob begins to realize that his opponent is more than a man. His opponent is the angel of the Lord. And so Jacob clings fast to him. But wait a minute. Jacob is in grave danger. Is he not? As Moses heard God say, you cannot see my face. *For a man shall not see me and live.* Exodus 33. So the angel says to Jacob, let me go, for the day has broken. But Jacob says, I will not let you go unless you bless me.

Former Professor and President of Westminster Theological Seminary, Edmund Clowney, puts it beautifully. **The match was over. Jacob was lamed. Yet for Jacob, the fight could not be over. Lame as he was. Blinded by his tears, he clung the more fiercely to his awesome adversary. If he could not win by strength. Then he would prevail in weakness.**

And the angel of the Lord said to him, what is your name?

Now pause with me to consider God is the all-knowing one. So why would he ask? Do you recall the last time that Jacob was asked this very same question? In Exodus 27. Do you remember his aged father? And Isaac says to Jacob, who are you my son? And Jacob said, I am Esau, your firstborn. Are you really my son Esau? And he answered, I am. And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him. *May God give you of the dew of heaven, the fatness of the earth, the plenty of grain and wine. Let people serve you. And nations bowed down to you.* But you see the blessing. Then was gotten through self-trusting deception. And the Lord knows it. And Jacob knows it. And so the angel of the Lord puts the same question to Jacob again. What is your name? This time he said. Jacob.

One simple word. One honest, one humble. Confession. I am the cheater of my brother. I am the deceiver of my father. I am the schemer in search of God's blessing. *And then the angel said, your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel. For you have striven with God and with men, and you have prevailed.* This is how Dr. Clowney, puts it, The Lord declares Jacob the winner. The Lord changes his name. As Dr Clowney puts it - What a strange victory. Jacob wins not by pinning his opponent to the mat, but by holding fast to his God in weakness.

In the Bible, names are very significant, and a name change in midlife is especially so. Israel means literally, God prevails, but God graciously reframes it. And says, you have wrestled with God and with men, and you have prevailed. Because the old name Jacob recalls his self-trusting past. But the new name, Israel, highlights this God trusting moment. It foretells his new identity, his new character. No doubt his success up ahead. Transformation.

Another one of my professors, Dr David Paulsen, described change like this. First you wake up. You've been sleepwalking, and you wake up to what is true, and then you own up. I did it. But then you shift weight. You turn from trusting in you to trusting in Him by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a beautiful transformation, is it not? Right in the heart of the story? Then Jacob asked him, please, please tell me your name. And the angel says, why is it that you ask my name? An indirect refusal, as if to say. You know who I am. And in verse 29. The Lord blessed him.

This is such an important principle. It's all throughout the Scripture. *God's prevailing grace flows to and through a heart of humble faith.* Did you receive the spirit by works of the law or by hearing with humble faith? The meaning for the second generation, as they stand on the plains of Moab, Jacob's victory anticipates their victory. It will not be by their power, but by God's grace through their faith. So cling to him.

That name, Jacob, reminds them that they have good reasons for humility, because their father was a sinner. A deceiver. But the name Israel reminds them that they have strong reasons for confidence. God will fight for them, and they will prevail by his grace through their faith. But the story anticipates your victory. It will not be by your power, but by God's grace through your faith.

So we cling to Jesus. In his death on Friday. Jesus identifies with us as Jacob. Because of our faithlessness. Jesus receives God's curse. But in his resurrection on Sunday Israel reminds them and us that Jesus is the true Israelite. In his resurrection, he is vindicated because of his faithfulness Jesus receives God's blessing and it gets even better. Because Christian, you have been baptized into this name. You in Christ are made to be a true Israelite by his grace through your faith in Jesus. And the way that you became a Christian is also the same way that you live and grow as a Christian by his grace through your faith in Jesus. It begins with isolation. It rises with confrontation. It turns with transformation. It begins to wind down. The action falls.

And we find, fourthly, the humble are made ready with commemoration. Verse 30. The story's tension begins to unwind. Jacob's wonder continues to climb. The angel of the Lord has disappeared, but Jacob commemorates his presence. He names the place Peniel, saying, for I have seen God's face, and yet my life has been delivered.

God answered his prayer for deliverance. And if Jacob has survived this battle, we can be sure that he's going to survive that battle up ahead when he meets his brother Esau. This would speak very powerfully to the Israelites hearing this story. And tonight, I hope it speaks powerfully to your experience, because the Lord's appearing to Jacob foreshadows his appearing to you.

Paul puts it this way in II Corinthians 4 - For God who said, let light shine out of darkness has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And so as Jacob mark the spot where he received grace. So we too must remember. And as Jacob expressed faith in God's future, grace so we too must trust God that he will win the battle for us. Up ahead.

You know, a funny thing happened to me 37 years ago when I walked into the jewelry store and I bought Cindy's wedding ring. You know what they did? They not only gave me the ring, they also gave me the box. Can you believe it? If God did not spare his most precious thing for you, if God would give you the most precious gift, how will he not also with Christ not graciously give you all things up ahead. Isolation. Confrontation. Transformation. Commemoration.

The story closes with resolution. The humble are made ready to onward. Progression. Verse 31. The sun rose upon him as he passed ten out, limping because of his hip. What a sight! What a contrast to behold. Do you see how the end of the story vividly contrasts with the beginning of the story?

Our story began in the thick of night, but it closes in a glorious sunrise. Our story began with Jacob staying back, but our story concludes with Jacob crossing over. Our story began with Jacob as the self-trusting deceiver. But our story concludes with Jacob as the God trusting prevailer. Our story began with Jacob, seemingly strong and sturdy. But our story concludes with Jacob broken but blessed limping in weakness, but beaming with confidence.

So those of you on the plains of Moab, how does this speak? Cross over, take the land, but cross over by humble faith, because it will not be by your strength, but by God's grace through your faith. How does this speak to you? Jesus is your lead climber, the trailblazer, the path finder who crossed from death to life on Sunday. And now he calls us to pursue our inheritance by following in his steps and by his power. But we pursue. We move into the future. We pursue our inheritance by humble faith because it will not be by our own strength, but it will be by God's grace through living faith.

So we close with Paul because he wonderfully sums it up. Is this not your heart tonight? Can you not say with living faith *my grace is sufficient for you*? That's what the Lord says to you. My power is made perfect in your weakness. And so Paul says, therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. What future are you facing? Something new, something hard, something unknown? God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. And this is how the humble are made ready to walk into the future.

Let me pray for us.

Our father, thank you that you have spoken your truth to us in love. You have moved towards us in Jesus. You are on the move to rescue. And we thank you for Your Word and your Spirit who works to help us see. Oh, would you open the eyes of our hearts still more, in order that we might know the hope to which we have been called. What is this glorious inheritance that you have in your people? And what is the surpassing greatness of your power toward us who believe. Would you do this for the sake of your great name, and for the good of your people at Briarwood Presbyterian Church? And this we ask in Jesus' name,

Amen.