

**SERIES: Unwavering Faith (Genesis Vol. 3)**

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**Message Title: Jacob Finally Surrenders**

**Release Date: Tuesday 4/21/20**

If there was ever a man who had experienced God's faithfulness over and over and over again, it was Jacob, and yet Jacob continues to struggle to understand what it means to trust God. As a matter of fact, Jacob has seen so much faithfulness from God that we ask the question, Jacob, what will it take for you to finally surrender and trust God? What will it take?

Well, that question gets answered in our story today, and as we read and study this story of Jacob, the question we need to process in our own minds is, what will it take for you to finally surrender and trust God? What will it take?

Chapter 32, Verse 1:

**Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him. Jacob said when he saw them, "This is God's camp." So he named that place Mahanaim.**" (Vs. 1-2, \*NASB)

(Which means Two Camps, Two Armies.) You remember when Jacob left the Land of Promise in Chapter 28, he had an encounter with angels. They were ascending and descending this ladder to the Heavens. Now he's been in the land of Laban for 20 years. He's coming back and he again has this encounter with angels. It's as if the Land of Promise is surrounded by angels, and Jacob has to go through them going out, and through them coming back in. In this case, he sees this angelic army, this angelic host, and he names this place Two Camps or Two Armies, basically, meaning there's the people of Jacob, but then there's this magnificent Heavenly army at his disposal. If his faith wasn't rock solid before, it's got to be rock solid now. God has actually let him see a glimpse of this Heavenly army at his disposal, to protect him in his journey back into the Land of Promise. Surely now Jacob is absolutely rock solid as a man of faith, isn't he?

**Then Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. He also commanded them saying, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: 'Thus says your servant Jacob, "I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now; I have oxen and donkeys and flocks and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight." ' ' (Vs. 3-5)**

Now, I would guess that Jacob hasn't thought a lot about Esau for 20 years. He's had his hands full with Laban, but now Jacob is entering back into the Land of Promise, and he has a brother that last he knew, wanted to kill him. They've drawn a line in the sand, where he's promised he's made an oath. He won't go back into the land of Laban and so he's got to go forward, which means he has to encounter his brother Esau.

The language that Jacob uses is very interesting. He refers to Esau as "my lord" and himself as "your servant". Now remember this is Jacob the liar, the schemer, the deceiver, that stole the

blessing in order that he might be the lord, and Esau might be the servant, and God said, “Yes, that's the way it will be.” But now coming back into the Land of Promise, his heart is filled with fear, and he's given that up, and it's as if he's given the blessing back. If I can just survive, you can be lord, I'll be servant. He sends a three-part message. Part one is I've been with Uncle Laban for 20 years. In other words, I haven't been hiding up in the caves. I've been getting a wife and a family. Number two is, I have more than I need. I'm not going to take anything from you. And number three, can't we just be friends here? Can we just let bygones be bygones?

**The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.” Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies; for he said, “If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape.”** (Vs. 6-8)

I find Verses Six through Eight just pathetic. They're just sad. Here in the moment of crisis, he hears that Esau is coming with 400 men, and it doesn't even cross his mind that God may intervene, that God may protect him. He has just seen this army of angels at his disposal. He has just seen God's faithfulness in protecting him from Laban. Why wouldn't he say, “I'll trust God”, but instead he is greatly afraid, which causes him to go into this plan of dividing his company into two groups. One will get slaughtered and maybe the other one can escape. Does that sound like a good plan to you?

**Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you, I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me and the mothers with children. For You said, ‘I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.’ ”** (Vs. 9-12)

This is the first time the writer tells us that Jacob prayed, and this is a wonderful prayer. He opens up addressing the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac. Of course, what's still missing is the God of Jacob. That's the part that he still doesn't understand. Then he reminds God: God, you're the one who said, return to your country and to your relatives and I will prosper you. It's not that Jacob didn't hear that when God said it. It's not that he had forgotten that; he heard it, he remembers that. He quotes it back to God. Do you suppose God was in the Heavens, saying, “Oh, Jacob, I had forgotten that?” God knew that. God's probably looking at Jacob saying, “Yes, Jacob I told you that. Why don't you just believe it?”

He goes on and makes a statement that he knows it's not been because of his performance, that God's been faithful. He says, I'm undeserving of all that I've received. He's right about that - good theology - and then he prays that God would rescue him from Esau, and then he reminds God one more time, “God, you said, I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.” God had promised that 20 years ago; if God had promised that, why didn't Jacob believe that? This is a magnificent prayer and out of this prayer, Jacob does what he does best. He plans, he schemes, he plots. He goes back to his old ways, as if he didn't believe a word of it. Do you ever do that? Do you ever go before God and offer these great prayers filled with all of these Scripture promises and five minutes later, it's as

if you don't believe a word of it.

We can quote the verses, we can pray it in our prayer, but five minutes later we're filled with fear again. The anxiety's back, the worry's back, our insecurities are back, as if we didn't believe a word of it. Well, that's Jacob.

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**So he spent the night there. Then he selected from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milking camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. He delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass on before me, and put a space between droves." He commanded the one in front, saying, "When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, saying, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and to whom do these animals in front of you belong?' then you shall say, 'These belong to your servant Jacob; it is a present sent to my lord Esau. And behold, he also is behind us.'"** Then he commanded also the second and the third, and all those who followed the droves, saying, "After this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him; and you shall say, 'Behold, your servant Jacob also is behind us.'" For he said, "I will appease him with the present that goes before me. Then afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me." So the present passed on before him, while he himself spent that night in the camp. Now he arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had. (Vs. 13-23)

So he sends this magnificent gift. I mean, this was a substantial amount of stuff and he's sending it in waves, so that Esau receives a wave and thinks, well, isn't that nice? And then another wave and wow, that's really nice. And by the last wave, maybe he's been bought off enough that Jacob will live.

Well, the last thing Jacob does is he takes his family and they cross over the river, and they are, in essence, the last wave, the last drove, and Jacob is left alone. Remember the last time he was alone? It was 20 years before this, when he was fleeing from his brother Esau who wanted to kill him. 20 years have passed in the land of Laban and once again, Jacob is alone, fleeing for his life from his brother Esau and we ask the question, Jacob, what have you learned? What have you learned? It's been 20 years of God's faithfulness. What have you learned?

**Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." (Vs. 24-26)**

What is happening here? If we didn't know the story, we might think that perhaps that was Esau who had snuck up behind in the night and was wrestling with Jacob to kill him. But as the story goes on, it becomes evident. This is no ordinary man. This is a man with divine power.

Hosea, Chapter 12, Verse Four helps us with this: tells us it's an angel, possibly the angel of the

Lord, which is God Himself. But then that raises the question, why is it that God Himself in human form wrestled all night with Jacob and couldn't prevail? Well, you have to understand what's going on here. This is symbolic of Jacob's life and God's relationship to him, and all night Jacob wrestles. He's tenacious. He won't give in. He's fighting back. He won't surrender. That's Jacob's whole life. He has wrestled with God and he's wrestled with man. Finally, at the end of the night, as the sun begins to arise, when the man realizes he cannot prevail, he's only got one tool left in his tool box and he reaches out and he touches Jacob's hip. Now some of your translations say he struck his hip, which is a very poor translation. The Hebrew word is very clear. It's a light touch. It's as if to say, this is divine power, not the force of the blow that's causing the damage. And Jacob's hip is immediately dislocated. He is rendered completely helpless. He is completely disabled at that moment. For the first time in his life, he can't do anything.

The man is going to depart and Jacob's in that helpless condition. He now knows who this is and he clings to Him and he will not let go. Jacob has finally come to the point in his life where he knows he either must cling to God or die. And at that moment, he surrenders.

**So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." (Vs. 27)**

In the ancient Near East, when you gave up your name it was the equivalent in our culture of saying "uncle." It meant, *I give up; I surrender.*

**He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." [Jacob is thinking maybe this was a tie!] But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" [In other words, "No...I won! I'm not going to give you my name."]** **And he blessed him there. So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved." Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh. Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip.** (Vs. 28-32).

The writer tells us that Jacob walked away with a limp. It's his way of saying this wasn't a dream. This wasn't something Jacob imagined. He would remember the rest of his life, this moment, as he would limp his way now through life. You know, God had tried everything. God had tried everything. He had made Himself known to Jacob in ways that are unimaginable. Over and over, God proved himself faithful. Jacob knew that. Jacob recited that. Jacob knew God's promises even to the extent that before Jacob encountered the army of Esau, God let him see this incredible angelic army at his disposal. What more could he do for Jacob, for Jacob to trust Him, but Jacob just wouldn't believe! Jacob was determined to do it his own way, through his scheming and plotting and manipulating, and God finally brought him to a point where he literally disabled him. He left him absolutely helpless, where Jacob had nothing left, before Jacob finally surrendered. Why did God do that? Because He wanted to punish Jacob? Because He was angry with Jacob? No, because He wanted to bless him. But it wasn't until Jacob surrendered that he could prevail.

Some of you could pinpoint the exact time and place when you reached that point in your life, when you finally surrendered, when you were finally brought to the end of yourself, and you had nothing left, and all you could do is reach out and cling to God; you surrendered that you might

prevail. But some of you still aren't there. Your lives are still driven by your fears, by your anxiety, by your worry, which are indications that you're still thinking you're in charge. You're still thinking that everything's up to you, that you have to accomplish it all. We come before God and we offer these magnificent prayers, filled with all kinds of Scripture and verses and promises, and five minutes later we walk away like we didn't believe a word of it. We're still living in our fears and our anxieties and our worries, and the question really arises, what will God have to do to convince you that He is faithful, that He is worthy of your trust, that you might surrender? Will He have to bring you to a point where you lose it all, where you are disabled on the ground of the wilderness with nothing left, before you finally understand what it means to cling to Him. Because if that's what it takes, then that is what God will do. Not because He's angry with you, but because He longs to bless you. That's all he's ever wanted is to bless you. But for that to happen, you must understand, you first must surrender, in order to ultimately prevail.

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Bryan: Nat, the first thing I have to say is this passage is why I named my golden retriever Jacob. [Ah] We had friends that raise very expensive golden retrievers, far more expensive than we can afford. But the mother stepped on the hip of one of the dogs and dislocated it, and people were afraid it wouldn't show right. So they just gave him to us, and it turned out the hip healed and he was just an awesome dog. And I named him Jacob because he had a little problem with his hip [fitting name]. Right. Thanks.

Nat, now about the time it seems like Jacob has finally learned his lesson, he reverts back to some of his old patterns of doubt and fear. Why do you think that is?

Nat: You know, the first thing that I'm reminded of with Jacob is he's human. He's human, and he struggles with the same things that you and I struggle with. So as soon as he takes his eyes off of God, he's staring back at the problem. He's forgotten the One who actually is in control and who's the One who's made the promise. And instead, he's thinking, okay, here's the problem, here's the situation. What can I do about it? He begins to play god. And that I think is where the problem starts. And this reminds me a lot of my youngest son. Like most kids, my youngest son hates the basement and we've got a fine basement - lights and it's got, you know, furniture and everything else. But he hates the basement. So whenever he wants to go downstairs, what does he say? Dad, come hold my hand. I need to go to the basement. And so I do, I hold his hand and we go down into the basement. But as soon as he lets go of my hand, or if I move away, even when I'm standing right next to him, what does he do? He bolts up the stairs every time. Isn't that not what Jacob is doing? God is right there with him, and yet he's not focused on Him and he goes back to his old ways.

Bryan: Yeah. I think that's a really good explanation.

Nat: Yeah. You know, the idea of angels guarding the land and Jacob encountering them going out and back is really quite fascinating. I think a lot of people today wonder about angels and are they present, are they watching over us and things like that. What do you think is the level of involvement of angels in our lives today?

Bryan: Yeah, I think the level of involvement actually is quite high. I do think that's a fascinating part of the story and you just wonder what all is God up to with His army. And I've noticed over the years it seems like Christians are pretty willing to believe in the reality of demons, and often dwell on that way too much. But we seem to discount that God has His own

army that has been deployed for our benefit. So the New Testament talks quite a bit about angels all the way from guarding children to visiting us. You know, *Angels Unaware* talks about two angels watching and observing things that are going on. You know, people have amazing stories that seem like it's some sort of intervention by an angel, and sometimes we feel the need to dismiss those. But why would we do that? I think angels are probably much more involved in our story than we realize.

Nat: And I think that's absolutely right. And I think your point about being so obsessed with demons is probably problematic at best. But I find great comfort as one of God's children to know that He does have people watching over us. His angels are always around.

Bryan: Yeah. You just wonder, over the course of a lifetime, how many times do angels intervene in ways we know nothing about that impacted our story?

Nat: Absolutely happening all around us. Wow. Fantastic stuff, Bryan. Thank you.