



Jacob is returning to the Promised Land after 20 years. He is coming home to fulfill his destiny. God promised to give him and his descendants the Promised Land. His descendants would be as numerous as the grains of dust. All people would be blessed through him and his family. God promised to be with him. God promised to bring him back to the Promised Land.

But he's also facing a death threat. His brother Esau said, "When our father dies, I'm going to kill you."

**Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is the camp of God!" So he named that place Mahanaim. Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. He instructed them: "This is what you are to say to my lord Esau: 'Your servant Jacob says, I have been staying with Laban and have remained there till now. I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, male and female servants. Now I am sending this message to my lord, that I may find favor in your eyes.'" When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, "We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him." In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. He thought, "If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape." Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, LORD, you who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,' I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted'" (Genesis 32:1-12).**

Jacob is a godly man. The presence of the angels shows that God is with him. He's going to meet Esau in a posture of humility. But in his prayer he's also concerned for himself and his family.

### **Myth #1 - A godly person experiences no fear.**

This myth implies that a "godly person" is so spiritual that they are immune to the human emotion of fear. And understandably, there is some merit to this myth. Jesus is able to carry us through difficulty and provide peace during hardship.

This does not mean all fear is gone. Fear is a universal emotion. When we face losing something we love, we experience it. Jacob is understandably filled with fear as he returns home. The last exchange he had with Esau involved a death threat. Jacob is returning to face that threat with two wives, two maidservants, 11 sons and thousands of animals. He has a lot to lose and he's petrified. In his fear, he turns to God for help. He asks God to protect him and his family.

#### **Dangers of believing Myth #1**

There are dangers in believing this myth. You put pressure upon yourself to label your fears as sinful. You disconnect from the true and accurate pain and fear you are experiencing. You don't recognize it and you don't truly deal with it.

**He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, "Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds." He instructed the one in the lead: "When my brother Esau meets you and asks, 'Who do you belong to, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?' then you are to say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind us.'" He also instructed the second, the third and all the others who followed the herds: "You are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. And be sure to say, 'Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.'" For he thought, "I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me." So Jacob's gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp.**

**That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man (verses 13–30).**

First of all, these are gifts worthy of a king. When he says he will "pacify" him with these gifts, pacify means "cover his face" with good items. He wrestled with this man until daybreak. How many hours was that—five, six, eight? And this "man" is really God in some type of human form. God made himself a type equal to Jacob. Although the God-man wrestled equally for many hours, he now uses his divine strength and with a mere touch dislocates Jacob's hip, his source of strength and leverage.

### **Myth #2 - God will always give us comfort when we experience fear and anxiety.**

What a strange and unexpected thing God does here. Instead of coming to comfort him, God wrestles him; he fights him. This was a physical, sweaty, dirty match. They're rolling on the ground. Imagine God putting you in a headlock, pinning your shoulders down, punching you in the gut.

Why would God do this? Why not come to Jacob and give him comfort and peace? That's what we'd expect, right? And what about us? If God wrestles Jacob, what will he do when I'm looking for comfort and peace? Sometimes I'm fearful, stressed or anxious.

I think God does this because God is more interested in giving Jacob what is best for him than giving him what he asks for. And the best thing for Jacob was a wrestling match. It's what he needed.

Discomfort, pain and trials are the tools God uses to refine and reshape us. God loves us so much he gives us what we need; what will make us a better Christian; what will break off the sinful, rebellious parts.

Jacob has been struggling with God his entire life. This wrestling match symbolizes his lifelong struggle. The time has come for God to break him of that. And while it will be painful for Jacob during these hours, it will be better for him in the long haul. Sometimes spiritual growth involves conflict, struggle and pain often before the comfort comes.

### **Dangers of believing Myth #2**

Dangers in believing this myth include confusion and despair when God doesn't comfort you immediately. You ask yourself, "Do I really know God? I am a really messed up person. God is punishing me." If you do this you miss out on the spiritual lesson God is trying to teach you. God might have to use more force

than you'd prefer to teach you the lesson. Do you want a velvet glove or a hammer?

**Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome." Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared" (verses 26–30).**

Even with a dislocated hip, Jacob would not let go. He realized during the fight that this "man" was not a normal man at all. He was God.

### **Myth #3 - "Thy will be done" encapsulates our posture.**

We see here that Jacob is tenacious and persistent in letting God know his desire. But note he is asking for something that God has already promised to give him. That's a very important point. God has promised many times to bless Jacob.

Jacob is not retreating to a position of "thy will be done God". Now, let me dispel any potential confusion. I am all for living a life surrendered to whatever God's will is. However, I have had many conversations with people who have lost their own opinions. They have lost their passions. Too many people today are excusing their passivity for the concept of "thy will be done." God does not want his children to be passive. He wants us to be engaged, thoughtful, proactive and tenacious. He wants us to care enough that we cling to God in prayer. Surrendering our will to his, yet boldly expressing our opinion.

Teaching this same lesson, Jesus used an illustration of a persistent widow. **"And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?"** (Luke 18:7).

Jacob engages God in a wrestling match all night long; possibly five, six, seven hours of wrestling. Then with a dislocated hip, although his wrestling strength is removed, Jacob still will not give up. He clings to God in desperation.

### **Dangers of believing Myth #3**

The dangers here are we risk losing our God-given passions, interests and opinions. We miss out on seeing God answer our specific prayer requests.

I must confess that in an attempt to not put God on the line, I have prayed "thy will be done" because I didn't want to deal with the personal disappointment when and if God didn't give me what I asked for. In an attempt to save God's reputation when I've been praying for others, I have prayed "thy will be done" so

they wouldn't have to deal with the disappointment when and if God didn't give **them** what I asked for.

God's ways are mysterious, yes. But he clearly wants us to ask tenaciously for what we want and surrender completely to his will, simultaneously.

**The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip (v. 31).**

#### **Myth #4 - Christians are picture-perfect people.**

Jacob walked with a limp the rest of his life. He was marked for all of his years by this encounter with God. It was a hard, painful, redeeming, redefining life experience.

A life-long walk with God will be evidenced by scars and healed wounds. We don't fit within the orderly, neat and clean lines. We're not meant to look like the magazine models. Our day-to-day lives will not conform to happy ending, movie-like lives. We face and deal with the hard realities and pains in life, with God's help. And that gets messy.

#### **Dangers of believing Myth #4**

We'll think God doesn't accept me because I'm messed up so we don't go to church, we won't join a community group. We'll live with discouragement because we don't measure up to all the so-called picture-perfect people at church and as a result, we hide.

#### **Conclusion**

You might be asking yourself, "What's in this for me? I thought being a Christian was supposed to make my life positive, good and better." This is a fair question so let me respond.

I've just told you that you can expect fear. God might not comfort you when you're in distress. You should passionately bring your requests to God and at times deal with the fallout and disappointment at not getting what you asked for. And know that you won't have a picture-perfect life. So what's in it for you?

Your life will be better **with** God than without him. Your life will be the best it will ever be with God. Because God designed you and knows what's best for you he will, in his perfect love for you, always give you what's best.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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