

POPULAR STORIES SERIES

CHAPTER 12

THE BELIEVER'S POWER TO PREVAIL

Genesis 32: 1-32

How does a weak, helpless sinner prevail over our enemies? Whether our enemy be: the curse of the law, our own sinful flesh and unbelief, ungodly sinners who would harm us. Satan, death and hell or the wrath of God? How does an utterly weak sinner prevail over our enemies?

Our subject is “The Believer’s Power to Prevail.”

This is the familiar passage where Christ appeared to Jacob in one of his many pre-incarnate appearances as a Man. Christ changed Jacob, changed his name to Israel and gave Jacob the much needed word of assurance.

Genesis 32: 28: And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel:—

It means “prince of God.” He gives the reason for this name—for as a prince hast thou power with God and hast prevailed. He gives Jacob this word of assurance, “By this same Power of God, thou shalt have power with men and prevail over all your enemies.”

This is true all Jacob’s spiritual posterity—you and I who are being saved by God’s grace. The question we will try to answer is, “How did Jacob have power with God and with men and prevail? How do sinners like us have power with God and with men and prevail?”

Usually, preachers use this passage to preach on the power of prayer. They say, “Jacob wrestled with Christ until he prevailed to get Christ to bless him. Thus we see the power of our prayer.” But that is not even close to what happened here.

This passage shows how God preserves the life of his believing child by continually turning us from our proud flesh to trust Christ alone.

OUR FOOLISH ATTEMPT

Even as believers, until God turns us, when trouble comes we will foolishly look to our flesh in an attempt to preserve our lives rather than to Christ.

Remember, at this point in his life, Jacob is a believer. He was converted by God back at Bethel. Christ was revealed to Jacob in the ladder. Through Christ, God made covenant promises to Jacob and Jacob was made willing to believe on God through Christ. So at this point, Jacob has been a believer for over 20 years. He has a large family and is very wealthy.

God had told Jacob to return to the land of his kindred—but our text says—**Genesis 32: 1: And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. 2: And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God’s host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.**

These were God’s angels sent by Christ to protect Jacob. They appeared in two armies—that is what the name Mahanaim means. Remember, Christ said, “I will go before my people and I will be your rear-ward.” Here was God’s host: one band to protect Jacob from Laban to the rear of the camp; the other to protect Jacob from Esau at front of the camp. Christ is our wall called Salvation and our gate called Praise. Believers are to look to Christ only to preserve our lives from all danger. But when we face the enemy, what do we so often do? We look to ourselves.

Even after beholding God's host to protect him, Jacob did not trust the Lord to preserve his life. Instead, he looked to his own wisdom and strength—**Genesis 32: 3: And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom. 4: And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: 5: And I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.**

Jacob was still afraid of the wrath of his brother Esau. Last time Jacob saw Esau, Esau wanted to kill him over the birthright and blessing. So, Jacob sent messengers to Esau.

In order to put us where we need to be, God will see to it that our situation gets worse—**Genesis 32: 6: And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him. 7: Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; 8: And said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape.**

Notice, no word was spoken of Esau's intent. But Jacob imagined a bad outcome.

Then Jacob SAID A PRAYER to God. Notice, it does not say "Jacob prayed" but "Jacob said." There is a great difference between casting our care on Christ in true prayer and merely saying a prayer—**Genesis 32: 9: And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: 10 I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. 11: Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. 12: And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.**

Notice, God knew what Jacob would become two bands so God sent two bands of angels to protect Jacob's two bands. Jacob feared Esau. Who should we fear? "Fear God and he will be for a sanctuary." Fearing the enemy gives the enemy the glory rather than God.

Jacob said a prayer! Everything he said was true. He was not worthy, yet God showed him mercies and truth—all of grace. He got himself into this situation by not trusting God—our sin is all our own. He asked God to deliver—only God can deliver. He even recited God's promise, "I will surely do thee good, and...thy seed." But Jacob was not praying? There is a difference between saying a prayer and praying. Praying is casting our care entirely upon God alone.

We see that Jacob merely said a prayer because no sooner does Jacob finish than Jacob wavers to the arm of his flesh—**Genesis 32: 13: And he lodged there that same night; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother; 14: Two hundred she goats, and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes, and twenty rams, 15: Thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses, and ten foals. 16: And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove. 17: And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee? 18: Then thou shalt say, They be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, also he is behind us. 19: And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him. 20: And say ye moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me. 21: So went the present over before him: and himself lodged that night in the company.**

Notice, he sent the present but he stayed behind. We do not trust our own wisdom and works.

He even rose up that night and put more distance between him and Esau—**Genesis 32: 22: And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. 23: And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had.**

Brethren, Jacob is a picture of us. When times are good, we think we are strong in faith. But let us only imagine the enemy is rising up against us and we will prove how very weak our faith in the Lord really is. All this was from assuming, imagining what Esau would do. That is how weak our faith is!

So we see what a believer will do. Though we have God's hosts, though we have God's promises, as long as we try to save ourselves, we are only looking to our flesh to preserve our lives. Will God bless that?

James 1: 5: If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. 6: But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. 7: For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. 8: A double minded man *is* unstable in all his ways.

THE END OF SELF

Christ must bring us to the end of self before we will truly pray, casting all our care upon the Lord alone.

First, God separates us from all our many helps—**Genesis 32: 24: And Jacob was left alone...**He was alone from all his many defenses: separated from his servants, separated from his family, separated from his rich abundance of cattle. Now, Jacob can be dealt with without any distraction. God may get you alone in pew or he may do it in a field somewhere.

Then our proud flesh has got to be dealt with—**Genesis 32: 24:...and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.** This man began to wrestle Jacob around like a rag doll, moving Jacob wherever he wanted—a real, physical and spiritual, struggle. Remember, who this Man is. Down the page Jacob tells us, “I have seen God face to face.” (Gen 32: 30) Where does a believer see God face-to-face?

1 Timothy 2:5: There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

John 1:18: No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him

2 Corinthians 4:6: God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

This Man is the one Mediator, the Man, Christ Jesus, the Angel of the Covenant of God's grace.

So we know Christ was in sovereign control over Jacob. It was not Jacob wrestling the Lord but—**Genesis 32: 24:...there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.** This is so important to understand or we will miss the message. Jacob was not wrestling with Christ to get the blessing; Christ was wrestling with Jacob to give the blessing! We saw the unbelief Jacob was in. Had God left him there, Jacob would have continued walking in his flesh. God has to subdue our flesh! We have experienced this ourselves. We cannot pray and cast our care on Christ unless Christ subdues our flesh and makes us willing in his power!

Christ could have turned Jacob in an instant without Jacob even knowing the Lord did it. But Christ wrestles us—**Genis 32: 24:...till the breaking of the day.** Christ converts his child from the dark night of our flesh till Christ—the Daystar—dawns in our hearts. This is how Christ preserves our life over and over again--“He saved us, is saving us and shall save us.”

We have to be taught our flesh profits nothing—so I am certain verse 25 should be read this way—**Genesis 32: 25: And when [Christ] saw that [Jacob] prevailed not against him, [or with him].** It was the Lord's will for Jacob to prevail with him. But Jacob would never prevail as long as Jacob looked to his fleshly power and wisdom. Be sure to get this: we never have power with God and prevail as long we are strong in ourselves. We do not preserve our lives by our strength and wisdom! But our flesh is too strong for us. So it has to be subdued by Christ.

So Christ makes us weak in our flesh—**Genesis 32: 25: [Christ] touched the hollow of [Jacob's] thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as [Christ] wrestled with him.** Now, Jacob is brought down. Now he has no ability to stand on his own two feet. Now he is utterly weak in himself. Think how painful to have a thigh out of joint! It is painful when God subdues our flesh. But it is great blessing to be made weak in ourselves!

“When I am weak then am I strong.” We are strong when Christ is our only strength, when all we can do is cling to Christ, weep and make supplication for Christ to bless us with his Power and his Wisdom—**Genesis 32: 26: And [Christ] said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And [Jacob] said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. 27: And [Christ] said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.** It is Christ who makes us truly confess our sin—not only that we got ourselves into this mess, but that all we are is sin—Jacob. Now Christ alone is his strength! No flesh shall glory in Christ's presence (Psa. 107:1-6; 11-13; 1 Cor. 1:26-31). Christ is the Power who makes his Jacob's trust Christ our only Strength. This is how Jacob had power and prevailed: Jacob was “Made willing in the day of Christ's power.” That is what we read in Hosea.

Hosea 12:4: Yea, [Jacob] had power over the Angel, and prevailed: [how so?] he wept, and made supplication unto him:

You may say but Christ has never physically wrestle me? Oh yes, Christ physically wrestles us in the strength of his providence and spiritually by the Holy Spirit in our hearts. “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that [by the Holy Spirit] ye cannot do the things that ye would. [in the strength of your flesh]” (Gal 5: 17)

Romans 7: 24: O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? 25: I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

HE BLESSED HIM THERE

We saw that God gives wavering believer's nothing but when Christ brings his child to Christ's feet then Christ blesses us there—**Genesis 32: 28: And [Christ] said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. 29: And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.**

How does a weak, helpless sinner prevail over our enemies? By Christ who is Israel, the Power and Wisdom of God! Jacob had no need to ask Christ's name because “Israel” is Christ's name! God said to Christ, “Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” (Is 49: 3)

As the Prince of Peace [Christ] hast power with God and with men and hast prevailed. On the cross, Christ prevailed to make his people righteous and justified with God! In our hearts, Christ prevails to make us one with God in him through faith.

Therefore, under Christ's name, in Christ the Prince of Peace alone—as a prince, thou hast power with God and hast prevailed. And Christ shall be your power with men and every enemy that opposes you—physical and spiritual—so that you shall prevail!

We have this illustrated for us. Remember how Jacob was afraid of his brother Esau? Look what Christ did for Jacob—“And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept.” (Gen 32: 4)

Is our power with God and men in our ability to turn our selves, to pray, or to preserve our own lives? “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” (Rom 8: 37)

That is exactly what Christ brought Jacob to confess!—**Gen 32: 30: And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.** Jacob was preserved, not by Jacob, but by Christ alone!

One last thing, scripture says by this work in our hearts, we are changed into Christ’s image and made obedient to rest in him—Jacob said, “I beheld God face to face.” Scripture says of Christ’s people, “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, [in the face of Christ Jesus] are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2Co 3:18)

Brethren, it is not us that makes us cease to walk in our flesh and willing to walk in Christ. It is not the power of our prayer that changes anything. It is when the Power of Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, is risen upon us, that our entire walk is changed—**Genesis 32: 31: And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.** So how do sinners have power with God and with men and prevail? By Christ, “the Sun of Righteousness.” And as he continues this work in us, the “path of the just shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” (Mal. 4:2).

Amen!