New Name, New Limp

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0:00] Good morning. My name's Matthew Capone, and I'm one of the pastors here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you this morning. We are continuing our series in the book of Genesis. You remember Genesis is the first book in the Bible. It tells the origin story of God's people, Israel, and this summer we are focusing on the story of Jacob, which is found in chapters 25 through 36.

And I once again want you to remember where we are at in the story. So Jacob is on his way home. He spent 20 years with his uncle Laban. That is 20 years that he has been away from his brother Esau, and Esau, 20 years ago, threatened to kill him.
So that is the tension. That's the crisis that's driving this narrative. Last week, Jacob sends messengers to Esau and receives no response. Instead, just the ominous news that 400 men are coming at him, which is threatening, right? It's scary.
And so this big question continues to be over top of the narrative, right? What's going to happen when Jacob meets Esau? And we're going to pause that question for this week. You might be wondering why I brought all that up. If we're going to pause it, it's because that question is still on top of this narrative.
It informs it. It informs it. It helps us understand it. This is not an isolated incident. There's a reason that the author of Genesis places this story in between the 400 men coming and the actual meeting of Jacob and Esau.
[1:38] That's not an accident. But we are pausing for a little bit of an intermission because Jacob, this week, is going to have a wrestling match with a mysterious man.

And that wrestling match, as we're going to see, is actually a poetic because it is one night that represents Jacob's entire life.
It's a symbol of everything that's happened so far. Now, this is a rich, rich passage. And so, as I say, sometimes when we come up against a episode like that, I'm going to say something, not everything.
I'm going to be doing well this morning just to communicate the major point of this passage. We're going to talk about two things. You'll see this on page 8 of your worship guide, Jacob's new name and Jacob's new lamp.
With that, I invite you to turn with me to Genesis chapter 32, starting at verse 22, which you'll find on page 7 of your worship guide. As we come to God's word, remember that Isaiah chapter 40 tells us the grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.
[2:53] And so that's why we read now Genesis 32, starting at verse 22. The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants and his 11 children and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.

He took them and sent them across the stream and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.
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.
Then he said, let me go for the day has broken. But Jacob said, I will not let you go until you bless me.
And he said to him, what is your name? And he said, Jacob. 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.
[4:04] 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.

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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.
The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. 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 on the sinew of the thigh.
I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you again that you have spoken to us in your word.
We thank you even more than that, that your word is filled with your power, that your word brings dead things to life. It brings something out of nothing. Did that at the creation of the world, and you do that now through your spirit as you bring sinners to faith in you.
[5:19] Now, we ask that you would be at work by your word in a powerful way this morning, that you would honor your promise in Isaiah 55, that your word does not return to you empty, but accomplishes your purposes.

And so we ask that you would accomplish great things in our lives here and now through your word in Genesis chapter 32. Most of all, we ask that you would show us Jesus, that we would see his glory, his beauty, his majesty, his holiness, his mercy, and his grace, and his love.
And we ask all of these things in his mighty name. Amen. We're picking up on the same day that we left off with last week.
You'll see verse 22. It says the same night. So it's saying the night of the day when Jacob sent drove after drove of gifts to Esau. That's how we ended last week that he was going to try to appease his brother's anger by having group after group of animals as gifts.
And each servant leading the group was supposed to tell Esau, hey, by the way, these are gifts from Jacob. But before that, that night, he decides to take action. So this is verses 22 and 23.
[6:31] He sends everyone across the Jabbok River. And they need to cross this river to enter the promised land. So it makes sense. It's unclear, though, why Jacob decides it has to happen right then and there that night.

It's unclear why he stays behind. Commentators argue and disagree why he decides to be alone. Regardless, it allows for this episode to take place.
Verse 24, we're told, and Jacob was left alone. This is meant to be ominous. So if we're watching the Jacob movie, there's suspense music playing.
You know you have that music that plays when you know someone's about to attack, which is what happens. Also, verse 24, and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.
So Jacob is attacked alone at night in his tent. And this is intentionally vague and scary and intense.
[7:34] It's scary because he's all alone. So there's no chance of anyone coming to help. No one's going to hear what's happening in the tent. No one's going to step in and give him a hand.

It's vague because we don't know who this man is. Now, if you've been in Sunday school, you've grown up in the church, perhaps you do know. But if you're reading it for the first time, who might you guess has jumped into the tent?
Most logical guess is Esau, right? Maybe Esau has decided, you know what? I don't need 400 men. We're going to solve this man to man. It's not just scary and vague, though.
It's also intense. Verse 24, again, they wrestled until the breaking of day. Now, that might not sound like a big deal until you've tried wrestling for hours and hours.
General George Patton, the famous World War II general, wrote a memoir called War As I Knew It. And it includes a letter that he sent to his officers in March of 1944.
[8:38] The letter says many things, and one of them is this, fatigue makes cowards of us all. Famous wrestling coach, Jay Robinson, takes Patton's quote and adds to it.

He says, you can beat anyone if you get them tired. Okay? So fatigue makes cowards of us all. You can beat anyone if you get them tired, which is part of what's incredible about this passage.
Jacob doesn't give up. He's going all night, presumably for hours. He is almost superhuman. Now, if you've been tracking with us, you know that Jacob is a man of great physical strength.
You do not want to meet Jacob alone in a dark alley. And if you get into a bar fight, you want Jacob there covering your back. Think back to chapter 29.
He wants to impress Rachel, so he single-handedly moves the stone away from the well. This stone that's supposed to require many men to move. But it's not just that Jacob is strong.

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[9:43] He's also fit. Okay? Those are two different things, by the way. He's got stamina. He's able to stay in the game. So you might remember Genesis 31 when he's complaining to Laban about all the ways he's been used and abused.

He says this, There I was. By day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes.
Jacob is a tough dude. Jacob is a manly man. He's able to do what almost no one else is capable of doing, which is hold in the fight hour after hour.
It's not just Jacob's endurance, though. The man, the mystery man, has stamina as well. So Jacob here has met his match.
And he's met his match not just in strength, but also in cunning, because just like Jacob, this wrestler knows how to play dirty. Verse 25.
[10:52] With just one touch, he dislocates Jacob's hip. By the way, this is our first hint that Jacob is not wrestling with a mere mortal.

You don't typically meet people who are able to just touch you and dislocate your hip. You also, by the way, need your hips to wrestle. And so you would think at this point that the fight is over, right? Jacob needs to tap out. But he doesn't. Even that is not enough to take Jacob out. That's what we find out in verse 26, because this mystery man says, let me go.
In other words, even though he's lost his strength, his hips are out. There's no way he can win. Jacob refuses to give up. We might say Jacob has no quit.
There's nothing that's going to stop him. And it's at that point where he delivers one of the most famous lines in all of Scripture. Verse 26.
[12:01] I will not let you go unless you bless me. That sentence, I will not let you go unless you bless me, tells us what this whole story is actually about.

But this is not about one night. Jacob has spent his entire life wrestling for blessing.
That's the whole Jacob story. And God, in this one episode, is bringing this to a climax. He's bringing it to a head once and for all.
Jacob's pursuit of blessing is the entire reason he has this tension with Esau. Remember, chapter 25, he steals Esau's birthright. Chapter 27, he steals Esau's blessing. And so this all-night wrestling match is poetic.
It's an image of Jacob's entire life. Jacob has been wrestling since before his birthday.
[13:19] Jacob was wrestling Esau in the womb. Remember back to chapter 25. It tells us this. The children struggled together within her.

Speaking of Rebekah. So Rebekah's pregnant. She has these twins. And she goes to the Lord in prayer, if you remember, because it's so uncomfortable to have these two boys fighting inside her womb. So it's been like this from the very beginning.
Jacob has always been working and striving. He's trying every trick in the book to get the upper hand. With Esau, with Laban. That's why Esau wants to kill him.
The point is this. Jacob has been seeking blessing the wrong way.
Jacob has been wrestling with man when he should have been wrestling with God. For his entire life, Jacob has relied on his power rather than God's power.
[14:30] And now, God is working to bring that to an end. That explains for us what happens next.

We're now in verse 27. So Jacob's asked for the blessing. And this man says to him, What is your name? Jacob answers. And he said, Jacob.
Do you remember why Jacob is called Jacob? Do you remember what the word Jacob means? We have to go back once again to chapter 25 when Jacob is wrestling with Esau in the womb. Remember, Rebecca gives birth. Jacob comes out second. He's the second born. He's not the oldest. That's why he has to steal the blessing. And he's holding on to Esau's heel.
He comes out. That's how aggressive he is. That's how much strength he has, even as an infant. And so if you look back and you have an ESV Bible, this is chapter 25, verse 26.
[15:36] It has a little footnote where it says what Jacob means. He takes by the heel or he cheats. When the man says, what is your name?

That is not a pleasantry. He's not asking for facts. He's not saying, you know, it's been fun wrestling with you. Maybe we should like introduce ourselves. No, he already knows Jacob's name.
But remember, names give and reveal identity. What he's saying is, tell me the truth about yourself. Who are you really?

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And Jacob has to give this introduction in a sense that sounds like the beginning of an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. My name is Jacob. Which means that I'm a cheater.
I'm a dirty little cheater. And I've been grabbing things by the heel my whole life. That's what the man wants him to admit and say out loud.
[16:46] And so Jacob's admission means now we're finally speaking the truth. Now we can get somewhere. Now we're being honest about what's really happening.

It's not just one wrestling match that's coming to an end. Jacob's entire life of wrestling is coming to a close.
Yes, I've gotten by this far. I've gotten by on my strength and my trickery. And it's as if God is saying to him, yes, that's true.
But not this time. Not tonight. Tonight you're not going to get by on your strength and your trickery. Blessing will not come from your cunning or your skill.
I'm the one who gives blessing. I'm the source. You're going to get blessing and you're only going to get blessing when you hang on to me.
[17:56] Blessing comes when you refuse to let go of me. And in a sense, Jacob finally gets it. He finally gets it for the first time when he says, I will not let you go unless you bless me.

I recognize the way I've been living this whole time has been wrong. That blessing comes from you. That everything that's happened that's been successful is because of you.
You're the one who protected me with Laban. You're the one who's kept my life even though Esau wants to kill me. And so it's time for a new chapter.
Not even a new chapter, a whole new volume. A whole new book in Jacob's life. And so that's why God, through this angel, gives Jacob a new name.
Verse 28. 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.
[19:12] Remember, a new name means a new identity. We talked about this last summer when we were in Genesis chapter 17. In chapter 17, God comes to Abram and makes him Abraham.

He comes to Sarai and makes her Sarah. And it's not an accident. It's not casual. God's telling them, You have a new future. Same thing for Jacob here.
He's got a new identity. Yes, Jacob, you've been a little cheater. That's your past. That's why they call you Jacob. But you know what?
That's not your future. Your future is Israel. And again, if you look at the footnote in your Bible, it says this.
Israel means he strives with God or God strives. And the idea is this.
[20:12] Now, Jacob will run to God. Now, Jacob will look to God for the blessing.

Now, Jacob will wrestle with God, not man. Jacob is not going to fight Jacob's battles anymore. God is going to fight Jacob's battles.
By the way, that's the only way he's going to survive this upcoming encounter with Esau. Esau is to let God do what only God can do, which is to soften and change Esau's heart.
No trick from Jacob will do that. And so that's why it's not an accident that this story is placed in between the encounter of Esau. Because this is what has to happen before Jacob sees his brother face to face.
He has to surrender. He has to give it up. He has to recognize he has reached the end of himself. He's not going to be a dirty little cheater anymore.
[21:34] And that, in a sense, is the question of Jacob's life. Where's the blessing come from? What's the source of the blessing? Jacob finally learns, loud and clear, the source of the blessing is not scheming, but God's mercy.

It is not Jacob's strength, but God's grace. By the way, this helps explain for us who the mystery man is. Only God is able to give us new names, new identities.
Now, I'm not going to spend too much time on this. I'll just say briefly on the man Jacob wrestles with. In verse 28, the man says that he is God, because he says, you've striven with God and with men and have prevailed.
And then verse 30, Jacob says the man is God, because he says, he called the name of the place Peniel, saying, for I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been delivered. I might be thinking, that doesn't really make sense that God appears as a man.

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Hosea chapter 12, the prophet Hosea gives us a little bit more clarity. He says this, he strove with the angel and prevailed. He wept and sought his favor.
[22:42] He met God at Bethel, and there God spoke with us. So what Hosea helps us understand is this is an angel he's been wrestling with. There's a sense in which somehow this angel represents God himself.

And so that's how he can say, okay, I've wrestled with God. I've seen him face to face. God has given us a new name as well.
We're called Christians. 2 Corinthians chapter 5 says this, What's the new creation?
It's the one who surrenders to God. It's the person who trusts God. The person who recognizes that blessing comes from God.
The one who knows that victory comes from God's grace, not from our effort. Jacob did not get this blessing because he won the wrestling match.
[24:07] In fact, he didn't. He lost. Jacob got the blessing because he refused. He refused to let go of God.

Are you there yet? Are you ready to hang on to God no matter what, knowing, recognizing that he is your only hope in life and in death?
Not just to confess it. Not just to say it in a worship service, but as we've talked about over the last couple weeks, to believe it. To believe it deep down.
Of course, as we've seen the last couple weeks, it's actually God who has refused to let go of Jacob.
And so that's why he gives him not just a new name. Jacob also receives a new limp.
[25:20] This is verse 31. The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. Wrestling for blessing, remember, has been Jacob's entire life.

He's been doing it since the womb. Now he needs to change. He has to wrestle with God. And just in case he ever forgets, he has a limp to remind him.
He takes away from his night with the angel a little souvenir. Jacob has to be brought to the end of himself to be willing to rely on God.
And old habits die hard. Jacob's strength will not work for him anymore. Turns out, you can't be a good wrestler if your hip is dislocated.
It's just science, okay? He can no longer physically wrestle. God is forcing him to wrestle spiritually.
[26:39] And so there's a sense in which God's saying this, look, Jacob, I'm going to cripple you. So that you can't rely on yourself even if you want to. You're not going to get by anymore on your own power.

In fact, I've removed some of it. Removed some of it for your own good. And so every time Jacob goes on a walk, he gets to be reminded, blessing comes from God.
I don't wrestle with man. I wrestle with him. Same thing becomes true of the entire people of Israel. Verse 32.
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 on the sinew of the thigh.
Every time Israelites come to muscle that's on the hip and they're having a meal, what do they remember? Blessing comes from God.
[27:53] Jacob has a new limp. God's forcing him to give up. Jacob has to say this, I'm a cheater, but it hasn't worked.

I've come to the end of myself. Help. And God is saying to him, look, cling to me for blessing. Wrestle with me for blessing. The point of all of it is this. God's grace must be received as a gift. God's grace cannot, will not be earned or won. God is not impressed with you.
He doesn't want to see your resume. He wants to see your need. He wants you to give up wrestling, trying to earn the blessing, and to receive it.
[29:15] I've mentioned a couple times that the night of wrestling is poetic. It's poetic because it represents Jacob's whole life. But there's a final piece of poetry as the story ends.

Many commentators point out that in verse 31, when it says, the sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip, the sun is rising in more ways than one.
Jacob's dark night is finally over. And it's over because he is willing to receive God's blessing as a gift.
Do you want the sun to shine on you? Do you want a new day in your life?

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Do you want God's grace more than you've ever known it before? You have to admit your need. [30:35] You have to come to God and only God for the blessing. You cannot win it. You can only be received as a gift.

Our Lord Jesus tells us the same. Jim read this for us this morning from Luke chapter 18. Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them.
And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him saying, let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for to such belongs the kingdom of God.
Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom like a child shall not enter it. God's blessing must be received as a gift.
Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do thank you for your great mercy and grace and love to us in Jesus Christ. We ask that you would turn us away from our own efforts and striving and cunning our attempts to earn favor from you and from others and instead that we would grasp only to you and your grace.
[31:59] We ask that you would do this as you show us your son and our savior our Lord Jesus that he's taken the punishment that we deserve and give us the life that he lived. It's in his name that we ask all of these things.

Amen. Amen. may may may may may may may may may may may may may may may may may
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