

## GENESIS 32:22-30

<sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. <sup>24</sup> So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." "But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

<sup>27</sup> The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. <sup>28</sup> Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel,<sup>[a]</sup> because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome." <sup>29</sup> Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. <sup>30</sup> So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

## LUKE 18:1-18

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. <sup>2</sup> He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. <sup>3</sup> And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

<sup>4</sup> "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'" <sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. <sup>7</sup> And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

WHAT IS PRAYER? IN THE SIMPLEST TERMS IT IS HAVING A CONVERSATION WITH GOD, WHICH IMPLIES LISTENING AS WELL AS SPEAKING.

ALTHOUGH THIS IS AN ACCURATE DESCRIPTION, MANY PEOPLE WOULD SAY PRAYER IS ASKING GOD FOR SOMETHING OR TO DO SOMETHING FOR US OR SOMEONE ELSE.

PRAYER OF COURSE, IS MUCH MORE, SINCE IT INCLUDES OFFERING THANKS AND PRAISE TO THE LORD, AND CAN INCLUDE JUST TELLING GOD OUR THOUGHTS OR HOW OUR DAY WENT, WITHOUT ASKING FOR GOD'S RESPONSE.

SOMEONE DESCRIBED PRAYER BEAUTIFULLY AS, "OUR CRAWLING INTO GOD'S LAP...KNOWING GOD LOVES US."

THE PICTURE THAT SAYING GIVES IS ONE OF COMFORT AND SHELTER, BUT IT CAN BE HARDER TO EXPERIENCE WHEN GOD DOES NOT RESPOND IN THE WAY WE WISH, OR SEEMS SILENT.

THE REV. JOHN PIPER OFFERS HIS OWN VIEW OF THE DYNAMICS OF PRAYER:

"FAITH IS THE FURNACE OF OUR LIVES. ITS FUEL IS THE GRACE OF GOD, AND THE DIVINELY APPOINTED SHOVEL FOR FEEDING THE FLAME IS PRAYER.

IF YOU LOSE HEART AND LAY THE SHOVEL DOWN THE FIRE WILL GO OUT."

FORTUNATELY, THE LORD REMAINS WITHIN HEARING DISTANCE ALWAYS, WE HAVE FORGIVENESS THROUGH CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKS TO MOVE US TO PICK UP THE SHOVEL AGAIN.

THIS IS GOOD NEWS BECAUSE- THERE ARE TIMES EVEN CHRISTIANS STRUGGLE TO KEEP ON USING THE SHOVEL OF PRAYER BECAUSE IT FEELS USELESS TO DO SO.

A CARTOON THAT APPEARED IN A MAGAZINE YEARS AGO OFFERS AN EXAMPLE OF THIS.

IT SHOWED A BOY KNEELING BESIDE HIS BED SAYING HIS PRAYERS.

THE CAPTION READ: “DEAR GOD, UNCLE JIM STILL DOESN’T HAVE A JOB; SIS STILL DOESN’T HAVE A DATE FOR THE SOCIAL; GRANDMA IS STILL FEELING SICK; AND I’M TIRED OF PRAYING FOR THIS FAMILY AND NOT GETTING RESULTS.”

SURELY THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD, OR RIGHT NOW HAVE, A SIMILAR EXPERIENCE, ALTHOUGH MOST ADULTS MIGHT NOT BE SO BLUNT WITH GOD.

HOWEVER, IT MIGHT BE ENCOURAGING TO REMEMBER GOD IS NOT PUT OFF BY OUR BLUNTNESS, EVEN IF OTHER PEOPLE MIGHT THINK THAT IS NO WAY TO SPEAK TO THE LORD.

EVANGELIST AND AUTHOR SHEILA WALSH SHARED HER EXPERIENCE HAS TAUGHT HER TO- “PRAY HARDEST WHEN IT IS HARDEST TO PRAY.”

THERE ARE MANY REASONS FOR PRAYER TO BECOME DIFFICULT: DOUBTS AND FEARS, GRIEF OR DEPRESSION CAN OVERWHELM US.

WHEN THIS HAPPENS, OR WE ARE OTHERWISE DISAPPOINTED OR ANGRY WITH GOD, THE BEST THING TO DO IS TO KEEP PRAYING AND DON’T LET GO.

WE WILL BENEFIT FROM DOING THIS EVEN WHEN LIKE JACOB WE HAVE TO WRESTLE WITH GOD ALL NIGHT LONG AND SOMETIMES LONGER.

AND WE WILL ALSO BENEFIT FROM HOLDING ON AND NOT LETTING GO OF GOD, WHEN UNLIKE JACOB WE DO NOT FEEL EITHER CHANGED OR BLESSED BY THE LORD OR OUR EXPERIENCE.

YOU SEE, WHAT WE DO NOT ALWAYS THINK ABOUT WHEN WE STRUGGLE WITH PRAYER AND WITH GOD IS THE GOOD NEWS OF THE SITUATION.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT WRESTLING WITH GOD SHOWS US HE IS ACCESSIBLE AND WILLING TO ENGAGE WITH US.

LET’S THINK AGAIN ABOUT JACOB’S STORY. HE SPENT MOST OF HIS LIFE DOING THINGS HIS WAY.

ANOTHER THING ABOUT JACOB IS THAT HE WAS NOT ALWAYS NICE TO, OR HONEST WITH, OTHER PEOPLE.

FOR EXAMPLE: HE TRICKED HIS OLDER BROTHER ESAU OUT OF HIS BIRTHRIGHT AS THE FIRST BORN.

AND LATER, WITH THEIR MOTHER’S HELP, DECEIVED THEIR FATHER INTO GIVING HIM THE BLESSING MEANT FOR ESAU.

AFTER DOING THAT JACOB FLED TO RELATIVES ELSEWHERE TO ESCAPE HIS BROTHER’S WRATH.

HE MARRIED BOTH DAUGHTERS OF HIS KINSMAN LABAN AND TWO OTHER WOMEN AS WELL.

EVENTUALLY GOD CALLED JACOB TO RETURN TO HIS HOME AND BROTHER.

UNFORTUNATELY, JACOB KEPT TO HIS OLD WAYS AND DID NOT LEAVE HIS FATHER-IN-LAW ON GOOD TERMS, BUT INSTEAD FLED FROM HIM LIKE HE HAD HIS BROTHER.

TODAY’S READING BEGINS THE NIGHT BEFORE JACOB AND HIS LARGE FAMILY ARE ABOUT TO CROSS OVER THE BORDER INTO HOME TERRITORY.

HE IS FILLED WITH FEAR ABOUT WHAT HIS BROTHER AND HIS BROTHER’S MEN MIGHT DO TO HIM AND HIS FAMILY.

JACOB GOES OUT ALONE TO PRAY FOR HELP, AND HE PRAYED TO THE LORD HIS GOD LIKE HE HAD NEVER PRAYED BEFORE.

GOD’S INITIAL RESPONSE WAS TO APPEAR TO JACOB IN THE FORM OF AN ANGEL AND WRESTLE WITH HIM MAN TO MAN, SO TO SPEAK.

IT SEEMS LIKE A STRANGE THING FOR GOD TO DO, SINCE WE KNOW HE COULD HAVE PINNED JACOB TO THE GROUND WITH A MERE THOUGHT.

BUT INSTEAD, GOD LIMITED HIS STRENGTH TO MAKE IT ONLY EQUAL TO JACOB'S, SO THAT THEY HAD TO STRUGGLE WITH ONE ANOTHER ALL NIGHT LONG.

WHY EVER WOULD GOD DO SUCH A STRANGE THING? SINCE THE BIBLE DOES NOT EXPLAIN IT, WE CANNOT KNOW FOR SURE.

ONE IDEA IS THAT THE EXPERIENCE TAUGHT JACOB ABOUT HIS NEED FOR A DEEPER RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS GOD.

HE ALSO NEEDED TO LEARN TO DEPEND ON THE LORD CONSISTENTLY AND NOT SIMPLY TURN TO GOD WHEN HE ENCOUNTERED TROUBLE HE COULD NOT AVOID.

WE ALSO ARE REMINDED TO ENGAGE WITH THE LORD DAILY AND NOT ONLY WHEN WE WANT OR NEED SOMETHING.

THE OTHER LESSON JACOB LEARNED THROUGH THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS WRESTLING MATCH WAS TO ACCEPT GOD'S WILL.

WE ALSO NEED TO BOTH LEARN, AND ACCEPT GOD'S WILL, EVEN WHEN LIKE JACOB, WE STRUGGLE TO DO SO.

INDEED, WE ALL STRUGGLE SPIRITUALLY WITH GOD OR HIS WILL, FROM TIME TO TIME AS A PART OF OUR FAITH WALK.

EVEN JESUS STRUGGLED IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE, SO MUCH SO HE EXPERIENCED PHYSICAL AS WELL AS MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL STRAIN.

HE STRUGGLED AGAIN ON THE CROSS WHEN IN THE MIDST OF EXTREME PHYSICAL SUFFERING HE FELT ABANDONED BY HIS FATHER, AND SO, JESUS CRIED OUT IN DESPAIR.

WHAT WE SOMETIMES FORGET WAS THE LESSON IT SHOWS TO US THAT JESUS GAVE HIS PAIN TO HIS FATHER THROUGH THAT PRAYER FROM PSALM 22.

HE SHOWS US FROM THE CROSS THE VALUE OF CLINGING TO FAITH AND NOT GIVING UP ON PRAYER NO MATTER WHAT.

THIS CAN HELP US WHEN WE STRUGGLE, OR SEEK TO COMFORT OTHERS WHO STRUGGLE, TO KEEP ON PRAYING WHEN IT FEELS LIKE GOD IS ABSENT OR DOES NOT CARE.

YES, INDEED IT IS GOOD NEWS TO BE REMINDED THAT JESUS UNDERSTANDS VERY WELL HIS OWN, AND THUS OUR, HUMAN NATURE.

THE SAVIOR, KNOWS FROM EXPERIENCE HOW EASY IT IS TO GIVE INTO THE TEMPTATION TO GIVE UP ON GOD AND ON PRAYER.

HE MODELS FOR US THE LESSON TO PRAY HARDEST WHEN IT IS HARDEST TO PRAY.

THIS BRINGS US TO THE SAVIOR'S RESPONSE WHEN ASKED ABOUT WHEN GOD'S KINGDOM WOULD COME.

HE ANSWERED BY TELLING A PARABLE ABOUT THE NEED TO KEEP ON PRAYING AND TO NOT GIVE UP.

THE STORY IS ABOUT A WIDOW WHO APPARENTLY HAD NO MALE RELATIVE WHO COULD OR WOULD ADVOCATE FOR HER.

WHILE WE DO NOT KNOW THE DETAILS, WE CAN SURMISE FROM THE STORY THAT SHE WAS TREATED UNJUSTLY BY SOMEONE.

SHE WENT TO STATE HER CASE BEFORE A JUDGE, BUT HE WAS NOT INTERESTED IN HER OR HER PROBLEM.

THE JUDGE IN THE PARABLE WAS COMPLETELY UNLIKE GOD, OUR DIVINE JUDGE, BECAUSE JUSTICE AND MERCY WERE NOT HIS CONCERN.

THIS HUMAN JUDGE NEITHER CARED ABOUT GOD NOR ABOUT WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THOUGHT ABOUT HIM.

IT SEEMS THAT HE WAS SO SECURE IN HIS POSITION THAT HE ONLY SERVED TO PLEASE HIMSELF AND FURTHER HIS GOOD FORTUNE.

THE WOMAN WHO WENT TO HIM, PROBABLY DID SO AS A LAST RESORT, HE WAS HER ONLY HOPE FOR JUSTICE, AND POSSIBLY FOR HER AND HER CHILDREN'S VERY SURVIVAL.

HER RESPONSE TO THE JUDGE'S UNRESPONSIVENESS TO HER PLEAS WAS TO KEEP PESTERING HIM AND NOT GIVE UP, UNTIL HE AGREED TO HEAR HER CASE AND GIVE HER JUSTICE.

THE WOMAN, WE MIGHT SAY, EXHIBITED PERSISTENCE, AND PERSEVERANCE IN STATING HER CAUSE.

SHE COULD ALSO BE DESCRIBED AS STUBBORN, IN THE SENSE OF NOT GIVING UP UNTIL SHE KNEW SHE WAS HEARD AND TAKEN SERIOUSLY.

HER REFUSAL TO GIVE UP FINALLY BORE FRUIT WHEN THE JUDGE GOT TIRED OF HER AND HER PLEAS.

HIS FAVORABLE RESPONSE TO HER, WHILE SELF-CENTERED, DID PROVIDE HER WITH THE JUSTICE SHE SOUGHT.

THE PARABLE IS MEANT TO TEACH US TO BE AS STUBBORN AND PERSISTENT, AND TO PERSEVERE IN PRAYER LIKE THAT WIDOW DID.

JESUS IS TEACHING US TO PRAY TO GOD WITH THE SAME KIND OF ASSURANCE THE WOMAN HAD THAT THE JUDGE HAD THE POWER TO HELP HER.

BUT WE ARE TO PERSIST IN PRAYER, NOT BECAUSE GOD IS UNJUST OR UNCARING.

INSTEAD, WE DO SO BECAUSE GOD'S LOVE FOR US SHOWN THROUGH JESUS, SHOWS US GOD CARES ABOUT US AND WILL LISTEN.

THIS DOES NOT MEAN GOD WILL GRANT US ALL OUR PLEAS, WHICH IS WHY PRAYER INVOLVES NOT ONLY PERSEVERANCE BUT SOMETIMES WRESTLING WITH GOD'S WILL.

TRULY, PRAYER, IS ABOUT ENGAGING WITH GOD OUR CREATOR AND SAVIOR, AND THIS INVOLVES: LEARNING, COOPERATING WITH, AND SURRENDERING TO, HIS WILL.

JESUS TAUGHT THIS ANOTHER WAY THROUGH WHAT WE CALL "THE LORD'S PRAYER."

THE OPENING PETITION SETS THE GROUNDWORK FOR ALL THE PLEAS THAT FOLLOW IN THE REST OF THE PRAYER, AS WELL AS IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD.

IT PRAYS: "THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN."

TO SINCERELY AND THOUGHTFULLY PRAY THOSE WORDS HAS A TWO-FOLD MEANING.

FIRST, WE PRAY FOR THE RETURN OF JESUS WHO WILL THEN FULLY BRING GOD'S KINGDOM, HIS RULE, TO EARTH.

SECONDLY, WE ASK FOR GOD'S WILL TO BE DONE IN OUR LIVES, IN THE MEANTIME.

I CLOSE WITH A PRAYER BY THE LATE ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIEST AND MONK, FATHER THOMAS MERTON, WHICH SPEAKS ABOUT SEEKING AND FOLLOWING GOD'S WILL.

LET US PRAY: "LORD GOD, I HAVE NO IDEA WHERE I AM GOING. I DO NOT SEE THE ROAD AHEAD OF ME. I CANNOT KNOW FOR CERTAIN WHERE IT WILL END.

NOR DO I REALLY KNOW MYSELF, AND THE FACT THAT I THINK I AM FOLLOWING YOUR WILL DOES NOT MEAN THAT I AM ACTUALLY DOING SO.

BUT I BELIEVE THAT THE DESIRE TO PLEASE YOU DOES, IN FACT PLEASE YOU. AND I HOPE I WILL NEVER DO ANYTHING APART FROM THAT DESIRE. AND I KNOW IF I DO THIS, YOU WILL LEAD ME BY THE RIGHT ROAD, THOUGH I MAY KNOW NOTHING ABOUT IT.

THEREFORE, I WILL TRUST YOU ALWAYS. THOUGH I MAY SEEM TO BE LOST IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NOT, FOR YOU ARE EVER WITH ME. YOU WILL NEVER LEAVE ME TO FACE MY STRUGGLES ALONE."

THROUGH CHRIST OUR LORD WE PRAY. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: GENESIS 32:22-30 & LUKE 18:1-8

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