

SERMON: WRESTLEMANIA BY THE BROOK

Genesis 32:23-29

(23) And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had. (24) And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. (25) And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. (26) And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. (27) And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. (28) And he 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 it is that thou dost ask after my name? And He blessed him there.

Introduction

No matter what you think of professional wrestling, I am sure you have heard of Wrestlemania. It started in 1985, in Arlington, Texas and has always drawn a big crowd, both in person and by pay-per-view. Some say, professional wrestling is not a real sport, but rather "sports entertainment," because the outcome is always predetermined. Some say it is indeed a real sport; in fact, it is the king of sports. Others say it is too violent and sends the wrong message to our youth. For those who like it, it is very entertaining and they cannot wait until the next big match. It must be admitted that the wrestlers are very agile, have great balance, have quick reflexes, and have perfected the gift of gab.

I must confess, I grew up watching professional wrestling every Saturday evening on WTVY from Dothan, Alabama. It usually came on while we were eating dinner and we had to be careful not to knock over our sweet tea while we tried to help the good guys win. We would help the referee count One-Two-Three.

After the TV broadcast concluded and dinner was over, my brothers and I would go outside and mimic the many wrestling moves we had just seen. By the stern direction of our father, some moves were off limits. We could body slam, but we were not allowed to execute the "pile driver." There were a few times we went a bit too far in our excitement. Our parents were never informed of the infractions because we knew all of us would be in trouble, both the victim and the perpetrator. The penalty, which we avoided with our silence, by today's standards, would have been blatant child abuse. Such irony: daddy threatened to hurt us, if we hurt each other.

Wrestlemania, as we said earlier, is a great event in which the status of wrestlers are changed or maintained. Jacob had his Wrestlemania near a brook named Jabbok and his status was changed forever.

Let's review the Biblical record. Jacob had always been a swindler and a cheat, and had never hesitated to take advantage of another person's weakness. He constantly matched wits against opponents of all types and had won. After many years in a foreign land, he set his face toward his homeland. He had left twenty years earlier, because he had stolen his brother's birth right and his father's blessing and had to flee for his life. Even in this endeavor to return home, he was still scheming. He sent his family and servants ahead of himself. The family crossed the river and he stayed behind. The strategy was simple but low down. His brother Esau would have to encounter the family before they got to him. If there were violence or insults, his family and servants would get it first.

Jacob was left alone. Suddenly, a mystery assailant came and a fierce conflict began. They wrestled for most of the night. Jacob sensed that he was wrestling against a superman and came to realize that God had come to challenge his power of self-reliance and his scheming nature. It was a conflict between the old Jacob and a new Jacob. Jacob wrestled so persistently that his opponent could not overpower him until he deliberately injured his thigh. Wounded in the thigh, his natural strength was exhausted; Jacob realized that he was a beaten man. For the first time in his life he was "whapped" and he could not deny it. Jacob realized more clearly that he was wrestling with a divine being, if not God Himself.

Jacob could not struggle anymore; He was tired and injured. Somehow Jacob, in desperation, found the strength to cling to his opponent. Wrestlers and boxers know that if you cling to your opponent, he cannot hit you anymore. The clinging restricts your opponent's hands, arms, and legs. It is really a defensive bear hug. He clung so tenaciously to his opponent that his opponent asked to be freed. Daybreak was approaching and the assailant's self-imposed time limit was about to expire. Jacob would let him go only on one condition: that he receive a blessing from him. The opponent, now a friend, changed Jacob's name to Israel and blessed him. His new name reflected his new nature and was prophetic of his future.

There are many unanswered questions about this narrative. There are also many practical points that can be drawn from it. Let's look at a few.

Exposition

1. All Of Us Have To Wrestle With Some Heavy Issues.

(America Is Wrestling With Issues Right Now.)

(We Wrestle With Tough Decisions.)

2. There Is Hurt That Helps.

(An Injury That Improved And Inspired Jacob.)

(Sometimes God Has To Hurt Us To Humble Us.)

3. The Conflict Turned To Clinging.

(He Realized This Was A Divine Encounter.)

(The Assailant Was Really An Ally.)

(There Is Too Much Conflict And Not Enough Clinging.)

4. The Demand For A Blessing.

(Never Endure Difficulty Without Receiving A Benefit.)

(Even If You Make A Mistake, Learn From It.)

Closing Thoughts

Jacob is a classic example of how the Lord deals with people who are imperfect-that includes all of us. The story of Jacob shows how the Lord uses such people, like you and I, to accomplish much in His program of salvation and healing. We all can take heart after studying the life of Jacob. Give God Glory! Give God All The Glory!

End Notes

1. Some theologians believe the man who wrestled with Jacob was a pre-incarnation appearance of Jesus, similar to the fourth man in the fiery furnace who joined the three Hebrew boys.
2. Jacob's name was changed to Israel. The traditional interpretation is "Prince of God." Some scholars would rather translated it as, "He Who Strives with God," "Let God Rule," or "God Strives." As you study with different commentaries, please do not let these variations confuse you. If you want to know more about why there can be vastly different interpretations and translations of Hebrew words and phrases, please do research on the "trilateral root" of Hebrew and other Semitic languages.
3. "Why his thigh?" many have asked. Many believe the thigh was chosen because the thigh is the largest and strongest muscle connection of the body. The assailant is deliberately crippling Jacob at the point of his greatest strength to humble him.

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