

Broken, But Better

Genesis 32:22-31

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

August 3, 2014

AUDIO: fbcjc.buzzsprout.com/7678/193546

"The Apostle" was a movie starring Robert Duvall, depicting a sincere, fiery preacher whose personal life was a wreck. God could use him in amazing ways. He was so earnest and powerful. But in a jealous rage, he lashed out at his wife's lover and ran from the law. I heard someone comment on the character played by Duvall: "Here was a man for whom the call of God on his life was everything. But he didn't take care of the relationships in his life."

Well, just change the name and we could say the same about Jacob. You've met Jacob. Jim Hill preached about him a few weeks ago in an outstanding sermon--about Jacob's ladder. Jacob was always cheating people, looking out for himself, getting in a jam and then asking God to bail him out (sound familiar?). Jacob has deceived his father, cheated his brother Esau and now 20 years have passed since he saw Esau. And Esau is approaching with 400 men. What would you think? Perhaps Jacob's guilty conscience is kicking in! He started doing two things, each revealing a side of his character. First, he started praying (32:9ff) and then he started trying to manipulate things, trying to buy his way out of the mess by bribing his brother with gifts (32:18ff). Pray...but stay in control of others and the situation!

That brings us to the sleepless night Jacob had right before he is to be confronted by his brother Esau, whom he has cheated out of his birthright and blessing. Let's hear the text of Gen. 32:22-31. [Read the text]. That night, Jacob sends his family and "everything he had" across the river (v. 23). He is there all alone. I've had nights like this one, haven't you? Insomnia, worry, wrestling with God...or demons. Alone. A lot of "stuff" bubbles up at night, when we are all alone with our thoughts and regrets.

Notice what a well-told story this is. The storyteller holds back an important detail. At first, the one wrestling with Jacob is called "the man." Only at the end of the story is it revealed that this is some divine being, an angel, no doubt. (We note that in Genesis, the being is never called an angel. That name is given to the being in Hosea 12:4. Many works of art have tried to capture this event. Our bulletin cover and screen show you one of them.

I find it interesting that the angel asks Jacob his name. Now that was not a question for information, but for Jacob's own self-discovery. "My name is Jacob." The name means trickster, cheater, con man. It was to make Jacob of his own darkness. So, in wrestling the angel, he was in a sense confronting his demons. Here's a great quote by playwright August Wilson: "Confront the dark parts of yourself...Your willingness to wrestle with your demons will cause your angels to sing."

In the midst of this wrestling match, we sense that something inside Jacob is turning. He won't let the angel go unless the angel blesses him. Oh, God, give us people who would rather die than miss out on what God has for us!

After this encounter with God, Jacob knew himself better and he knew God better. And he was ready for a right relationship with his brother Esau. Chapter 33 tells us Jacob and Esau were reconciled! Did you note the progress in the story? It was night (v. 22). Then it was dawn (v. 24). Then finally, daylight! (v. 31) [*The New International Commentary on the Old Testament--The Book of Genesis, Vol. 2*, by Victor Hamilton, p. 337]. Jacob leaves that morning with two new things. A new name, Israel. And a limp. The angel had touched him and his hip went out of socket.

The limp reminds Jacob that he's not in the driver's seat. We aren't in the driver's seat. God is. The limp reminds Jacob that it's not his way. It's not our way. It's God's. It's not our work for God. It's God's work for us and through us.

There is a purifying quality to God's love. It can cleanse us. Wash out the filth. Our adversity can teach us to trust God. Our limp can remind us how much we need God. When our confidence is shaken, we can be more ready than ever for a new relationship with God and others.