

St. Paul: On The Same page

10.13.13 Week #268

Day One: Genesis 32:22-30

Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless 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."

Jacob was a mess. His life was like a soap opera. He had two wives competing with each other. He had taken their maids as wives also. His sons by all these women were in competition with each other. He was in a stinky situation with his in-laws. Members of his family were practicing idolatry. He's about to meet his twin brother who once threatened to kill him.

Could things get worse? And now a mysterious man shows up and wrestles with him all night long! He refuses to reveal his name, but he gives Jacob a new name. Instead of Jacob, "the grabber," he will now be called Israel, "wrestles with God."

"Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 3:14-15

Israel does indeed wrestle with God, not only this man but also the nation that would be descended from him would constantly wrestle with God. Their lives would be a mess, like Israel's, yet God would bless them.

It's OK to wrestle with God. Like children, we resist God's instruction, his limitations, his purpose for us. But God is patient. He is merciful. He becomes weak so that we may be strong. Our lives are a mess, but he makes us clean!

Prayer: Father, Creator, I am not afraid to wrestle with you, to strive as I seek to understand and accept your will, because I know that I will come to no harm. You will bless me as you blessed Jacob. Amen.

Day Two: 2 Tim.3:14-4:5

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

"Were you born in a barn?" That's what my mom would say when my brothers and I would run into the house without closing the door, or without wiping our feet, or just like a herd of rampaging cattle bursting through the kitchen.

She expected that our actions ought to reflect our birth and our training. If we were born in a barn, then we'd act like barn animals. But since we were born in a nice clean hospital and raised under her careful teaching, she expected that we would be well mannered and respectful young men.

What did you learn from your parents? Besides manners, and personal care, and besides the schooling they gave you for reading and writing and arithmetic, what are the most important things you learned as a child? As I

watch our families, it seems to me that the most important things parents seek to pass on to their children are their passion for the University of Michigan (or another favorite team), their love for a sport or hobby, their values in food and certain family traditions. Flags, decorations, branded clothing, they use all these things to pass along these important traditions.

Are these the most important things?

Paul tells Timothy, "Continue in what you have learned." Like you, Timothy's mother and grandmother probably had ordinary traditions they shared. But the vital life-giving thing that Timothy inherited was the knowledge of Jesus Christ, a daily life of prayer, an understanding of God's word, and a saving faith in Jesus.

How are those precious treasures handed on? We study God's word with our children. We pray with our children. We model a life in which Jesus comes first.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I received a treasure. Help me hand it on. Amen.

Day Three: Luke 18:1-8

[Jesus] said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. 3 And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' 4 For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" 6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily."

I was recently called to jury duty. It was all pretty interesting. Unexpectedly, I was actually chosen to sit on a jury and I got to observe the functioning of the court in a way that I had never seen before (since the extent of my experience was whatever I had seen on television).

What struck me most forcefully was the extreme lengths to which the judge went to ensure that everything was absolutely, scrupulously fair. I found it interesting to observe all the detailed rules

of the court, the behavior of the bailiff, the strategies of the attorneys for the prosecution and the defense. But in reality there was only one character who was truly central to that experience. It was the young man who was on trial, and who never even spoke.

Justice is highly valued in our society, so it's a bit shocking to us when Jesus compares his Father to a crooked judge. But this story is not about the judge. It's about the plaintiff, the poor widow. It's not about all the grand courtroom ceremony around her, the marble columns or the judge's robes. It is about her stubborn appeal, her persistent seeking, and the end result.

Jesus says that we are to be like her. Insignificant, weak, poor, we have no special influence. But we can make our appeal to the Ruler of all things, and because he is just and merciful he will hear us.

So... why aren't you praying?

Prayer: Father in heaven, hear my prayer – and move my heart to appeal to you day and night. Amen.

Day Four: Luke 17:7-10

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

4:1 I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 5 As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

If you were given an amazing new dishwasher that made any dishes sparkling clean no matter how dirty they had been, would you still be standing at the sink scrubbing?

If you found an inexpensive medicine that immediately eliminated your poison ivy, would you still be scratching yourself?

If there was a food that killed the common cold, would anyone be sneezing and coughing?

Of course not! And yet we have been given the word of God itself, truly a miracle answer to so many of our problems, yet we don't use it.

Of course, reading the word does not give us instant wealth or health or deliverance from our troubles. It does much more than that – it gives us eternal blessings. It changes us! It shapes us for heaven.

Perhaps that is the very reason we hesitate to open ourselves up to God's word – because it does rebuke, correct, and exhort us. It points out things we may not wish to hear.

God's word is the perfect tool, first for God to use on us – and then for him to use in our lives as we help others to know him. What is your plan for deepening your knowledge of his word?

Prayer: *Lord, I have not always wanted to be rebuked or corrected. And yet, my own plans have not worked out so well. Help me to seek and to find blessing in your word, today and every day. Amen.*