**Wrestling for Blessing**

***22****The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.****23****He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had.****24****And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.****25****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.****26****Then he said, “Let me go, for the day has broken.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”****27****And he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.”****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.”****29****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.****30****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.” (Genesis 32:22-30)*

We often see God’s blessings and our spiritual growth as we struggle with Him. Greetings in the Lord as we think out loud today about God’s blessings as presented in Jacob’s story as he returned back to Canaan. The account is probably familiar to us already – Jacob succeeded in getting from his uncle’s grip after 20 years of service by God’s protection. Through that time period, many things changed about him and “Deceiver” Jacob was going to become Israel, “The One who wrestled with, struggled with and persevered with God.” (All of those meanings are wrapped up in the word “Israel.”) It is not possible, in fact, to understand the meaning of the word “Israel,” with one word or expression. Continuing with the above theme, there was great meaning when Jacob met God during his journey. My message today is exactly about that moment; what does his wrestling with God mean, and what does his name-change say to us? Let us go deeper into the subject…

Encounters with God transform and restore us. Jacob was approaching his brother Esau with great fear with his entourage of children and wives. He had tried to protect his family within his human limitations, but Esau was approaching silently with his band of men, and Jacob, if God had not been with him, may have been slaughtered completely by his brother. Jacob was trying to soften his brother’s heart with gifts – indirectly apologizing for his past sins against Esau.

At night, he (Jacob) has an interesting experience: a man began wrestling with him, and because Jacob was persistent, the man had not backed away from him. It had become clear, however, that the Lord did not want Jacob to see His face, and seemed be in a hurry to leave before dawn. Jacob, however, had understood (to the best of his ability) that the One with whom he wrestled was not an ordinary man. He concluded that this was either God Himself or His representative – and so, he asked for a blessing, which resulted in his old name being removed from his identity, and his new name being given. From now on, he would be the “one who prevailed with God,” and not “Deceiver” or “Usurper.” Israel was now testing his boundaries with the wrestler, but God did not let him see his face. At the end, Israel commemorated the encounter by calling it “Peniel.”

Very often, parents are wrong when they disallow hardship or struggles to come to their children. Someone once wrote the following about struggles, which can be tied to seeking God’s blessing through the ordeal. The writer said:

“When I hear my friends say they hope their children don't have to experience

the hardships they went through--I don't agree. Those hardships made us

what we are. You can be disadvantaged in many ways, and one way may be

not having had to struggle.”

In our case, dearly beloved, we must be careful to recognize God when He comes to us in a wrestling match or struggle. It may be that the struggle in which we find ourselves is an opportunity to change, to become wiser, or to become stronger in faith. Perhaps, for example, it may be that a financial struggle is really a means to be “upgraded” in faith, if we stay patient and faithful to the Lord, even if an immediate solution does not arise to the struggle. Perhaps a certain personal relationship was disturbed and lost its peace. Maybe the friendship cooled and now you barely speak to each other. God has a blessing, however if we continue to struggle in His direction for a solution. Or, it may be that there is strife in the home, and the “wrestling match” is prolonging… God expects that we not be disheartened by the pressure, but that we seek God’s blessing in the middle of it and continue to put all our effort for the love of the Lord toward a resolution.

In a word, if we want to live out our faith, it is necessary to go through the struggles, so that we can ask and receive blessings at the end of each one. Jacob became Israel and wound up a prophet at the end of his life. He grew very rich, but was rescued during the time of famine, because God remained with him even in his later, more financially difficult years, after having gone through this ordeal (both with his brother and losing his wife).

The possible blessings at the resolution of a struggle may be many: the establishment of peace in the family; financial breakthrough or an unexpected resolution. There may be an improvement of atmosphere wherever you are; perhaps there will be healing of relationships at church or at the workplace. There may be a strengthening of faith or a positive change in personality (done only by God).

I pray that God give all of us patience so that we do not give up during the struggle, but rather, working with God, we receive His blessing and thus be changed. We often see God’s blessings and our spiritual growth as we struggle with Him.