

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH SURRENDER

GENESIS 32:22-32

Life is often transformed when we least expect it. It may even happen when we are not seeking to be transformed. It was that way in the life of Jacob.

After the fearful Jacob had sent his family across the river Jabbok, he found himself alone. As he sat in that aloneness contemplating the anticipated meeting with Esau on the next day, he doubtlessly lifted his heart up to God in prayer. It would be the kind of prayer that he had offered in this same chapter. But God did more than listen to Jacob's prayer that night – He changed Jacob from a cheat into a prince.

That Jacob had been a conniving cheat is obvious from the record we have of his life. We have already considered that the explanation for his lifestyle was his carnality. Even though he enjoyed the privileges of a special covenant with God, he still chose to live by his own wits. Jacob had far too much confidence in Jacob. God had decided that Jacob must be changed. The sovereign God set into motion that night the dynamics that would bring about a dramatic change in the life of Jacob before the sun came up the next morning. Jacob sat beside the river as the sun went down as a man wrapped up in himself, but when the sun came up he was a prince of God. During the night his name had been changed from Jacob to Israel.

Some of us may be able to point back to some dark moment in life in which we, too, were changed for the better. It may have been a different kind of experience from that of Jacob but it still involved a movement from a life of carnality to one of spirituality. It involved changing the basic agenda of life itself. Since we know that each of us need to have such a transition point in our lives, it should be helpful for us to take an in-depth look into the night that brought about the change from being a cheat to being a prince of God. Would it not be a wonderful thing if God would make such a change in many of us this very night?

I. GOD OPPOSES OUR CARNALITY.

The scriptures are so clear and yet so mysterious at this point. The record reads, “So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.” At first we are given no indication concerning the identity of this man. We might first be left with the impression that it was some Arab traveling across that part of northern Canaan. However, when Jacob interpreted the event the next morning he himself said: “It is because I have seen God face to face, and yet my life was spared.” It becomes clear that when the one with whom Jacob struggled that night was none other than the angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Son of God Himself. It was God who came to Jacob at night and initiated the wrestling match between the two. We are not to understand that Jacob initiated a wrestling match with the man, but rather the Man initiated the wrestling match with Jacob.

1. Our carnality prevents the accomplishment of God’s purpose in us.

Jacob had been chosen to be a prince of God. He had been chosen to be the heir of the promise that God had given to Abraham concerning a Seed that would bless the world. God knew that Jacob could never become what He had destined him to be until the carnality in his life was dealt with. In Jacob's case his carnality centered in his self-will, his independent spirit that kept him from trusting and obeying God. To this point he was still insistent on doing everything Jacob's way. Something must be done about this. So God purposes that He will not allow him to go back into the land of Canaan until his carnality has been dealt with.

We can learn something from this. There is in many of us a carnal principle that is limiting the activity of God through our lives. We are still doing things our way instead of God's way. We are still clinging to our will rather than embracing His will. If God is ever to use us in a mighty way to make a difference in the world, then this carnal principle must be dealt with. He stands in unaltered opposition to that lifestyle and the dominance of that principle in our lives.

2. Our carnality prefers our way – not God's way.

As Jacob had been preparing of his encounter with Esau on the next day he had gone about it in the same manner he had always conducted his affairs. The whole plan reflected the scheming mind of Jacob. This must be dealt with if God is to use Jacob mightily. We need to underline the reality of God's opposition to our carnality.

II. GOD BREAKS OUR CARNALITY.

During that dark, long night as Jacob wrestled with the stranger, he kept prevailing. He would not yield to the strength of the stranger. He kept attempting to bring the stranger under his control. However, during the night something happened. “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.”

1. God cripples

The Hebrew text would indicate that it didn’t take a strong blow from the stranger with whom Jacob wrestled to knock his hip out of joint. All the stranger did was touch his hip. With just a touch from the stranger, the hip was suddenly disjointed. You can imagine the excruciating pain and weakness that this brought to Jacob. You can imagine the sense of helplessness that came over him when he suddenly realized that one whole side was out of commission. Any hope he had of overcoming the stranger was suddenly gone. God had crippled him.

It is unfortunate that God had to cripple Jacob. If at any point in the night Jacob had surrendered to the stranger, the crippling would not have been necessary. The crippling became necessary because Jacob kept on insisting on doing things his way and bringing the stranger under his control. For the rest of his days Jacob would walk with a limp as a reminder of that night when God crippled him. Has God ever crippled you? There are many other useful children of God who walk with a limp. I do not refer necessarily to a physical limp but there is a mark on their lives that was brought about by some dark experience in which they were brought to utter helplessness before God. All pride and

self-sufficiency was stripped away from them and they found themselves standing before Holy God utterly helpless. This is a part of the process God uses in breaking our carnality.

I remember such an experience in the life of George Truett. He was the successful pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas when it happened. While on a hunting trip with a close friend, there was a shooting accident in which the close friend was killed. Dr. Truett felt responsible for the death. From the time forward there was a different dimension to his ministry. It was more effective than ever. He had been crippled.

2. We cling.

Once God had touched Jacob's thigh and left him crippled, everything was transformed. Suddenly he grabbed hold of the stranger of the night and held on for dear life. The record reads, "Then the man said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.' But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go until you bless me.'" It was in that moment that Jacob became aware of just how inadequate he was. Self and pride were broken before the Lord and he is holding on for dear life. He knows now that he cannot make it unless the Lord will bless him. It is not the blessing of his father Isaac that he needs, but it is rather the blessing of the sovereign God of Abraham and Isaac that he needs. So he clings as though everything depended on it. It is a part of the surrender that must take place in our lives.

The famous poet, Henry Van Dyke, must have gone through such an experience. In one of his poems he wrote,

"With eager heart and will on fire
I sought to win my great desire.

“Peace shall be mine,” I said but life
Grew bitter in the endless strife.
My soul was weary, and my pride
Was wounded deep. To heaven I cried,
“God give me peace, or I must die.”
The dumb stars glittered no reply.

Broken at last, I bowed my head
Forgetting all myself and said:
“Whatever come, His will be done.”
And in that moment peace was won.

3. We confess.

While Jacob was still clinging to the stranger of the night, and making his appeal, the stranger asked him, “What is your name?” Jacob’s answer was, “Jacob.” It was then that the Lord made the announcement concerning the new name that he was to be given.

We must not misunderstand this passage. The stranger of the night was not in doubt about the person He had wrestled with through the night. He knew that the wrestling match had been with Jacob. What He was requesting was a confession. Jacob’s name means “cheat,” “crafty one,” “supplanter.” He wanted Jacob to admit to himself and to admit to God that Jacob was a cheat. He wanted Jacob to confess that he was Jacob.

This is a part of what God is doing in our lives. He in his sovereign direction seeks to bring us to the place we brokenly confess, “I am a sinner and in my flesh there dwells no good thing.” He wants us to confess, “Apart from him I can do nothing.” We will never come to the place that we will be a prince of God until we have acknowledged that we are a hopeless and helpless sinner before God. It is the broken spirit and contrite heart that God is seeking to bring about within us.

Do you know that God has been so at work in your life? Has God broken you? Has God brought about that inner brokenness which puts you into a position to be transformed from a cheat into a prince.

III. GOD CHANGES US.

God blesses our weakness. In the concluding part of Jacob’s experience we are encouraged when we read, “Then he blessed him there.” It was the climax of the whole event.

1. The change of the name.

After Jacob had made the confession concerning his name, then the Lord said to him, “Your name will no longer be Jacob but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.” The change of Jacob’s name was an outward sign of the change in a man. His life would not be characterized any more by his manipulation and conniving but rather it would be characterized by the favor of God that would rest upon his life. He would be called Israel. The name Israel means, “He struggles with God.” His name would be a constant reminder of the place that God had in his life.

Jacob is not the only Biblical character who had his name changed. Simon's name was changed to Peter. Saul's name was changed to Paul. Abram's name was changed to Abraham. In each instance the change of the name represented the change in the person. God may not give to each of us a new name when He changes us, but the change will be none the less real.

2. The transfer of blessing.

We read often in the scriptures that God blessed someone as He did Jacob here. But what does it mean? It evidently in the case of Jacob represents a transfer of authority. From this point forward Jacob would walk as Israel – as a man under authority who shares authority. Whenever a person comes under the authority of God through surrender, God is then able to entrust them with power. God is able to do something with their life that He never would have been able to do before.

It should not surprise us that when Jacob encountered Esau the next day, Esau was not nearly the furious enemy that Jacob had imagined he would be. Instead he came as a brother open to reconciliation. Without a doubt there would have been no such meeting between Jacob and Esau if there had not been a meeting between Jacob and God the night before. When Jacob put his life through surrender under the authority of God, then he was in a position to be reconciled to his brother in ways he could never have imagined. The blessing was upon him. That which he had sought by manipulation and conniving was now his. It came to him in the moment of his weakness. It came in the moment in which all strength and all self-glory was stripped away.

It is always that way in the life of the children of God. It is when we are weak that we are strong. It is when we surrender that we become princes before God. God is able to transform a cheat into a prince if that cheat will bring his life under divine authority and control through surrender. George McDonald understood this when he wrote, “When God can do what He will with man, the man can do what he will with the world.”

The blessing always follows the brokenness. Dr. Edwin Orr, a servant of God, whose influence reached around the world, has told in his book, Full Surrender, of the crises that came into his own Christian life. It came at a time when his yielding to the divine will was fractional rather than full. As he was sharing a time of prayer with a few friends in Belfast he told the Lord that he was willing to do anything – anything to be surrendered and filled. Then came an inner voice saying, “What about your will?” Orr remarks that if he had been asked, what about your besetting sin? He would have said, “Yes, once more I confess them.” But the question about his will was different.

At the time he was taking a correspondence course on missions given by the China Inland Mission. He told the Lord that he was willing to be a missionary but the inner voice was not satisfied, “It persisted in the question about the will.” The inner voice asked about a certain romance that was blossoming in his life at that time. Was he prepared to surrender that romance to God’s will? Orr says that with his lips he could say “yes” but in his heart he was saying no. That was the crux of the whole thing. That bit of

withholding was the undercutting of God's will in his life. He had not been willing to yield his will to the Lord.

Only when Dr. Orr was willing honestly to confess his imperfect surrender as sin, and yield that final stronghold of the self-life to Christ, did God fill him with the Holy Spirit and release him for ministry that would literally become a blessing around the whole world.

Of that experience Dr. Orr would write in a poem that became a song.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart today,
Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray:
See if there be some wicked way in me:
Cleanse me from every sin and set me free.”

I pray thee, Lord, to cleanse me now from sin:
Fulfill thy promise: make me pure within:
Fill me with fire where once I burned with shame:
Grant my desire to magnify thy name.

Lord, take my life and make it all thine own
I want to spend it serving thee alone:
Take all my will, my passion, self, and pride –
I now surrender, Lord, in me abide.”

Are you ready for God to take your life, whatever it may be and transform it into what He had planned for you to be? Why not tonight? It will enable God to change you from what you are into what He wants you to be—from a cheat to a prince!