

Jacob Genesis 32-33

There are parts of our lives that are broken beyond our ability to repair. But there is hope because we have a God who can fix the unfixable. He can give you a new name just as He did for Jacob, and all you must do is cling to Him.

Turn to Genesis 31

Last week: at Anderson and ran into a physical therapist who treated me years ago

- Helped me recover from pinched nerve in neck – took many weeks
- But so long ago I couldn't remember how I'd pinched my nerve. What did I do?
- Suddenly remembered, "Oh, yeah, I took off a sock wrong!"
- For real – earned weeks of physical therapy by taking off a sock wrong!

There's nothing quite like lame injury stories to remind us how broken we are!

- taking off sock wrong; slipping in the shower; friend who tore knee using restroom!

But I would argue, worse than our bodies being broken... our souls are broken, too

- at least I can take ibuprofen when my pinched nerve acts up
- ibuprofen won't do a thing for a broken spirit – that's infinitely harder to fix

Been on my mind a lot last 2 weeks – preaching my mental health series at Anderson

- last Sunday gave my talk on my own depression – same story I told you 6 months ago
- And you know what? I hate that it's the same story 6 months later
 - o My depression is still there
 - o I still take medicine and work out and do all the same things to manage it
 - o And it's still not going away

There are places deep inside our souls that are so broken...

- that no amount of rest or medicine will fully heal them
- so broken that ultimately only God can put the pieces back together
- and it may take decades rather than days
- **I'm talking about brokenness from what other people have done to us...**
 - o parent who abandoned you; person who abused or betrayed you; death of a loved one; loss of a marriage
- **And I'm talking about brokenness from bad things we've done...**
 - o an addiction we gave in to; a relationship we broke; a shameful sin we committed
- Don't get better overnight and they don't get better without the supernatural help of God

And unfortunately becoming a Christian doesn't instantly fix that

- You know the gospel:
- The moment you say to God, "I believe" your sins are forgiven – you receive eternal life
- But you are still broken... God doesn't take away all effects of sin, tragedy, loss
- Trusting in the gospel doesn't make all the bad things in your life disappear

So what do we do about the brokenness deep inside each of us?

I want to answer that question by looking at Jacob this morning

God brought a real measure of healing to the profound brokenness in this man's soul

- I say "measure of healing" because God didn't fully heal Jacob in this life
- there were hang-ups, struggles, and sins Jacob never fully got over
- BUT God did bring significant healing in Jacob's life...
- And I want to show you how

Background:

- **Abraham had a son named Isaac**
- **Isaac married Rebekah and she gave birth to twin sons – Jacob & Esau**
 - o God chose Jacob to receive the inheritance
 - o But Esau was 1-minute older – had the legal birthright
- **So Jacob schemed and manipulated to steal the birthright**
 - o Succeeded, but made Esau angry enough to kill him
 - o So Jacob fled his home – left everyone & everything behind
- **That's when God began to break Jacob**
 - o Allowed Jacob to fall prey to a man just as deceitful as him – Laban
 - o Jacob ended up with 4 wives, 20 years of forced labor, and the worst family!

Jacob had broken pieces in his soul just like us – gaping holes

Probably the worst hole of all: his dad didn't love him

- Isaac preferred Esau, and didn't hide his favoritism – Jacob grew up without his dad's love
- **Jacob tried to fill that painful hole**
- **first with wealth**
 - o struggled with Esau for the birthright – won
 - o but it goes bad – had to run away alone and penniless
- **then with romantic love**
 - o struggled with Laban – won
 - o but it goes bad, too – ends up with 4 wives who hate each other

Jacob struggled and worked for decades to try to fix the brokenness in his life... to no avail

And that's when God shows up, not to break him, but to rebuild him

- to begin to fill the un-fillable holes in his life, to begin to fix the unfixable

If you want God to begin to heal the brokenness inside of you... this is how
Story begins in ch31 with...

1. A Desperate Need

- **read 31:3 – after 20 years with Laban, it's time to go home**
- **Sounds great – just one problem... read 32:3-8**
 - o When Jacob left home 20 years before, Esau was planning to kill him
 - o Now Esau's coming with 400 men = round number for a militia in ANE
- **Jacob's assumption: Esau is coming to kill me!**
- **He's trapped**
 - o Can't turn around – Laban will attack him if he goes back
 - o Can't stay here – Esau is coming with an army! Jacob has no army – can't fight back
- **All he can do: cut his losses!**
 - o Divides his possessions and servants into 2 groups so at least one could get away
- **This is a terrifying moment for Jacob.**
 - o This is the moment when your boss calls you in to lay you off
 - o This is the moment your significant other says they want to break things off
 - o This is the moment they wheel you into the operating room for surgery
- **The context for this encounter with God that's about to happen is desperation**

- **Lesson 1: You see God most clearly in your moment of greatest need**
 - o C.S. Lewis, "God whispers..."
 - o It's when we're in pain, suffering, afraid, at the end of our rope...
 - o Now be clear: not how God intended it!
 - Garden – Adam & Eve had BOTH perfect pleasure and communion with God
 - But sin broke that harmony
 - Now it is only in pain and suffering that we clearly hear the voice of God
 - o That's why James can say, "Count it all joy when you encounter various trials"
 - Not rejoicing in the trial itself
 - Rejoicing in the opportunity to meet God in your suffering
 - o There is hope in suffering – that's when our eyes and ears are most open to God
- **Jacob is desperate and overwhelmed by fear... so he responds with...**

2. A Humble Prayer

- **He begins with a desperate prayer – read 32:9-12**
- **VERY different from his last prayer... read 28:20-21**
 - o Do you see the difference?
 - Then: conditional – he calls the shots, he makes the deal
 - Now: submissive and desperate! – no conditions!
 - o 32:10 – humbles himself before God
 - "I am unworthy... you are the reason for my prosperity"
 - o 32:11 – pleads for deliverance
 - Desperate! Done manipulating his way out of trouble
 - Absolutely dependent on God to rescue him from certain death.
 - o Jacob's prayer shows us that the guy is truly broken – humbled
 - That means he's ready for God to rebuild him!
 - God can't grow us in grace till He breaks us of pride
- **Lesson 2: Healing begins with humility**
 - o This is one of my cardinal rules of counseling
 - o Often parent will ask: please call my son/daughter and ask them to come in
 - o My answer: no – You can give them my number... but they have to call
 - o They have to take that first humbling step of asking for help... or we'll get nowhere
 - o That's the first step of healing
 - o If you know someone trying to hide or manage their brokenness on their own:
 - pray that God will do whatever it takes to humble them so they ask for help
 - pray God will use the brokenness to break their pride

3. An Unexpected Encounter

- **read 32:22-24**
- **Notice the setting of this encounter – Jacob is...**
 - o **Alone**
 - Many of his servants were already ahead of him taking gifts to Esau
 - The rest were with his family on the other side of the river
 - Jacob wanted to be alone for prayer & planning
 - o **In the middle of nowhere**
 - Jabbok – barren wilderness
 - o **At night**
 - wrestle "until daybreak"
 - Actually the 2nd time God met Jacob in the dark of night

- **What's really surprising is not that God comes... it's what God does... HE ATTACKS!!**
 - o Now Jacob doesn't yet know that this is God
 - Dark of night – no lights. It just looks like “a man” to Jacob.
 - o He doesn't know who it is... but we do. We know this is God.
- Should make us ask... **why would God attack Jacob??!**
 - o Jacob's obeying the command to go home, humble, praying
 - When people pray and obey, we expect God to comfort and bless
 - Instead, God assaults him at night when he's alone and already terrified
 - o **Why? Because God wanted Jacob to finally realize,** “Jacob, you've spent your whole life struggling with people to get what you thought you needed to fill the holes in your life. You fought Esau for the birthright and Laban for his daughter because you thought those things would fill you and fix you. Don't you see, Jacob? It was only ever ME who could fill you and fix you. It was ME you should have been struggling with. It was ME you should have pursued.”
 - o Jacob spent his whole life wrestling with the wrong people – could never fill holes
 - o Now time to wrestle with the right Person – the only one who could fill and fix
- **Lesson 3: Many of us spend our lives wrestling the wrong people!**
 - o Struggle, compete, manipulate to get from them what we think will fill holes
 - o No! There is only one Person who can ever fill you and fix you
 - o If you are fighting other people, you are wasting your time!
 - o Pascal...
 - o There's no person on earth who can satisfy you – fill you – fix you
 - o If you try to fix your life with the things people can provide...
 - approval, money, fame, sex, family, entertainment
 - you will be miserable – it will never work – you will never find peace
 - o As Augustine said of God...
 - o Stop trying to fill the holes in your life with other people – there is NO hope in that
 - o Go to the Lord. Only He can satisfy you, fill you, and fix you.
- And let's see how God begins to fix Jacob
 - o It's not how you'd expect. It's not comfortable or comforting. Healing begins with...

4. A Debilitating Touch

- **read 32:25**
- **Things go well for Jacob at first**
 - o He was strong – worked in the fields his whole life
 - o Had always been able to rely on strength to save him – looks like it will once again!
- **But then something happens he did not expect... man dislocated his hip**
 - o **A career ending injury!**
 - You can wrestle with only one arm... but not with only one hip
 - Wrestle by throwing your weight around with your hips
 - He'll never be able to defend himself again - can't fight back ever again
 - o **A supernatural injury**
 - Hip joint is the strongest joint in your body because the ball is so deep in the socket and held in place by some of your strongest connective tissue
 - Hear of someone dislocating a shoulder, but never a hip
 - Takes incredible force – but all “the man” did was “touch” Jacob
- **That's how Jacob finally comes to realize what we already knew: this is not a man!**
 - o He's locked in battle with God... and now he knows
- **That realization changes everything. Read 32:26**

- **Instantly Jacob stops fighting and starts clinging**
 - o He can't fight anymore, his hip's gone
 - Means that when Esau shows up, he's toast!
 - o So with no hope of winning in his own strength, all Jacob can do is cling to God
 - Pleads for blessing – for God's protection in confrontation with Esau
 - o He can't fight anymore, struggle, bargain, scheme... all he can do is cling to God
- **Lesson 4: For God to fix the unfixable in your life, you must cling to Him**
 - o You can't bargain with God. You can't force His hand. You can't earn His help.
 - o All you can do is cling to Him for dear life
 - o You may have to hold on for months, years, decades... just don't let go!
 - o Cling to God. Plead for His help. And then repeat day after day
 - That's my most basic strategy of fighting my depression
 - Still memorize scripture, talk to others, exercise, take meds...
 - But the most important thing is just cling to God and plead day after day
 - o That's how you'll find His blessing and His help
- **Jacob clung to God and pleaded for blessing... and God responded by giving him...**

5. A New Name for a New Man

- **Read 33:27-29**
- Names in Old Testament – not just sounds to get someone's attention – summary of their character
- **God asks: "What is your name?"**
 - o Not because God didn't know! Omniscient – knows all things!
 - o Because God wanted Jacob to acknowledge what kind of person he had been...
 - o "Jacob" was a name with a meaning = "usurper / heal grabber"
 - o Fit Jacob perfectly! He'd always been a heal-grabber
 - schemed, plotted, fought to get what he wanted from others
 - Jacob had "jacobed" people his whole life!
 - o God wanted him to admit it / confess, "Yes, I am Jacob, a heal grabber"
- **Jacob confessed who he was... And then God blessed him with a new name**
 - o "Israel" = "God fights/rules" = from now on God will fight for you
 - Jacob had always relied on his own resources to overcome enemies
 - Now he could rely on God to overcome every trial
 - o God is saying "Jacob, you don't have to fight anymore. I will fight for you."
- **I love this story because it shows us a common theme you see throughout scripture... God is in the business of renaming broken people**
 - o foolhardy, moody man named "**Simon**" – renamed "Peter" – the Rock
 - o "**Saul**" the murderer and persecutor – renamed "Paul" – the Apostle to the Gentiles
- **Lesson 5: Who you were in the past does NOT DEFINE who you will be in the future because God can give you a new name**
 - o Many of us have grown up with names we would like to leave behind:
 - Unloved, Addict, Anorexic, Gossip, Failure, Workaholic
 - names that have defined us in our own minds or in the minds of others
 - o **You do not have to be defined by that name ever again!**
 - You may always struggle with that issue or carry that wound
 - But you don't have to be defined by it ever again
 - Because you have a God who wants to give you a new name

- **That new name can make you a new person... just like it did for Jacob, now Israel**
 - **Read 33:1-3**
 - **He humbles himself – bows 7 times = accepts full responsibility for sin**
 - **That's not like the old Jacob**
 - No excuses, deception, manipulation... just repentance
 - And great faith in God – because Jacob's bowing in front of Esau
 - If Esau wants to kill him – it's super easy!
 - Jacob has put his life completely in God's hands
 - **This isn't Jacob anymore – this is Israel**
 - a man who let's God fight his battles – who trusts God to protect him
 - **And God come through! Read 33:4**
 - A Miracle!! They had hated each other – Esau had every right to kill Jacob
 - Instead, there's not just forgiveness, there's weeping!!
 - Not just tolerating each other – love each other!
- **Do you see what God can do when He makes us new?!**
 - When you let God rename you and make you new...
 - He can begin to restore anything broken in your life
 - the relationships that are beyond hope
 - the wound that is too deep
 - the crisis that is too far gone
 - He can heal anything
 - Not necessarily in the way you want or when you want
 - But He can fill heal every wound IF you will humbly cling to Him

**Nothing in your life is beyond hope IF you will cling to God day after day
Let's plead with God for help...**