

Lesson 21: Jacob's Wrestling Match

Genesis 32:1-32 (pg. 42-43, Gospel Story Bible)

Teaching Points:

Jacob is reminded of God's faithfulness — This is an important time in Jacob's life. He has just been through a difficult experience with Laban. He is now on his way back home where he will see his brother, Esau. That could be cause for even more fear, after all Jacob had left home because Esau had wanted to kill him. God promises to be with Jacob as he returns home (Genesis 31:3), and God keeps that promise by sending angels to Jacob as an encouragement and a reminder of his faithfulness.

Jacob fears man more than God — On his journey back to Canaan, Jacob meets the angels of God. This confirms God's promise that he will be with Jacob on the journey. Even though God sends angels to Jacob, he is still afraid of Esau. Jacob's fear of his brother is greater than his trust in God.

Jacob wrestles with God and learns the fear of the Lord — In the middle of the night, when Jacob is all by himself, a stranger appears and begins to wrestle with him! Jacob must have thought it was a robber or one of Esau's men. So he grabs hold of the stranger and the two wrestle all night.

Toward morning, Jacob's opponent, with one touch, puts Jacob's hip out of joint. Despite the pain, Jacob holds on to his opponent and refuses to let go until he receives a blessing for he realizes he is not wrestling with an ordinary man.

In Genesis 32:30, we discover that Jacob wasn't wrestling with a man but with God! God had appeared to him as a man—and one day God would do this again when he sends Jesus.

Where is the Gospel?

How does today's Bible story fit into God's greater plan of redemption?

Read John 12:13.

Can you imagine what Jacob must have thought when in the middle of the night a stranger appeared and began to wrestle with him? Jacob may have thought it was a robber or one of Esau's men. They wrestled all night, but Jacob did not give in. Then, toward morning, the man put Jacob's hip out of joint with one small touch. Suddenly Jacob realized he had been wrestling with God.

Despite the pain, Jacob held on and refused to let go until God blessed him. So God blessed Jacob and gave him a very special name: Israel. From that time on, God's people would be known as the people of Israel.

When Jesus came riding into Jerusalem just before going to the cross, the crowds waved palm branches and shouted, "Blessed is ... the King of Israel."

Bible Truth:

God
protects,
disciplines,
and blesses
His chosen
ones.

Object Lessons:

1. What are you afraid of? (Grades K-2)

Supplies:

- a whiteboard and dry erase marker

Ask the class to think for a minute and consider what they are most afraid of. Don't have them shout out their answer, but instead just think of it.

Then ask the children to give you their answers one by one. As they do, write their answers on the board. If more than one person mentions the same thing, strike a tally mark next to the answer already listed. Don't take silly answers; encourage the class to give real answers.

Ask the class to rate the items on the list from most fearful to least fearful. Come up with what the class thinks is the most fearful object or thing.

Then ask the class the following questions:

▪ What was Jacob afraid of?

(Jacob was afraid that his brother Esau might try to take revenge for his having stolen his birthright.)

▪ What happens to our relationship with God when we fear? (Our fears cause us to take our focus off of God.)

▪ Is there such a thing as a good, healthy fear?

(Yes, some fears make perfect sense; for example, a fear of heights protects us from falling. The healthiest fear is fearing the Lord. Fearing the Lord helps keep us from sin and produces faith as we consider his awesome power. When we understand how powerful God is, we become more careful about how we live.)

2. Acting It Out (Grades 3-5)

Supplies:

- enough volunteers for one to guide each group of students

Divide the class into four groups. Have each group act out one of the following skits that demonstrates fearing man more than fearing God. (See full lesson, Object Lesson #2)

A Little Bit More (grades 3-5) - Fear of Man

Fear of man is the desire for the approval and acceptance of others with the associated fear of how they might treat you if you fail to win their approval and acceptance. The Bible directs us to fear God and obey him. When we crave the approval of others and listen to what they say instead of to what God says in his Word, we fall into sin.

Proverbs speaks to the fear of man this way: "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe" (Proverbs 29:25).

In the New Testament, Paul contrasts seeking the approval of man with seeking the approval of God: "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10).

The fear of man is a snare that snatches our affections away from Christ and what he has done on the cross. It snatches our attention away from the holiness of God and the sinfulness of our actions and focuses our attention on attracting the affections of man. When we fear man we trade love for God with love for man. God ceases to be our God, and man becomes our god.