

[Jacob Wrestles The Angel]

:: genesis 32.22-32 ::

Say Uncle!

We all know what that means, but I wanted to know where the saying came from.

Surprisingly I found a really in depth article which explained the possible origins of this idiom.

The most documented and likely derivation comes from a joke first printed in 1891. First found in an issue of the *Iowa Citizen* on October 9, 1891, the story is as follows:

A gentleman was boasting that his parrot would repeat anything he told him. For example, he told him several times, [in front of] some friends, to say "Uncle," but the parrot would not repeat it. In anger he seized the bird, and half-twisting his neck, said: "Say 'uncle,' you beggar!" and threw him into the fowl pen, in which he had ten prize fowls. Shortly afterward, thinking he had killed the parrot, he went to the pen. To his surprise he found nine of the fowls dead on the floor with their necks wrung, and the parrot standing on the tenth twisting his neck and screaming:

"Say 'uncle,' you beggar! say uncle."

Will you yield?

This is the question that each one of us must wrestle with this morning.

We're taking a look at a few of the Christophany passages in the Old Testament, where Jesus came to earth in a pre-Incarnate form from time to time to visit with people.

Today we'll look at the famous passage of Jacob wrestling the Angel of the Lord in Genesis chapter 32, beginning in verse 22.

I am simply stunned by the graciousness of our God as we read about the way He deals with His people, even in the face of defiance and pride and rebellion. As we see how Christ revealed Himself in this passage, I hope that it will humble each of us and that we will do some serious self-evaluation in light of the mercy and love and grace that He has shown to each of us.

So, starting in verse 22, we read:

Genesis 32.22-24a - And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. Then Jacob was left alone;

Jacob had fled from his father-in-law, Laban. He was heading back to the land of his fathers and on his way he was told that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men at his side.

This was not great news for Jacob. Unable to return to Laban, he was now forced with the prospect of meeting with his brother, whose birthright he had purchased and whose blessing he had acquired through less-than-honest methods many years before.

In fact, the last time the brothers were together, Esau had vowed to kill Jacob for his deceit and thievery.

God had revealed Himself to Jacob several times, but at this point in his life there was almost nothing honorable about this man. Honestly, I find it difficult to read about Jacob's life, because the guy was a disaster. His home life was a joke. His behavior was self-serving. He had very little interest in God and he was an out-and-out coward when faced with confrontation.

Now, he's at rock bottom. It's the night before he has to come before his mighty brother Esau and we see him send away his possessions, he sends away his servants, sends away his children, sends away his wives.

And by 'sends away' I mean that he sent them **TOWARD ESAU!!!** He sends them over the river as a sort of human shield for himself, where he is left alone.

Earlier in the chapter Jacob had called out to God, but only in an attempt to save himself. Not out of worship or out of devotion. Not in trust or in faith. Just out of sheer terror and fear and cowardice.

Now, on the eve before his imminent destruction, he's left alone. He can't go forward. He can't go backward. All his scheming has brought him to this rock-bottom situation. And *here* is where the Lord meets him.

Genesis 32.24b-26 - ...and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"

This is such an amazing passage; it's really unique in many, many ways. However, I think that it is often misunderstood.

I am convinced that Jacob is *not* a role model for us. I am convinced that this is *not* a lesson on how we are to pray or how we are to behave in our relationship with Christ. I am convinced that this is, instead, a contrast between our sinfulness and God's graciousness.

Because there is no indication that Jesus' plan was to wrestle with Jacob in this encounter. I believe instead that His desire was to speak to Jacob, to reveal Himself to Him, as He had back in the vision of the ladder with angels of God ascending and descending, and as He had back in the beginning of this chapter when Jacob came to Mahanaim, the camp of the Lord. As He had in other Christophanies earlier in Genesis.

But at this point in his life, Jacob was not interested in the things of God. We don't see him doing the things that his father Isaac did, meditating on the Lord in the field, or what Abraham did, building altars and making sacrifices. We see him only serving himself.

In fact, when God said:

Genesis 28.15 - "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

Jacob said:

Genesis 28.20-22 - Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

Of course, we don't see him doing any of that. We see him heaping up wealth for himself, but never do we see him bringing worship to God.

And here in our passage, Jesus comes to Jacob and Jacob starts wrestling Him. It's almost comical if it wasn't so shameful.

Christ, in His grace, condescends to Jacob's level. I mean, do any of us have any hesitation in knowing that Jesus was going easy on Jacob? With a word or a thought the Lord could have vaporized him. Yet, in His grace and in His mercy, He wrestled with this man who was, to this point, not walking in righteousness, not living up to the plan God had for him. He was willing to get down on the ground and wrestle it out with this selfish, cowardly man, because He loved him.

Instead of yielding to the Lord, Jacob continues to struggle. He continues to try to dominate God. He refuses to yield. This is a pattern we've seen in Jacob's life. He was a man who thought he was self-sufficient. He was a man with a great work ethic, but he was also a schemer. A trickster. He thought that he was a pretty smart guy and that his success was due to his own intelligence, his own willpower. And, frankly, his life was just spent piling up possessions for himself.

Even when God Almighty came to him and said, "Hey, I am with you!" He said, "You can be my God if You do what I want."

This is incredible defiance and arrogance in the heart of Jacob. And here, when given the precious gift of a Christophany, Jesus Christ came and revealed Himself to this man, and he spends the night wrestling with Him, trying to overcome Him, trying to lord over his God. What a waste! What a terrible rebellion. What a missed opportunity.

But Jesus allowed Jacob to struggle with Him. Eventually He was forced to discipline Jacob in order to do what He needed to do. He touches his hip and it did two things according to our text. First, it popped it out of joint and second, verse 32 says that it shrunk his muscle.

As children of God, if we live in rebellion, if we live in a way that tries to lord over God, if we try to take control of our lives from God, then at some point, in His mercy, God must discipline us. He must break us of that willful desire to contend against the Lord.

There is a wonderful illustration that Philip Keller uses in his book *A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23* that has always stuck with me. There was a sheep in his flock that kept wandering away. Again and again it would leave and abandon the shepherd. Then, one day, that sheep started bringing other lambs with it when it wandered away.

In order to protect the flock and to protect that wandering lamb, the shepherd had to break it's leg, so that it was unable to wander off. From that point the shepherd carried this rebellious lamb, in order to keep it safe and to keep it from leading other sheep astray.

When we live in rebellion, or, more often, when we simply live in selfishness, when we think of God as someone who should be subject to *our* desires and *our* plans, then eventually we will find ourselves in a position like Jacob. Where we can't go backward, we can't move forward, we're left alone in our failed plans. And in that moment, when God again reveals Himself to us, we must choose to submit, not contend. We must humble ourselves, not strive with God. Because when we strive with God, He must stop us and He must discipline us.

Jacob's hip was out of joint, yet still he fought with God. Still he made demands.

Christ, almost comically, says, "Hey, let me go. It's morning." And to me He's also saying, "Time for you to go meet your brother out there. And good luck with all that!"

No anger. No giving Jacob what he deserved for his behavior. Just long-suffering grace. This is how Christ behaved in this strange situation.

At this point Jacob said, "No, I'm not letting You go till You bless me."

Now, understand this.

Jacob, by this time, understands who this is that he is wrestling with.

He's at the point of no return with Laban and his brother Esau.

He's sent away his possessions.

He's sent away his family.

And what is his response? "Bless **ME!**"

Not, "Spare my family," or, "Forgive me for the life I've led," or, "Have mercy on me, a sinner." Nope. Just "bless **ME!**"

This is not a lesson on how we are to talk to God or to pray or to behave in our spiritual lives. This is a shocking display of selfishness and a heart that desires to rule over God.

So what happens?

Genesis 32.27 - So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob."

Jacob. Supplanter. Swindler. Trickster. Schemer. Heel-Catcher. That's what Jacob means.

What is Jesus doing here?

I think He's giving Jacob another chance to understand what's going on. He wants Jacob to understand what this life was all about, and Jacob just didn't get it.

Our God loves to reveal. Christ was showing him what his life without God was. Just a guy swindling people. Tricking people. A guy who was constantly in strife with others. A heel-catcher.

And remember, God had come to Jacob and made him promises. He had come to Jacob and told him that He would be present with him always. He had explained to Jacob that He had a plan for his future and for his family and for his life. Yet Jacob had lived in a way that showed that he didn't really care about that. He didn't really believe it. He didn't really rely on the Lord.

Oh sure, he called out to God when his life was in danger, but otherwise there was nothing. His family were a bunch of idolaters. His marriages were a disaster. He had essentially wasted 20 years of his life working for a guy who was only going to take advantage of him.

And now, at the very brink of his destruction, God comes once again to him to show him something powerful, to reveal to him a life that he couldn't imagine. And his response was to lash out. His response was to try to bend God to his own will.

Jesus said, 'what is your name?' because He was trying to show Jacob how desperately he needed the Lord. He showed him that he had squandered the revelation. He had squandered the time. He had squandered this opportunity because he was only concerned with some personal blessing, some personal protection or wealth. He was the swindler. He was Jacob.

And now, crippled and alone, facing the sunrise of the day where he would have to stand before a brother who had every cause to kill him and his family, and here God comes to him and shows him His faithfulness, He shows Jacob His grace.

Genesis 32.28 - And [Jesus] said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."

Now, before we start thinking, "See?!? Jacob did a good thing!" We need to remember the whole story. Jacob was *not* a man who was walking with the Lord. Compare this story and his life to that of Abraham's and the Christophany from last week.

Not only that, but this word 'prevailed' is very interesting. We must trust the translators, who did a great job delivering the Bible to us, but we need to understand that this word in the Hebrew is the word *yakol*. And the word *yakol* is used 195 times in the Old Testament. 22 of those times it is translated as 'prevail.' However, 34 times it is translated as 'cannot.' Strongs concordance also indicates that the word could be translated as 'suffer.'

This verse *could* be translated as:

Genesis 32.28b - for you have struggled with God and with men, and [you] have suffered/cannot."

Jacob's wrestling is not a victory. It is not a principle of how we talk to God or how we pray. It is an example of our sinfulness, of our natural rebellion, and how despite all of that, God works with us, He continues with us, He is faithful to bring us revelation. He is gracious and merciful and willing to take people like you and me and Jacob in order to bring about His will, in order to bless us.

Genesis 32.29-32 - Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell me Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why is it that you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there.

So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Just as he crossed over Peniel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip. Therefore to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, which is on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob's hip in the muscle that shrank.

So interesting. Jacob demands to know the Lord's name. How sad that he never previously cared to know more about God. Not after his vision. Not after coming to the camp of the Lord. Not after hearing God's plan for his life. He never previously cared to know anything about the God of his father, but now demands to know His name.

Just another example of his defiance. Another demonstration of Jacob's (and our) heart, which naturally desires that God bend to our will. Which wants to cause God to submit to us, like a Genie or a waiter or a slave.

And God says, "No, you're not in charge here. Why are you asking My name? Is it to worship Me? Is it so you can know Me more intimately? Or is it because you're trying to be the boss? Because you want something?"

And as God breaks Jacob of himself, He blesses him. As God shows Jacob that he is lost without a Savior, He becomes his Savior. As He shows Jacob that everything is lost without the Lord, his family is gone, his possessions were sent away, as He brings him to this realization, He blesses him.

This is our God, who shows us how bankrupt we are so that He can then fill us with all the blessing that He has provided through Jesus Christ. He is the God who perseveres with us until we are willing to submit ourselves to His will.

Finally, Jacob started to get it. He finally cried uncle. He understood that God was the one preserving his life. God was the one who would bless him. God was the one who was with him.

What about us here this morning?

Each of us need to do some serious evaluation to find how submitted we are to God. We need to evaluate our lives to see what we're living for. We need to look within and discover if our lives are broken before God or if we're trying to live in contention with Him, if we're trying to accomplish our own will.

God is with us. We belong to Him. He is gracious and merciful and loving, but if we are not allowing Him to control our lives then we will find ourselves like Jacob and Jacob is not a good place to be.

Don't struggle. Submit.

Don't fear. Be confident.

Don't demand. Worship.

Look at Jesus Christ. See what He has said, what He has done, what He desires to do and then give your life to Him so that He will accomplish His great plan in you.