

GBC - Sermon - Genesis 32:22-32 - What is Dangerous Prayer?

This week we're starting something new, something exciting, something I want you all to be part of. *Talk about prayer journals.*

As we work through the prayer journals, we will also be focusing in on and honing our prayer lives in a corresponding sermon series. Today we are going to talk about **What is Dangerous Prayer?** If you want to follow along, we're going to be in Genesis 32:22-32. If you don't know your bible well, that's the first book of the bible, so at the front, and then go to big number 32. There are bibles in the chairs and you're welcome to open up a bible app if you are using a phone or tablet or something electronic.

Let me read to you our passage, and you'll see it here on the screen as well. **Genesis 32:22-32** is about Jacob wrestling with God and it says - **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." 31 The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. 32 Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.**

Let me tell you a bit about Jacob. Humanly speaking, few of us would have chosen Jacob for great honor because he spent a good deal of his life deceiving others and cheating to get his way. Jacob preyed on his brother Esau's weaknesses and stole his birthright (25:29-34). He also conspired with his mother to deceive his father (chap. 27), and he did not turn the other cheek when his uncle Laban cheated him (30:25-42). Throughout his life, Jacob displayed a

disturbing tendency to rely on himself and not on the Lord's presence and power. In fact, the very name of Jacob means "deceiver". Yeah dad, thanks for the great name, right? Jacob was a mess, yet God used him anyhow. So there's hope for you and me.

This was a pivotal moment in Jacob's life as he returns home to the Promised Land. While away for twenty years, he had picked up a couple of wives and a whole bunch of livestock. This conniving man who tricked his father and stole his brother's birthright is now preparing to see Esau his brother again. He is a lot wealthier than when he left, and we can only hope, a little more mature.

Jacob's first life-changing event was in a dream, but in this second event there is no sleep. Jacob is literally up all night, wrestling with an angel of God, whom he finally comes to understand as God himself. Have you ever wrestled with God? I have. I think that is part of what prayer is for actually. While you and I might not get to physically wrestle with God, we certainly can and should do so in prayer.

As we do this, as we wrestle with God in prayer, we will find that in response to it God will **mark our lives**. We see in the story that Jacob was humbled physically, but he was also reminded that he was changed spiritually by God through this process. I think a lot of times people are uncomfortable bringing their real feelings to God. It's OK to pray to God for things you want. It's OK to pray for things you want blessed. It's even OK to ask God to forgive, heal, protect and provide for you. But can you really pray to God and tell Him you're angry? That you're dissatisfied? That you're disappointed? That sounds dangerous pastor. I can't pray like that...can I? Yes, yes you can. And you should.

Jacob was desperate for God. His scheming twenty years earlier had left his brother Esau in a murderous mood, and now Jacob was coming home to find who knows what? Right before today's passage, a scout had reported that Esau was coming with 400 men! **Verse 7** describes Jacob as in "great fear and distress." So, in typical Jacob cunning, he divides his camp into two groups, thinking at least one camp would survive an attack from his brother if it comes to that. He also sends ahead a series of gifts to soften up his brother. **But most importantly, he prays.**

Verses 9-12 record Jacob's prayer: **9 Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, Lord, you who said to me, 'Go back to**

your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,’ 10 I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. 11 Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. 12 But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’”

I like Jacob’s prayer. It is honest and reflects his character, imperfections and all. In verse 11 he prays for himself, and then, as an afterthought, mentions his family. “Oh yeah, God, don’t forget about them, too!” In his prayer, Jacob thanks God for his blessings, asks God for rescue, and reminds God of God’s earlier promises. Some scholars believe Jacob prays all night to God, that this is the wrestling match, a figurative description of prayer born out of adversity.

A New Testament example of a prayer wrestler is Epaphras. In **Colossians 4:12**, Paul describes him as **“always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.”** Epaphras cared so much for his fellow believers that he wrestled in prayer for them. Charles Stanley reminds us, “Fight all your battles on your knees and you win every time.” And Oswald Chambers notes, “Prayer does not equip us for greater works - prayer is the greater work.” Begin in prayer. Wrestle with God until you have that “peace that passes all understanding.”

And you know the funny thing about prayer? More often than not, it doesn’t change your situation as much as it changes you! Look at Jacob’s life. For his prayers to be answered, God needed to do a work in him, particularly with his self-centeredness. So pray dangerous prayers to God, but know that as you pray them, He may well change you in ways you never saw coming.

Another thing that can happen when we pray dangerous prayers is that as we do this, **God can change our identity.** In verse 28 Jacob received a new name. Jacob meant deceiver. His new name is Israel - which means “He who struggles with God.” God didn’t take his problems away. Esau is still coming with 400 men. God didn’t give Jacob more weapons or a better battle plan. What God did was to help him see that he couldn’t rely upon himself, that he needed to turn to God in his need, and in that, Jacob found a new identity that is signified by his name change.

Praying dangerous prayers can help us break from our past. Maybe you messed up. Maybe you made a mess out of a relationship, or a business deal, or out of your whole life. We all carry baggage, just like Jacob. In praying dangerous prayers we too can find a new identity. We too can find a new way to move forward. We too can find freedom from our past. But it requires that we, like Jacob, quit relying on ourselves and turn to God. This starts in our prayer life. If we don't make the move there first, we won't make the move at all. So pray dangerous prayers, be raw and honest with God. Be free with Him about what is holding you back, what your hangups are, where you are hurting. And then lean into the new identity that God has for you - freedom in Christ.

Your past does not have to define your future. It might inform your present, but it doesn't define your future. You have freedom in Christ. Trust God with those prayers that scare you. Trust God because He already knows and is waiting for you to bring it to Him. Pray dangerous prayers.

You see, as we pray dangerous prayers, it helps us **draw nearer to God**. Look at **verse 30** - when Jacob truly came face to face with God, he had a new or a renewed sense of God's great mercy. **Mercy is simply defined as unmerited favor.** You didn't earn it. You don't deserve it. Yet God, Yahweh God, the Creator of the universe, the God who made all things great and small. That very God, the God of Jacob, **God has looked upon you, saw you for what you are, and chosen to love you anyhow.** That is mercy. And when we experience mercy, it leads us to a deeper intimacy than any we had previously experienced.

You know who I remember in life more than anyone? It's those people who put up with me when I was at my worst. Teachers, Sunday School teachers, parents, friends, people who loved me despite of me. And God loves us all the more, and His mercy is all the greater. When you experience that kind of love, it draws you nearer to God. So pray dangerous prayers.

If you want to feel closer to God in 2019, you also need to **start getting honest with God**. You can't hide anything from God. You're fooling yourself if you think you can. And when you are hiding from God, when you are running from God, you can't feel near to God. Dangerous prayers are those things you're afraid to talk about. Things you wish hadn't happened. Things that are holding you back, holding you down, keeping you from a deep and abiding relationship with Christ. Resolve to pray dangerous prayers, praying for things

you don't want to admit or talk about. **Pray about them anyhow**, and I can promise God will begin to show you His mercy.

The final reason to pray dangerous prayers is **the impact it will have on your faith community**. Think of how this might impact your family, your friends, your co-workers, our church, and your neighbors. In **verse 32** we see that Jacob's encounter with God had a lasting impact that far exceeded Jacob's lifespan. There's places in our lives and in our world that God wants to work, wants to work with us, but He's just waiting for us to get on board with Him. We need to pray dangerous prayers - outrageous prayers - prayers that will move mountains - with the full belief that God can and will do things greater than we can imagine.

The impact we can have as a people of prayer is only limited by us, not by God. When we begin to pray for things, when we begin to pray for people, we begin to care more. When we begin to care more, we begin to act more. When we act more, we impact more. And when people see it, and they see God in it, He gets all the glory, honor and praise. It's great to want to leave a legacy. It's great to leave a nest egg to your kids or grand-kids. But it is far greater to create a spiritual heritage. Pray that God would use you in new ways this year. Pray for opportunities to invest and invite your neighbors and friends. Pray boldly for your enemies. Pray for those who have wronged you. Pray for those who have hurt you. Pray dangerous prayers that God would move in incredible and undeniable ways so that there would be no mistaking Who was at work.

So let me ask you, **when was the last time you prayed dangerously?** If you haven't done so, begin today. If you've gotten out of the habit, begin again today, if you've already been doing this, do it even more beginning today. I believe that God has great things in store for you, me and this church in 2019. And I believe it is all going to begin with our dangerous prayers. Over the next 21 days we are going to explore the dangerous prayers that have been prayed by God's people for thousands of years. I trust God will meet you in a life-transforming manner. I pray that you will not be the same and that your family, neighborhood, workplace, and church will be impacted because you personally have met with God. Let's pray.