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GENESIS 32-33

Series: Understanding Your Roots

[PRAYER] So Lord, we are thankful that you've answered our prayers. We're thankful that you worked out the details and made it clear that John and Hannah are the ones for us. We are looking forward to what you're going to do in their lives and in our lives as a result of our partnering together. So Lord, we ask now that you would focus our attention right now into your word into Genesis 32-33. That as we look at this passage that we'll understand more of what you have for us. What do you want to say to us, Lord? We're available. Speak to us. Change our hearts. Touch us in a very special way. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.

A family was sitting around the dinner table having a discussion and the conversation turned to a man. One of their friends had recently become a believer. The dad said in the comment, "Yeah, God touched his heart."

The seven-year-old girl paused for a moment and she said, "How does God touch someone's heart? How does God touch someone?"

Mom thought about that for a minute and she said, "Well what that means is that God touches them and they're a changed person."

So she thought about that for a little bit and she said, "When God touches someone does it hurt?"

Dad thought about that for a minute and he says, "Well sometimes when God touches you He kind of wraps His arms around you and you just feel the comfort of God in His presence.

Sometimes when God touches you He tickles you. You know you look out and you go, 'Oh this is so great.' I just think the blessing of God is God's tickling that God does sometimes when He touches us. But there are other times when God touches us and it does hurt. But it's always good."

Wow. I like that answer. I like that response. Because sometimes when God touches us it hurts. That's what we're going to see in our chapter today as we look at Genesis 32.

I'm excited to share this story with you because this is a remarkable story that changes the lives of every Jewish person even today. You see what's happening in the story is that Jacob is upset and afraid and he's got this problem with fear. We'll talk about that. But God is actually going to touch his hip, which is going to go out of socket and he's going to limp for the rest of his life. That's what's going to take place.

Now the Bible is going to tell us in the passage that all the Jewish people don't eat that part of the meat of the cow or the sheep. They don't eat that part because this is such a holy event. This was so special that God touched grandpa. God touched his heart. We know that. He changed his name in the passage. God did something special in his life. So we're going to make that a holy

experience. So the Jews don't even eat that part of the meat of the animal out of holiness, holy reverence for the fact that God touched Grandpa Jacob.

Well let's dig into the passage and see what God does in Genesis 32. It starts this way. Verse 1 starts with these first few words. It says – *Jacob went on his way*. Which gives me the opportunity to remind us what on his way means. Where has he been? Well you know that for the last twenty years he's been with Laban. That was a good experience in the sense that God blessed him with all the children, wealth, and so he grew. But it was also a challenging experience because of Laban himself. So we saw last week how they separated and it was not an easy separation. But it was done now and now Jacob turns and he's facing toward home.

Now he's got another whole load on his heart that's bothering him. Because twenty years ago he left home. When he left home his brother was mad at him, even said he was going to kill him, and that's why he had to leave home. So for twenty years this has been lingering in his mind. What's going to happen now as I go home? What am I going to do? God said *I will be with you*. The five words. *I will be with you*. But he's still pondering this. He's still concerned about it. It's still weighing on his heart.

So we continue the verse. It says – *So Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" So he called the name of that place Mahanaim* (which means two camps). He's looking at his whole camp of people, but then he looks up and there's angels there. Somehow God revealed to him angels. I'm going wow, this is so caring of God to do. For a man who's looking toward going home, knowing that there's a big challenge awaiting him, for God to send these angels, this is so exciting and so great. So empowering.

I just think if God would open our eyes so we could see angels, we'd be surprised at where they are. I think there's probably a lot of angels on the New Jersey Turnpike, protecting people as they're driving. Do you know the Bible tells us as Jesus was speaking He referred to every child having an angel. And some of our children use those angels more than others. Those angels are there. There's a spiritual presence that exists.

Somehow Jacob got to see that. What an encouragement that must have been for him. Yes, this is two camps. There's my camp and then there's the spiritual camp as well. Oh he's pumped and so he's ready now.

He's going to send this message. Look at what he does in verse 3. *And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob. (Do you see the humility there? My lord Esau. Your servant Jacob.) This is what you say to him: 'I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.'"*

The word *favor* there is the word grace. That's the word. Grace. That I can find grace in your sight. So he sent it off. He's excited. He's pumped. He's sending the message in advance.

Here's what happens. Now you have to realize we've got several hundred miles that he's got to travel. So there's plenty of time for the message to get here and the message to get back. So now we have the message coming back. *And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him."* Oh no.

This (as you can imagine) for a man like Jacob who tends to have a fear problem here, he tends to think about the negative, the problems associated with what's going on. There are some people that are glass half-empty kind of people. They tend to focus on the negative. Their mind kind of races about the bad things that might take place. So now there's 400 men coming with Esau. So well you can imagine what's going on inside of his heart. He is really upset. In fact the next few words tell us not that he's a little bit upset; he is really upset. It says – *Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed.* He was just upset inside of his heart. What am I going to do? Didn't know what to do with all of this. It's just so upsetting for him because of his fear.

Now there's a weakness that Jacob has that we must understand. His name is Jacob, which means heel-catcher or someone who's tricky or trips other people up. There are three qualities that a person has that when they're together those three qualities are together there is a temptation to be dishonest. These are good qualities that people have. One is that they're intelligent. Two is that they're creative. And three is that they persevere. They hang in there. They don't like obstacles. So they want to overcome the obstacle with their intelligence and creativity and sometimes they'll cut corners. Sometimes they'll do something that's wrong or dishonest in order to get there. That's the temptation for someone who has those three qualities, intelligence, creativity, and perseverance. There can be a temptation for them to not have integrity.

That's why it's so important for us to build integrity on the inside to be able to address the temptations that exist. But here's what comes along with a deceptive lifestyle. A person who's tricking people, a person who's offending people because they're being dishonest, who's taking advantage of people, you know what they live with? They live with fear. The fear that I'm going to get caught, the fear that someone's going to get revenge, the fear that bad things are going to happen to me in general because I'm a tricky person. It's fear. So Jacob has this internal problem that seems to be tied into his identity. It just seems to be this guy who's tricky has this problem with fear. So we see his fear popping up several times so far in the book. It's going to pop up here as well.

It says – *Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps, thinking...* I'll just pause there with the word *thinking*. Because one of the challenges with fear and anxiety is the thinking. Right? You start thinking about, your mind starts racing, and you start having this internal cyclone that goes forward. You imagine if this happens and that's going to happen and if that happens, that's really going to be bad, and this is going to be terrible, and then there's disaster waiting for us. I mean you just start thinking in that cyclical way. So he's thinking. This is what he's thinking: *"If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape."* So that's why he divided them into two camps.

And then Jacob prays. This is very important that he takes some time and he prays because he knows he needs to turn this over to the Lord. Here's his prayer. *And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good.'"* Lord, you told me you would do me good. I just like the way that Jacob throws back the promises of God onto the Lord. Lord, I'm reading your scriptures here and this is what it says. That's essentially what we can do as we pray back scripture to the Lord.

Verse 10 – *"I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps."* Two camps. When I came over I just had my staff when I came to Paddan Aram. But now what do I have? I have two calves. I have all this stuff that I have now.

In verse 11 he says – *"Lord, please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him* (notice his fear is what's driving him). *Lord, I'm afraid that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. But you said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'"* So he's pouring his heart out for the Lord.

Verse 13 tells us what happens now. So he's prayed and he's going to take some more action. It says – *So he stayed there that night, and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau.* I want you to see how big this present is. It just describes and helps us understand how much stuff this guy really had. This guy is really rich to be able to give this huge of a present. Here's the present (verse 14): *two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milking camels and their calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys.* That is one big gift.

But now he's thinking strategy. How can I creatively approach this? He's using his intelligence now to work forward here. Which is great. He says – *These he handed over to his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass on ahead of me and put a space between drove and drove."* He instructed the first, *"When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, 'To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these ahead of you?' then you shall say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a present sent to my lord Esau. And moreover, he is behind us.'"* He likewise instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, *"You shall say the same thing to Esau when you find him, and you shall say, 'Moreover, your servant Jacob is behind us.'"* For he thought (remember he's back to thinking again). He's trying to plan, strategize, kind of work this out in his mind, for he thought), *"I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterward I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me."* So that's his plan that he's working out. He's prayed. He's got a plan. He's trying to work this out. But he's still wrestling in his own heart about this. What's going to happen? He's afraid of what's going to come down here.

So in verse 21 it says – *So the present passed on ahead of him, and he himself stayed that night in the camp. 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.* So the ford is the place he could easily cross. They crossed over and he sent all of his family, all the stuff that he had left, everything he sends

over the Jabbok river. *He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had.* Everything. Which leads us to the next phrase. Because it says – *And Jacob was left alone.*

God's going to speak to him, God's going to touch him in the midst of this. But I think Jacob had to get alone before God could touch him. The same thing is true in our lives. I mean our lives are crammed with all kind of activity and busyness. But there's so much noise in our lives. I mean you get out of your car where the radio is playing, you go into your house where the TV is on. And if you turn those things off, you've got your cell phone giving notifications. I mean there's busyness happening continually. It's hard to think. Jacob gets alone. I would just suggest that sometimes in order for us to hear God and be touched by the Lord, we must be able to get alone.

Well he got alone. Jacob was left alone. *And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.* Now it says a man here, but later Jacob is going to call him God. That he's wrestled with God Himself. So I don't know whether this is an angel that he's wrestling with or he's wrestling with the preincarnate Christ here. But he's going to wrestle all night. And he's going how could you wrestle all night. If any of you know anything about wrestling you have a hard time wrestling for very long without getting tired. This is part of his determination. We see that Jacob is a determined guy. Remember he worked fourteen years for his two wives. He was very determined. And now he's going to wrestle with God all night, the rest of the night. You're going wow. That is a lot of determination. To which I would say yeah, it's a guy thing. Sometimes us guys, that's how we are. We just got to keep pressing. I know that women too wrestle with things, but there's this sense that he's just pressing on.

Notice what happens. It's very interesting. It says – *A man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. 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.* You've got to be asking the question that I'm asking. Which is how can you wrestle with God and prevail? How can you be strong enough to keep going in the midst of that with an angel or God Himself or whatever? How does he do that? I pondered that this week. I was thinking if you have someone who is stronger and more powerful than you and you're wrestling with that person, maybe that person would back off in order to help you learn or teach you.

So I called my grandson. My grandson is into karate and he works at the karate studio and he's moving forward in his belts. I said, "Do you ever spar with your teacher, coach, whatever you call the guy. Do you ever spar the guy? I'm telling this story in the Bible and it says God wrestled with Jacob and Jacob prevailed. So I'm trying to figure out what that's like." He says yes. He said, "One time I asked my teacher if he would spar with me because I wanted to learn these things and so he did. Now he's strong enough that he could have wiped me out and knocked me on the mat, but he didn't. He backed off and he worked with me and I continued to work and do the things because he was teaching me something." Wow. I thought what a beautiful example of what God is doing in this picture. It's not that God couldn't win the battle. It's that Jacob prevailed. He hung in there and God was teaching him because God wants to do something deeper in his heart, something very deep inside of his heart, and he has to wrestle with God. I know that sometimes you guys are just like me – at night in the dark (that's what it says, he's alone) and we wrestle with God. Sometimes it takes us all night to wrestle with God. That's what Jacob's doing in a physical way here.

It says – *Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.* That is something happened where the hip got dislocated. It's going to affect the sciatic nerve. We'll talk about that in just a moment. It's going to affect him because he's going to limp for the rest of his life. That's what's going to take place.

You see I'm convinced that what God is doing in this story is He's saying, "Okay, Jacob, you've got a problem. You've got a problem with dishonesty. You've got a problem with fear in your life. I want to help you. I want to teach you how to lean on me." I can imagine that every time now as Jacob is walking with a cane and he's leaning on that cane it's a reminder to him that he must lean on the Lord in every area of his life. Leaning on the Lord and trusting in the Lord. That God is doing something deeper in Jacob's life that he needs to have done. So God says, "Okay, I'm going to dislocate your socket of your hip. I'm going to mess with your sciatic nerve here and you're going to learn how to lean on me." Wow. Does your theology allow you to experience a God who might inflict pain? We'll look at that in just a moment.

Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." He's such a determined guy. Bless me. I need more of the blessing. Do something inside of me.

So it says – *And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."* I'm going to draw attention to Jacob which means trickster, which means a person who trips people up. What is your name? It's Jacob. That's my name. And with that whole package of dishonesty and fear, what is your name? He says my name is Jacob. *Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel (which means to wrestle), for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."* I'm going to change your name. I'm going to change something very deep inside the core of your heart. I'm going to change your identity. I'm going to change who you are. This isn't about a hip. This is about your heart. This is about something deeper inside of you that you need inside of your life that's more important than anything that might be going on in your body or on the outside.

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. 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." The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. 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.

Today I did some research on what Jewish people do today. They don't even eat the hindquarters. They would never eat filet mignon, for example. They don't eat the hindquarter of the cow or the sheep. Here's why. Because the sciatic nerve goes from the hip down the leg, as many of you know all too well. But the point is here the people of Israel, the Jewish people revered this experience that Grandpa Jacob had with God. That God touched him. That they said this is going to be something that's going to change us as well. Not so much the pain that they recognized. But the thing that God did inside of his life. He changed his name. His name was changed from Jacob to Israel. Now we're going to have the twelve tribes of Israel. We're going

to have Israel become a nation. So the Israelite people say we're not going to eat this part because it was a holy moment when God touched our grandpa. When He touched Jacob and changed his name to Israel.

Well let's look at the theological question. Does your theology allow for God to inflict pain in order to do something? Let me show you a couple other passages. Paul certainly thought so. In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (that's the passage about the thorn in the flesh – now a thorn is painful) he says – *Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan* (so this seems to be somehow inflicted by Stan) *to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.* But he's asking God, "Lord, will you take this problem away?" What does God say? Does He say, "Okay. Since you prayed and because you're my servant and because you're doing a lot of good things I'm going to take this away." He doesn't say that. He says no. The answer to his prayer about the pain is no. He says – *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* That's what God said to him.

So here's Paul's conclusion. As he's thinking about all of this, this what he says. This is what he's learned from that. He says – *Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* God says I'm going to do something in your life, Paul. It's very important. And yes, it's going to be painful.

I just wonder if in this story if Jacob wouldn't have wrestled with God if God might not have needed to touch his hip. If he would've just said, "Okay God, I'm going to receive the fact that I will be with you. I'm going to receive the fact that your angels are present with me. I'm not going to have the fear in my life. I'm going to let it go. I'm going to learn how to trust you." I just wonder if he wouldn't have had to have that experience, that touching of the hip.

You know I say in my own heart, "Lord, just whisper to me please. If you whisper, I'll listen. Because I don't want you to have to say something loud to me or do the discipline. Just whisper. I want to be so sensitive that I'll listen." But sometimes what happens in our lives is the patterns start to grow and we start to develop some ingrained thinking and patterns of reacting inside of our hearts that create internal problems for us. And God says we're going to have to do something about this. We're going to have to do some internal surgery.

On December 18th last year I went to the doctor because I knew I had cancer on my nose. I had a pimple on my nose that wasn't healing, so I was going in to do a Mohs procedure where you take out a little bit and they look at it under the microscope and then if they don't get it all then they take out some more and so on. My wife said she was in there for a few minutes and they scraped it, they saw it. I wasn't worried about it at all. It wasn't a concern of mine. I went in and he started to dig. Okay. Three hours later I had a hole in my nose that was a dime width at 3/8-inches deep. A huge hole in my face. Three hours. And that three hours was a difficult three hours. I was awake during all of that while he's doing all this work and I had this huge hole in my nose.

But here's the interesting thing about the surgeon. The doctor comes into the office and he comes in with a smile on his face and he says, "We got it all." I'm thinking, "You got it all, but you got a big mess right here we've got to do something about." Of course that's when I went to the plastic surgeon and he did the rest of the work and I had a couple surgeries and so on to give me back a nose. So I'm very grateful that I have a nose. But what an interesting thing that the surgeon comes in with a smile after he did all that damage to my face and he's smiling and he says, "We got it all." You know I just think that sometimes there's pain necessary in our lives to dig out the cancer that exists in our hearts.

I think that's why in this next slide it says Hebrews 12:11. This is the passage which says God disciplines us. *He disciplines the one he loves.* That's what He says about us. That's what the passage is about. I just took one verse for the sake of time. It says – *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. But painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.* Does sometimes the touch of God inflict pain? The answer is yes. Sometimes it does. But it's always good.

I've got to read to you the rest of the next chapter. I'm just going to read through Genesis 33 because I want you to see how it works out. Because sometimes the things we worry about aren't worth worrying about. Sometimes they never come true. Sometimes the things we're afraid of don't ever happen. That's what happens here for Jacob.

It says in verse 1 and following – *And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants. And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.*

But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. Why do you think they wept? I mean twenty years of uncertainty and pain and now there's reconciliation. They are weeping together because of what God has done. And when Esau lifted up his eyes and saw the women and children, he said, "Who are these with you?" Jacob answered, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." Then the female servants and their children approached and bowed down. Next Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel and they too bowed down.

Esau said, "What do you mean by all these flocks and herds I met?" "To find favor in your eyes, my lord," he said. But Esau said, "I already have plenty, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." Jacob said, "No, please, if I have found favor or grace in your eyes, accept this grace from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably or with grace. Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all have need." And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it.

Then Esau said, "Let us be on our way, I will accompany you." But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are tender and that I must care for the ewes and the cows that are nursing their young. If they are driven hard for just one day, all the animals will die. So let my

lord go on ahead of his servant, while I go along slowly at the pace of the flocks and herds before me, and the pace of the children until I come to my lord in Seir.”

Esau said, “Then let me leave some of my men with you.” “But why do that?” Jacob asked. “Just let me find favor in the eyes of my lord.” So that day Esau started on his way back to Seir. Jacob however went to Sukkoth where he built a place for himself and made shelters for his livestock. This is why the place is called Sukkoth. Because Sukkoth means shelters.

After Jacob came from Paddan Aram (that’s where he was with Laban), he arrived Safely at the city of Shechem in Canaan, and camped within sight of the city. For a hundred pieces of silver he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent.

Verse 20. You’ve got to watch this. *There he set up an altar and he called it El Elohe Israel.* El Elohe Israel which means Israel is his name. El Elohe is God Almighty. God is my almighty God. Or God the almighty God of me, Israel. That’s what he’s saying. God has taught him this lesson. And Israel (Jacob) is going to use this now in his life because he realizes that God is God Almighty. He’s the one that’s bigger and more powerful than any of the fears that I have.

Fear can damage us. It can hinder our lives. It can prevent us from growing. It can stunt where we are and it can paralyze us. But when we learn how to trust the Lord and we see how big He is, God Almighty, wow, God can take us to much greater heights in our lives.

Let me make it clear that God does not cause all pain. Sometimes the pain that we experience is just because we’re sinful, that we have done mistakes and we cause our own pain. We’re experiencing the consequences of our own actions and that is painful. Sometimes we experience pain because of other people who are sinful and they’ve inflicted pain on us and it has created damage in our lives. Sometimes we experience pain because we live in a broken world that has disease and cancer and other things. Because we live in a broken world we experience pain in our lives. But there is a kind of pain that God inflicts on us as part of His training and discipline. But when God touches us and sometimes it’s painful, it’s always good.

Would you stand with me and let’s pray together.

[PRAYER] Father, I don’t like pain. I want to avoid that. If you can guide me through life without the pain I’d really appreciate that. But Lord, I know that sometimes there are areas in my heart that are just messed up so much that I need some kind of guidance, some movement that needs your touch. So Lord, I give you permission in my heart to touch me in ways that I need to be touched so that there might be this harvest of righteousness and peace inside of my heart. Lord, do that gently, would you? I just ask for your comfort in the midst of pain and challenges that I experience and my brothers and sisters here experience. Lord, we need your comfort. We ask that you would do a deep work in our hearts. Grow us to be the people that you want us to be. Lord, help us to deal with our own fears. Show us who you are – God Almighty in our lives. We ask this in Jesus’ name, amen.