

## “Roots - Jesus Comes to us from a People”

Scripture: Genesis 32:22-31

Graphics: manger, roots, family tree, calendar, wrestling

Big Truth: Advent is a season of anticipation of Christ’s coming celebrated at Christmas, and is a time of opening ourselves once again to the living Christ coming to us in a new and unanticipated way. The story of Jesus, his family, his hometown, and his circumstance tell of a God who is redeeming and renewing the world through Jesus. The family story of Jesus intersects with your family’s story and invites us to invite Him deeper into our lives this season. Jesus’ people (Israel) are a people who changed after wrestling with God, and then transformed the world.

Focus Phrase: Transformed people carry a testimony that “God can!” in a world where “we can’t.”

### 1. Scripture

- A. **PRAY! (Jesus, you are Lord...)**
- B. This series (and the focus of this season) is called *Roots - Advent and the Family Story of Jesus*. Jesus came from a someone, somewhere, and something - a people, a place, and a story.
- C. This morning, we’ll take a deeper look into the PEOPLE from which Jesus came...the people of Israel. And Israel, while today is a place, began as a person - a man - an ancestor of Jesus, of Nazareth, named Jacob.
- D. Jacob had an encounter with God one day, and, as is the case many times in the Bible, God changed his name...to Israel...the people of Jesus.
- E. The title of our message is **Jesus Comes to Us from a People**.
- F. Grab your bible...and let’s **Read Genesis 32:22-31**.
- G. So Jacob wrestled with God and sustained an injury. He was changed by that encounter, and went on to change the world for God.

### 2. Introduction

- A. But, **“How does the story of Jacob, the namesake of the people of Israel, help us embrace both the wrestling and the transformation we experience as followers of Jesus?”**
- B. Dan Wilt writes, “When we think of Christmas, and the season of Advent that anticipates it, many of us think of family. Family. It is that strange mix of people we call mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, great grandparents, and even non-family members who aren’t blood related to us—but feel as though they could be.”
- C. As followers of Jesus in a particular place or church, we are the Body of Christ. As the Body of Christ, we are bonded together as a family...with a spiritual lineage in this church and in our families. But even more than that, our spiritual heritage reaches all the way back to the first disciples, Jesus, and the people from whom Jesus came - the people and place: Israel.

- D. Being part of the people of God connects us with the covenant-making Creator of the Universe...and we each have a place in that family. That story culminates, for us and every other church in all times and places, in the **birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.**
- E. And that's why this season focuses our hearts and minds on Him - on Jesus - and His people, Israel - God's chosen people into which WE are adopted as daughters and sons. John 1:12-13 remind us: "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."
- F. Today, we consider the '**someone**' from whom Jesus came to us, his earthly family - the people of Israel - *a people who wrestle, who changed, and who transform the world.*

### 3. Jesus and the People of Israel

#### A. Jesus Comes From A People Who Wrestle

- i. The story of Jacob in Genesis 32 is one of the most fascinating stories in scripture. As you examine or recall the history of Jacob prior to this moment, Jacob is NOT a very nice guy.
- ii. Jacob is a taker, a manipulator, a liar, and a deceiver of people - especially his brother Esau and his father, Isaac. Jacob gets his way by any means possible. I mean, the episodes in his life make our heads spin!
- iii. Until one day, Jacob made a journey to see his brother Esau...to make things right. And it's at THAT point when Jacob encountered God in human form, and wrestled with him.
- iv. **Jacob was a wrestler.**
  - a. When I was younger, I was NOT a wrestler. Except if you consider wrestling with my brother, seemingly to the death, in the backyard of our family home. Besides that, I grew up in a big school, and only the biggest and strongest boys got a spot on the wrestling team - and many of them won state championships. These guys were tanks.
  - b. However, my Dad was the announcer for the varsity wrestling matches in the school gym. So, I remember tagging along as a youngster to watch the matches and cheer on the wrestlers. And, if you've ever been to a wrestling match, it's A LOT of shouting (mostly from mom's who were trying to shout their sons to victory from the stands!)
  - c. You can't help but get physically involved. I think it's because wrestling is not a sport of first downs and home runs. Wrestling is all about resistance against a single opponent. It's a very intense and powerful exertion of force and counter-force. And the match is only over when

one of the wrestlers on the mat subdues and sometimes pins the other or wins by points awarded to the one that exerts the right force and resistance in the right place and right time.

- d. Jacob was a wrestler. The people of Israel wrestled. They wrestled with their culture. And, often, they wrestled with God and God's law and God's plans for them, as a nation.
- e. Dan Wilt again: "Jacob was, by all accounts, a wrestler, a resistor, a pressurer, a forcer—always to get his own way. He was a man in a struggle his entire life. He wrestled with his brother coming out of the womb, and he wrestled a birthright and a blessing from him as well. Jacob psychologically wrestled his father out of a gift that was not intended for him, and he wrestled with his father-in-law over issues of fairness. Jacob knew how to get his way."
- f. When Jacob got to the Ford of the Jabbok, he met God there. Now, in the bible, in the OT, when someone meets God, it's almost never in a way that the person would see God's face. It was widely accepted in the Jewish culture that if someone were to see God's face, they would die instantly. But, then, there was Jacob, meeting God face-to-face, it says. Jacob believed so firmly that it was God with whom he was wrestling that he would later rename the place Peniel, which means "face of God." Interestingly, for Jacob, it was night (dark) and there was some ambiguity about the FORM which God took...a human form, which is probably the reason Jacob could wrestle with him.
- g. And just as Jacob was about to pin God to the mat, God touched Jacob's hip and put it out of joint! Ouch!
- h. And from that moment on...Jacob had a limp - an injury - from God's touch. That limp would always remind him that he wrestled with God, and had received the blessing that he sought his whole life from his father and brother and family. But it was that limp that made him humble - humble enough to listen to God and to want to reconcile with his brother, Esau.
- i. The people of Jesus are a people who wrestle with God.**
- j. This week, I realized that there've been many time in my life when I've felt like I've wrestled - wrestled with my own failures and sin. I've wrestled with God and His will and direction, at times. And wrestled with what it means to be a sold-out follower of Jesus - counter-cultural, gracious, and filled with God's love for all.
- k. As part of the lineage of Israel and Jesus and your own family, where have YOU wrestled with God? Where are you wrestling in other parts of life? Maybe it's with addiction, or grief, or pride, or secrets. I

assume, like me, you often come away from wrestling with God with a severe limp. See, because we never go through the times of wrestling with God and come away unchanged.

1. That's why the people of Israel have also been a **people who change...** and WE, through Jesus, are part of a people who change. The wrestling leads to change.

## **B. Jesus Comes From a People Who Change**

- i. The most obvious change for Jacob was his change of name - to Israel, after his encounter with God that night.
- ii. But, from that moment, the trajectory of the people of God - right up to you and me today - changed course. It's profound that the people of God are named as Israel which means, "one who wrestles with God." What other group of people, or world religion, has its roots in this interactive wrestling match with the Creator of the Universe? For me, that gives OUR story the truth and credibility to be the only Way, Truth, and Life.
- iii. And, gives the people of God HOPE!
- iv. Throughout scripture, over and over and over, we read about the people of God changing. When we are lost or foolish, God allows us to wrestle with Him and He leads us to humility in the encounter. That's the whole point of repentance - turning away from our sin and turning TO God. Even in those moments when we resist God's grace, He still woos us to himself...so that we can be included in the people who change.
- v. In fact, we GET to change. God is so gracious that we're given a gift every time we repent, we change, and we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us for God's glory and our good.
- vi. The family story of Jesus - which includes Jacob and David, Moses and Rahab - what we clearly see is an imperfect people. And even though they - and we - are covenant people with God, they fall and fail...and yet get back up again.
- vii. By grace, God KNOWS they CAN and DO change. We CAN and DO change! But it takes humility and God's grace working in our lives.
- viii. James 4:6 tells us, "But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."
- ix. As we become more like Christ, it WILL take more wrestling matches with God. There's no shame in that IF the end result of the wrestling is that God changes you, gives you a limp, and you move closer to Him in humility.
- x. And when you're changed, humble, and limping, God WILL use you to work for transformation in the world.

### C. Jesus Leads Us to Be a People of Transformation

- i. Jesus is the pivotal, universe-altering step God took toward us...to adopt us into the people of Israel...and to offer us grace upon grace.
- ii. Jesus knows our humanness. Jesus knows our weaknesses and temptations. Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”
- iii. Jesus is Emmanuel - God with us...but then, by the power of the Holy Spirit given to us at Pentecost, Jesus becomes God IN us.
- iv. The wrestling leads to the limp which leads to the humility which leads to the change in us, SO THAT God can use you and your limp and your changed heart to transform the world. This is missional! To make disciples!
- v. Jacob’s past was not his future. Jacob feared his past and all his mistakes, which were all catching up to him before his wrestling match with God. Yet, when He humbled himself before God, he was transformed.
- vi. You and I can be people who are being transformed, from glory to glory, in the presence of God this Advent season. We can then be transformers.
- vii. If you’re taking notes, write this down, **“Transformed people carry a testimony that “God can!” into a world where “we can’t.”**
- viii. You are a person being transformed for God’s glory, your good, and the good of the world. (repeat)

### 4. Conclusion

- A. This is a season of reflection - a season to look back over your life and identify the places where you wrestled and with whom and why.
- B. And, you come by that honestly. You, as a descendant of Jacob, are still a work in progress - a wrestler being used by God to transform the world.
- C. You and I are equal parts faithful and unfaithful...and yet, we can take heart that Jesus understands US and THAT from his own family tree.
- D. For reflection this week is this question: How has the love of Jesus met you in your struggle and fear...and how has that love changed and dissolved?
- E. What do you want God to do in you through your own seasons of wrestling this past year? He is changing you. He is changing me. He is changing us - our church, our families, and our community and world.
- F. As WE change to be more holy and filled with grace, how is God using YOU to transform the world?
- G. **“Transformed people carry a testimony that “God can!” into a world where “we can’t.”** Let’s pray... **PRAY!**