



A theologian who is now in Heaven, named R.C. Sproul, once said that it used to be that people thought they were justified by their works. Meaning, people thought that if they were good enough, then God would accept them. To be justified is to be declared righteous and innocent in God's courtroom. Of course, we have many people today who think that if they're good enough (or, at least if they're not too bad), God will be ok with them. He'll declare them "good enough." But Sproul went on and said that in our culture in America today, it seems that many don't believe justified by works. They seem to now believe "justification by death." In other words, it seems that people tend to just think God's going to accept anyone, no matter what. I tend to agree with Sproul, and that burdens me. One of the reasons why that so bothers me is because that means people are focused more on themselves than they are on God. They have a high view of themselves and thus they have a view of God where God *must* accept them.

But, who is God? Is your view of God a being who *has to accept humans*? If so, then humans are god. The biblical view of God that we went through last week reveals that we humans get our life, meaning, value, dignity and eternal hope from God. As a result, we need God. But humanity has rebelled. And because God is just, we deserve punishment. This entire series is focused on showing the reality of God being just and also merciful. Exodus 34 tells us that God's glory is actually seen when we understand these twin realities. Let me read verses 5-7 again: . ⁶**The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."**¹

Last week, I gave the big picture of God's glory in showing mercy and judgment. This week, we're going to see God's mercy and judgment by simply looking in the Old Testament. My main idea today is **God's glory in mercy through judgment in Israel is a picture of how God deals with the world**. Let that sink in. God's glory in showing mercy through judgment in Israel (so, looking at how God reveals himself in Old Testament Israel) is a picture for us to see how God reveals his glory to all of us in the world. This morning, what I'm actually going to do is spend 90% of our time on the life of Jacob, who is later named Israel. I'm doing this because Jacob's life actually is a picture of what the nation of Israel's life is going to be like. In me doing this, I hope it's helpful for you today to understand what it means that God reveals his glory in mercy through judgment. I hope you see the personal connection with your life as well.

Before going into Jacob's life, I want you to know that this message is particularly valuable to me? Maybe you know the words of the apostle Peter in 2 Peter 3:18: grow in the grace and knowledge of our

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ex 34:5–7.

Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.² The word “knowledge” there refers to experiential knowledge, and I love that because at least one of the ideas of this word is that God makes his truth experientially understood. Let me put it another way. Have you ever had times where you’re reading the Bible, and you don’t know what it means. Or, maybe you know it mentally, but then something happens, and in that moment you think to yourself, “Yes! That’s what that verse means! I knew mentally, but now I *know* experientially what that means.” That’s what Peter is saying in that verse. Now, what does this have to do with Jacob and the nation of Israel?

Over the course of the various struggles I’ve had in my life: spiritual battles, mental turmoil, emotional anxieties and depression, chronic physical pain; I’ve come to realize that Jacob’s story, and Israel’s story, is *my* story. It’s a story of God revealing his glory and leading me to actually trust him. It’s a story that reveals God’s merciful and just glory! So, this sermon is extremely personal to me, and I genuinely pray this would become personal to you. Because it’s so personal, it may be difficult to take notes in this sermon. You might just want to sit back and just listen. Whatever you do, though, I ask that you pray that God would unite your heart to his Word and that your faith would grow as you behold his glory.

Now, let’s go to Jacob to see a picture of God’s glory in his life.

Jacob, the heel-grabber. If you’re familiar with the story of Jacob in the book of Genesis, you’ll know that he was a twin. Before he and his brother, Esau, were even born, we’re told that they wrestled in the womb. When Rachel, their mother, asked the Lord what was happening inside of her. The Lord said that two nations are in her womb, and then he gave a promise to her that the older brother (Esau) would end up serving the younger (Jacob). Then came the time for the delivery. Esau came out first, but Jacob’s hand was holding Esau’s heel. It seemed almost as if he was trying to gain the control over his brother in the womb. In some ways, maybe it made for a cute and funny story to his parents when he was little, but it ended up becoming symbolic for how Jacob lived his life.

Now, even from birth Jacob had the promise that God would bless him in a special way, but Jacob often doesn’t turn to trusting the Lord. He continues this heel-grabbing tendency. Instead of trusting that the Lord is in control, there’s a scenario where he makes food for his supposedly starving brother, and before simply loving his brother and giving him food, he tells his brother to give him his birthright – which means the blessing of being the oldest. Shockingly, Esau does this.

Jacob has manipulated the situation. He has gained control. But what type of relationship do you think this leads to with Esau? Tense. Then, at another point in time, when Jacob’s father, Isaac, is getting old and ready to bless his sons, Jacob and his mom work together to deceive his dad so that he can be blessed. Why would they have to deceive? Why wouldn’t they trust the Lord? Why not turn to prayer? Can you relate? You know God’s promises, but you think, “God, this makes no sense! I’m going to have to do “this” or “that” in order to fix this!” Do you heel-grab? Once again, Jacob is seeking to grab control to manipulate the circumstances even though he’s been given a promise of God’s good intentions towards him. Now, he does get the blessing, but what do we hear from Esau? Esau says the next time he sees his brother, he’s going to kill him.

Jacob flees to his mother’s homeland. While there he meets a relative named Laban. Jacob ends up getting a dose of his own medicine. Laban also is a heel-grabber, seeking for control. Jacob longs to be married to Laban’s daughter, Rachel, and in the Hebrew he uses sexually crass verbiage to express how

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Pe 3:18.

he wants Rachel, and he'll do whatever it takes to marry her. Laban makes an agreement for Jacob to work 7 years for Rachel. Jacob does! Now, keep in mind that God's promise given through Rachel to Jacob includes the promise of children and land. But at this point, Jacob is thinking only of himself and how he can get what he wants when he wants it. Laban tricks Jacob and Jacob ends up unwittingly marrying Laban's older daughter, Leah. Waking up the next morning and seeing her face and not Rachel's was shocking and he was angered. Laban explains that if Jacob wants to guarantee working an additional 7 years, then he can have Rachel, too, in a week's timespan. He ends up marrying Rachel, too.

At this point, keep in mind that polygamy is forbidden already at the beginning of Genesis. We're told that the "two shall become one flesh" – not the three or four or more. Jacob has taken matters into his own hands. He's grasped for control, and it hasn't worked well for him. But, maybe in his mind, at least he's in control and he's handling it. But if you stop and look back at his story even at this point, you see God's judgment and discipline of Jacob, can't you? The deception and heel-grabbing led him to have to flee in fear. It's led to further deception and sin, and it's brought pain in other people's lives. Think about Leah, who is loved much less. Yet, in the midst of this, too, we see God's mercy. Nothing is going to thwart God's good plan to show mercy to Jacob. Yet, God allows Jacob to continue in his heel-grabbing.

In Jacob's life, there are scenarios where God reveals himself in more personal ways – where Jacob is given spiritual insight to see a stairway that leads up into Heaven, for example. But we end up getting to my favorite story of Jacob's – his wrestling with the Lord. Jacob has spent years and years with Laban, and he's finally leaving with his herds that he's acquired and his large family. Even in the midst of Jacob's sins, and God's discipline; God has shown immense grace to Jacob, blessing him with all of this. Now Jacob is going to his homeland, as God is calling him to go. But remember the words of his brother, Esau? If Esau sees him, he's devoted to killing him. Then, as Jacob is traveling with his family, someone reports to him that Esau is coming to meet him with an army! Jacob has no army! What is he going to do? How can he defend himself? I imagine panic and anxiety strike. And what's Jacob's natural impulse? Heel-grabbing for control. He must figure out what he's going to do. So, he comes up with a plan. He organizes his flocks, servants, and family into different groups. It's actually quite horrible and reveals his sinful priorities. Of course, Rachel is in the last group. Leah and her children in the group before, and the lesser important in the front. The logic is that if Esau's army is set on killing, at least he may have Rachel protected in the end. Do you see the sin? Do you see the grasping to control and self-protect in Jacob?

God has shown Jacob through life circumstances his discipline and punishment. Why doesn't God just give up on Jacob and punish him one last time? I want to be fed up with him at this point, but God isn't. The night before they head out to meet Esau, Jacob goes away from everyone else, and we're told that the angel of the Lord meets Jacob. Now, after this incident, Jacob says he sees God. So, I believe that the angel of the Lord is actually God the Son, Jesus (before he came in the flesh). There's more study on this in the Scriptures, and if you want more information on this, I can give it to you. But let's just say what Jacob says, this angel of the Lord is actually God. God meets Jacob in all of his mess and in the midst of a fear-inducing problem. His brother seems to have come to annihilate him and his family.

What does God then do? We're told that he begins to wrestle with Jacob. Wait. What? Is a wrestling match the best idea? What about strategizing? What about comforting Jacob that all will be fine? Nope. Wrestling. But at this point, Jacob doesn't know who this is. It's completely dark out. And Jacob wrestles in return. And this wrestling match goes on for hours into the night – which, by the way, suggests that Jacob is a very strong man physically. He's a heel-grabber in every way. He's always going to try to come out on top. He wrestles, and continues to wrestle, and then a moment comes. The Lord touches Jacob's

hip socket and puts his hip out of joint. It seems that in that moment, Jacob realizes something terrifying. This person is more than a person. This being has been allowing him to wrestle. Why didn't this being pop his hip socket earlier?

And, this is actually a good question for us to ask as readers. Why did God come to allow Jacob to wrestle with him? Why did God let the wrestling continue for hours? It's the same kind of question we can ask about Jacob's life. Why did God allow to heel-grab for control *so much*? Why didn't God stop Jacob so much sooner? Before answering, let's see what happens next in the story. And, by the way, if you want to read the story later, you'll find it in Genesis 32. After his hip is put out, God tells Jacob to let go. Think about this. Jacob must be in pretty bad pain, but he is now not wrestling, he's just holding on for dear life. Why? We read Jacob's response, **"I will not let you go unless you bless me."**³ What is different here in Jacob's responses? This isn't just a sinful request for Jacob to have more money or fame or life. I think Jacob now knows who he's with. Jacob has wrestled with all of his might. He has tried to heel-grab the situation, and God has proven that in all of his strength, he's not stronger than God. So then we read the Lord's response: **he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."**⁴

Wait. Did Jacob win? Not technically. He lost. But the angel of the Lord reveals that when you submit yourself to him, you win. Jacob finally came to a point of laying down his persistence to control and manipulate and live in fear. Jacob seemed to come to a point where he trusts God's promises over him. And then we read what happens after this incident: 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 Penuel, limping because of his hip.⁵

He beheld the glory of God, and Jacob realizes that he didn't deserve to remain alive. God could have taken him out in an instant, but instead God revealed his glory to him. He showed judgment on Jacob's sin by letting Jacob wrestle with him, but in that God showed his mercy. Jacob then gets up and limps towards his brother. This is phenomenal. And I think we should think it's amazing. He met the Lord and he goes towards what could be his death. I think that he trusts the Lord, however imperfect or even good that trust might be. But what we do know is that this is a pivotal moment in Jacob's life. How he behaves after this in various circumstances have a different tone to them.

We also know this is pivotal because here he's given a new name: Israel. "El" is the Hebrew for "God." "Isra" can be translated wrestles or prevails. I actually think it includes both meanings. In other words, **"Israel" means that God wrestles and prevails.** Jacob's freedom is found in God prevailing over him. Jacob's freedom is found in God wrestling him, addressing his sinful tendencies, and defeating Jacob. Through God's judgment over Jacob, God shows him mercy, and therefore, God says that Jacob now prevails because God has prevailed over him.

Now, this is Jacob, who is named Isra-EL. He is not stuck in heel-grabbing control. This doesn't mean he was perfect after that. But again, he did respond different to many of the trials after this. Also, Jacob's name changing doesn't mean that Jacob had no problems after this. Sometimes people think that God blessing them means that they'll have an easier life and no difficulty. That's not the case. God's blessing

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 32:26.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 32:27–28.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 32:30–31.

is rest and peace through trusting him. Because after this wrestling match, Rachel dies giving birth to her child. Jacob's son's sell their brother into slavery and tell Jacob he's dead. Jacob's son, Judah commits atrocious sin with his daughter-in-law and leaves his family for a while. Were things easy for Jacob? No. But he's Isra-EL – God prevails. We see over and over again that God is faithful to Jacob and Jacob can trust the Lord – not grab for control.

This is Jacob. This is Israel. And, this is the story of the Old Testament. Move from Jacob's story, and discover the growth of **the nation of Israel**, who are heel-grabbers as well. The people end up being enslaved in Egypt. They cry out to the Lord for rescue. God doesn't rescue for 400 years! Let that sink in, Ventura. That's a long time. Why? Was God punishing them? We're not told. What we do know is that in this broken world, we will have difficulties and pains. The more important question is, "How will we respond to the brokenness of this world when we experience it?" Will we respond like heel-grabbing Jacob or will we trust? Well, we're told Israel cries out and God eventually responds to rescue them out of Egypt. Glorious stories of plagues, and how Israel leaves Egypt with the spoil of the nation. Then they arrive to the Red Sea. What do they do? Complain! They state God brought them to the desert to kill them. But is that what God did? No. Now, keep in mind, the nation of Israel has the promise of God over them. Through Abraham, God has all the nations will be blessed. That means that Israel is going to have the special rescuer come through them – to bless the whole world. So, Israel cannot completely die away. But clearly, they don't trust the Lord. But what does God do here when they complain? He rescues them through the waters. Then they're on the other side. They rejoice. But then, not too long later they complain. And this cycle continues. They don't want just the bread from heaven. They want meat. God gives them meat. And, at times in their complaining, God punishes and judges the people. When they experience punishment, they cry out for forgiveness. God gives them mercy, they rejoice. Then they become presumptuous with God's mercy, and God punishes for their sinfulness. They cry out, God forgives, and the cycle continues. It goes through to when they enter into the land with Joshua. It continues through the times of the Judges and the Kings. You read through all the books of the Old Testament, and then you get to what seems like a breaking point: the Babylonian Captivity. Israel has continuously been heel-grabbing for control. God continuously is patient with them. God has judged. God has shown mercy. But this Babylonian Captivity is like the later stages of the wrestling match with God. Will they see their sinfulness? Will they hold on to God even though he tears their hip apart?

You know, back in Deuteronomy, God prophecies about the Babylonian captivity. I want you to hear his words and understand his heart: **"When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, so as to provoke him to anger, ²⁶ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed. ²⁷ And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you. ²⁸ And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. ²⁹ But from there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. ³⁰ When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God and obey his voice. ³¹ For the Lord your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them."**⁶

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Dt 4:25–31.

Do you see mercy through punishment? Verse 29 says, “But from there you will seek the Lord your God. . . .” Verse 31, “. . .the Lord your God is a merciful God.” God is bringing this immense judgment, so intense that we have the book of Lamentations come out of this time period. But God is bringing this brokenness so that it will lead to people’s genuine rescue. That they may see God’s glory in giving mercy through judgment.

Like Jacob, that Israel might discover that they deserve punishment because they are sinners – and God is just in doing so – but that God is also merciful and his mercy does triumph over judgment. So, the question we’re left asking at the end of the Old Testament is, “Will Israel prevail?” Meaning, will the nation of Israel believe and submit to the Lord and find freedom in surrendering to him and his ways or will they continue to grasp for control? Clearly there were those who clung to the Lord. The Old Testament continues with a wrestling match. The hip is out of socket, and Israel is left to wonder, “Who is wrestling with us.” And, just like Jacob came to realize this angel is the Lord. After the Old Testament, enter Jesus. He doesn’t disappear in the night, though. He comes to reveal his light. Jesus coming to this earth is the people seeing God face-to-face. Jesus came not only to wrestle with people, but to wrestle with our own sin. And in wrestling with our sin, it looked like he lost. He took people’s sinfulness on himself and paid the punishment we deserved. And on the cross judgment was poured out on him so mercy could extend to all who trust him. And, in rising from the dead on the third day, he conquered death and rose victorious. Truly, Jesus wrestles and prevails.

Now, the question remains for the nation of Israel even today. Will they continue to grasp for control or submit. Do they see Jesus? But the question comes to everyone here today: **Will we experience God prevailing over us in his mercy through judgments or will we continue to try to wrestle against the Lord?** Do we behold Jesus? Earlier I told you this story is very personal for me. I’ve wrestled with God through chronic physical pain. I’ve wrestled with God over finances and the stress of taking care of my family. I’ve wrestled with God over spiritual struggles and temptations. God has shown me my sin. He has disciplined me. He has allowed me to go through painful circumstances. Can you relate? Have you gone through these things? Now, where are you today? Are you still heel-grabbing for control? Or, do you see that through God’s judgments and through God’s discipline that his design is to give you mercy. you still saying, “God, you did this and that, and that was wrong!” Or, maybe you’re saying, “Why is God allowing me to wrestle for so long? Why do these things happen over and over and over again?” Honestly, we don’t know those answers. Why did God wait so long for Jacob? But right now, you could know God’s prevailing grace. Will cry out to God for superior blessing – the ability to trust him no matter what? You will have continued trials in this broken world, like Jacob – but God has a grace that comforts you and reminds you of your security in him. It’s grace found in beholding the gloriousness of his glory! He is merciful and gracious.

I remember years ago praying that God would do whatever it takes to increase my passion for him. I remember praying, “Even if that means I limp the rest of my life.” Do you know what year that was? I believe it was 2017 – the same year I began having leg issues. Could God take it all away. Sure. Has he? No. But you know what God has done? He allowed me to wrestle with him – and he prevailed. **He gave me the miracle of a limp, and through faith, I’ve won, too.**

Now, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 2 – all of us who trust Jesus are also the children of Abraham. We too are Isra-EL. We are people God prevails over. Do you trust Jesus? **Do you see God’s mercy shining through the difficulties, pains and even judgments in your life? Can you resonate even with the apostle James’ words that mercy triumphs over judgment? Do you see that Israel’s story is yours? Oh, how I pray we’d encounter Jesus in this way and be able to say, “Isra-EL”: God wrestles and wins!**