

Special Messages of 2017

The Names We Have Been Given

Unedited Transcript

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My name's Zach and I am so glad and honored to be with y'all this morning. It's a little bit weird for me because Pat's son John was in my class growing up and I remember thinking like, "Oh wow, your dad's like an author. He's like a big deal," and so to be here at something that he runs, I don't know, it's just a little bit weird for me. So I'm glad to be here. I'm so thankful for Pat and what Man in the Mirror does, and so with that, would you guys join me in prayer?

Father God, we thank You that You love us. That You are a father to us, and Father, You know each one of the men in this room. You know the week that they've had. You know what their day holds. You know the things that they bring into this room that maybe no one knows but You, and so Father, I ask that You would take this time and You would speak directly to each of our hearts. That whatever it is we most need to hear in this moment You would speak. And Father, I surrender myself to You. I surrender the things that I've thought about, the things that I've prepared and studied. I give You my mind and my heart. I give it all to You to be used however You so choose, but please Father, by Your spirit, come and speak to us, Your children. In Jesus name, Amen.

Well, when Pat asked me to come and speak and I thought, all right. I'm speaking to a room full of men, the thought that came to mind was about names, like the names that we've been given, the names that have been called us and how do we find out what our true name is?

If you're like me, you've been called a lot of things, and probably when I say, what names have you been called? You probably go back to a time from your childhood where a name was given you that brought on some shame or felt like you needed to hide or you never wanted to feel the weight of that name again.

I remember when I was in sixth grade, we were at PE and we were playing football, and the quarterback threw me this great pass that was right where I should have been able to catch it. The ball came and it hit my chest and it bounced off. So from that point on, all my friends called me Rubbermaid, and so that was kind of like a name that was given me, and now I've got five kids, but my two oldest boys love football. And y'all, even as a 36-year-old man, when we go throw the football outside, I'm so worried that it's going to bounce off me and my kids are going to make fun of me, and so that name has kind of stuck. It's kind of carried this weight, like, oh man, I don't want to be caught in this same situation again.

Now that's kind of a silly name to be given, but I'm sure we've all had times in our lives where something was said of us that stuck, that's actually affected the way that we've made decisions. Dan Allender, in his book *To Be Told* says this, "The journey of our story truly begins when we start to see that the name we have been given is not our truest name. Our drama has to do with both how we lost our path and our name and how we stumble forward to hear the voice of our author and namer. We often lost our path

and our name due to the stories and the names we acquire from our experiences." So we've got all kinds of names that we have to work through in order to discover what it is our true name is.

A recent CNN article came out. It was very interesting. It talked about how we've emasculated men with porn and video games. As I read the article and as I reflected on what it was saying, it made sense to me because most men at some point in our lives have been called a loser. At some point in our lives we've been told that we don't have what it takes, maybe from a father, maybe from a boss, maybe from a peer. And so it makes perfect sense. If you've been told you don't have what it takes and that name has stuck, of course you're going to pursue a girl who can't say no and an enemy who can't draw blood.

We've all been given names like that that aren't our true names. So how do we discover what our true name is? Well, today we're going to look at one of my favorite stories in the Old Testament and it takes place a night in the life of Jacob. If you're not familiar with Jacob, I want to give you a quick synopsis of his story.

Jacob was a twin. If you remember his birth, his older brother Esau came out first and we're told Jacob was holding onto his heel as they came out, and so right from the beginning you know there's going to be competition between these two men.

Esau, we learn, grows up to be a very strong man. He's a hunter. We're told he's very hairy. He's kind of the definition of a man's man. He's also his father's favorite. His father is Isaac. What we're told about Jacob as he grows up is that Jacob is a shepherd. Jacob is really close to his mom. We're told that Jacob isn't very hairy, so he's kind of a hairless mama's boy you would say, and so you've got this man's man and this hairless mama's boy and they're constantly in competition with one another.

Well, towards the end of their father's life, Isaac, it was customary for the father to pass on a blessing to the first born. Well, Jacob really wanted that blessing, and his mom really wanted him to have that blessing, and so they sent Esau out on a hunt. Said, "Hey, go catch some food. We're going to have a big feast to celebrate the blessing, so you go do that," and while he was doing that, Jacob and his mom dressed him up in a hairy costume and he went in to his dying father and his dying father pronounced the blessing on him, which is funny to me because at some point Jacob had to realize Esau was coming back, right? This wasn't going to bode well for him.

But he did it anyways, and as soon as Esau gets back, he's angry. He threatens to take Jacob's life, and so Jacob has to flee. He has to go off to a distant land. So he leaves everything behind because he's angered his brother so much for stealing the blessing.

So as Jacob is away in a far, distant land, we're told that God provides for him. In fact, he gets married twice. He has two wives, Leah and Rachel. He begins having kids. He's the father of the tribes of Israel, so he has 12 sons. Not only that, he has servants and livestock. We're told that he just grows tremendously in wealth.

After a number of years of being away from home, he gets homesick and he decides he wants to go home, and so he starts to make the journey back home, but he hears that his brother Esau knows that he's coming and has sent an army out to meet him. Well, Jacob devises a plan. He's always coming up with a plan. He decides, "All right, I'm going to break my family and my servants and my livestock into two halves, and I'll send one on one path home and one on the other path home so that if Esau comes

upon one half and he decides to kill them all, at least I'll still have half," which can you imagine sending them out that way? Like, "Good luck, family! I don't know which one of you is going to survive," but that's what he does!

So where we're going to pick up the story is right after he's separated his family and he's sent them on different paths and we find him alone at night, and that's where we'll start. We're in Genesis 32 starting in Verse 24. "So Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.' But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.'

The man asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Jacob,' he answered. Then the man said, 'Your name will no longer be Jacob but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.' Jacob said, 'Please tell me your name.' But he replied, 'Why do you ask my name?' Then he blessed him there.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'It is because I saw God face to face and yet my life was spared.' The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel and he was limping because of his hip. Therefore, to this day, the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon. This is God's Word."

To know our true name is to struggle with God. What happened at the fall when man turned against God and ate the fruit that God told us not to eat? What was the lie that we believed? We believed that we could be like God. The serpent told Adam and Eve, "Hey, you're not all that you can be. You can actually be so much more than this. You can be so much greater than this! You've got a God who's a withholding God. So eat this and you will be like God," and so at the core of our fallen nature is that we think we know best.

Because of the fall, we fight against dependence. We seek self-sufficiency. We were created though to be needy. We were created from the very beginning to be dependent, to be dependent on God and others. When God created man, He said, "Man is very good," but He said, "There's one thing that's not good. It's not good that man should be alone."

So in our actual creation, we were made to be dependent, but because of the fall we now seek independence. We now are people who constantly are striving, and so in our striving we've been given names by others, but we've also given ourselves names, names that declare our independence, and so at the very beginning, we have to know in order to find out what our true name is, we have to admit that we're fighting God. That every single one of us are fighting God.

The Apostle Paul in Romans 5:10 says that we are in fact enemies of God. That's why one of the first steps in any recovery program is to admit that we're powerless, that we've been fighting a battle that ultimately we cannot win.

My wife always says, "The truest thing about us this side of Heaven is our struggle," and so if we want to discover our true name, we have to first admit that we're in a fight, and when we do that, we'll actually discover some things. We'll discover who God is.

I love how in this story it begins by saying, "And Jacob was alone and he wrestled with a man until daybreak." The story begins with us not knowing who Jacob wrestled. It's not until we get to the end of the story that we actually find out that this whole time Jacob has not been wrestling with a man. He's been wrestling with God Himself.

So think about that for a second. Jacob begins wrestling with someone that he assumed was a man. What does that tell us about God? It tells us that God condescended to such a point, God put on such humility that we're even told at one point in the fight that God realizes that He's about to be overtaken by Jacob. That means God made Himself so weak that a hairless mama's boy almost overtook him. That's weak! That's humble! What condescension!

And so the very first thing we learn about God when we realize that we're fighting Him is how weak and vulnerable He will make Himself to engage us in the fight. He didn't have to do that. And we see His power because when Jacob is about to overtake God, God realizes that that's about to happen, and what does He do? It says He simply touches his hip socket and it's wrenched out of place. He's had that amount of power this whole time, but yet He's laid it aside so that He can engage Jacob in this fight.

What else do we discover about God in this fight? Well, we discover that by engaging in it, God validates it. That whatever you have against Him, whatever your struggle is, God wants to go in the boxing rink with you. He wants to fight it out with you.

A lot of us have grown up believing that we have to protect God from our actual feelings, that if we struggle with doubt or anger or we have some issues with Him, that that's just something we have to keep to ourself. But no! This fight shows us that God validates that and says, "I want you to bring it to Me. I want you to wrestle through it with Me."

And when does Jacob realize who he's fighting? He realizes it when he sees His power. When his hip is touched and all of the sudden it's wrenched out of place, and what is Jacob's response? Well, I think if I were to be fighting with someone and then realize that they have that kind of power, I'm going to be scared to death and I'm going to try to get out of it. I'm going to try to run away.

God even tells him at one point, "Hey, you better let Me go because it's about to be daylight, and in order to see Me in the daylight means that you will surely die." But what does Jacob do? It says Jacob grabs hold of Him even under the threat of death. Why? Why was Jacob not scared of Him? Because God first condescended, because God first humbled Himself and made Himself vulnerable to Jacob that all of the sudden, he's not fearful anymore. He holds on to God even when it means risking his own life.

Jacob also discovers who he really is. God asked him what his name is, and Jacob says, "Jacob." Now Jacob means liar. It means deceiver, and throughout all of Jacob's life, he has tried to manipulate people. He's tried to spin things. He's tried to kind of orchestrate how things play out, but what I love about this is when God asked him his name, there's no spin. He just says it. He just says, "Jacob." He just says, "Liar."

But then God's response to him is what's so amazing to me. God looks at him and He says, "You will no longer be called Jacob but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with man and have overcome." See, God tells Jacob who he really is. God looks at Jacob and he says, "You will no longer be

defined by your sin. In fact, you are defined now by how I see you and what I had in mind when I thought you up."

But see, because of God's grace, because God humbled Himself in such a way to engage Jacob in this fight, Jacob for the first time I think felt free to tell the truth about himself. He didn't hide anymore. He just owned his sin, and in doing that, God actually told him who he really is.

I was meeting with a young man not too long ago who's struggling with his sexuality and he's had a pretty rough time. He's in high school, and as we were sitting across from each other and he was talking about his life and his struggle, what I kept seeing was just this very strong man. He's had to fight through a bunch of things, and I told him that, and as soon as I told him that, he just started crying almost uncontrollably, and when I asked him why, he said, "Because no one's ever called me a man before." But that's who he is.

My wife and I, we were going through a really rough time a few years ago. I was in a really dark place. A lot of the things that I had hoped to achieve in life were not going the way I thought and I was really taking it out on her and our kids, and for a while I didn't know if our marriage would survive, but I have a really good wife. When I would be at my worst, when I would be at my ugliest, she would be so mad at me, but she would look at me and she would say, "Zach, you've really hurt me. This isn't fair. You shouldn't treat me this way, but I know this isn't who you are. I know this isn't who you are."

What kept us together was that she had vision for who I was apart from my sin and she didn't allow my sin to define me, and that's what God does when we wrestle with Him if He renames us and says, "You're no longer defined by your sin." And then God blesses Jacob. What had Jacob been looking for his whole life?

There's an interesting phrase or an interesting sentence in some of the preceding verses with Jacob in regards to his brother Esau. When he separates the family and he sends them on two different paths, he also sends with them gifts for Esau, and he thinks, "Well, you know, if I send these gifts ahead, maybe, maybe he'll accept me." That's what I think Jacob's been looking for his whole life, and he says, "Perhaps now he will accept me." Jacob wanted to hear words of acceptance and blessing so much that at one point he was willing to dress up in a costume to hear words intended for someone else.

That's us sometimes. Sometimes we dress up. Sometimes we wear a mask. Sometimes we make personas in order to hear words of acceptance and blessing that were actually never intended for us. See, the problem when we wear a mask, when we're not true to who we are, when we get loved, it's not us who's getting loved. It's the mask we're wearing that gets loved. That's what Jacob wanted. His whole life he had been putting on this act just so that he could hear words of blessing.

But then it says, "God blesses Jacob." What I find interesting about this one little verse in this chapter is we're not told what those words of blessing were. A blessing is always words. It's not like some magical like, "I bless you." A blessing is a benediction. It's words spoken, and so God spoke some words to Jacob, but we don't know what they are. They aren't recorded here, and the reason I think we don't know what they are is because the words were so personal and intimate and intended only for Jacob.

God blessed him by saying to him what he most longed to hear his whole life. What words have you been longing to hear your whole life? You can only hear them if you get into the battle with God, if you

engage in the struggle, and if you do that, He will speak the words that you've been longing your whole life to hear, that are meant only for you.

Notice too that it is when Jacob is at his weakest that he receives the blessing. When he got the blessing, we're told he also got lameness. Now for a self-sufficient person, a person who thinks that they are a god, an encounter with the real God always leaves a wound. And we're supposed to remember and tell others about that wound.

I love the last verse of this passage. It says the Israelites stopped eating a particular part of the tendon because that was a reminder of this night with Jacob and God. See, everyone needed to hear and remember about the night that Jacob wrestled God.

Paul rejoiced. The Apostle Paul rejoiced in the thorn in his flesh because it was a reminder of his need for his Savior. He boasted in his weakness. Why? So that he could tell others the story of the grace of Jesus. All of us have stories like that. Your story told truthfully is good news for others.

As you engage in the battle, as you engage in the struggle, as you receive the blessing of God, you will also receive a limp, and God does that intentionally because He doesn't want you to keep this to yourself. He wants you to share truthfully with other people. There are other men around you who think you have it all together, who think that they'll never be acceptable to God because you do it right, because you come here and you read your Bible and you appear to have a great family or whatever. They think that they're disqualified from God's grace and mercy because you have it together. Your job is to tell the truth. Boast in your weakness so that God's grace will be on display. Your story told truthfully is good news for other people.

I want to end with this. There's only one place in scripture where this night is recounted by someone else. In the book of Hosea, the Prophet Hosea, in Hosea 12:4, it's mentioned this night with Jacob and God. It says this, "He struggled with God and overcame Him. He wept and begged for His favor."

As I reflected on that night, and especially given the context that Hosea gives it where there's battling and there's wrestling and there's struggle, but there's also tears, seeing Jacob's tears mixed with sweat, I couldn't help but think of another man who wrestled all night with God, whose tears mixed with sweat as well.

We're told that on the night that Jesus was betrayed, He met alone with God in a garden and He was wrestling with God. He was saying, "God, if there is any way that You can accomplish what You want to accomplish apart from what is the plan, let's do that." He was battling, He was wrestling with God, and He began weeping, and we're told He was in such excruciating agony over what was being asked of Him, that not only was He sweating but He was sweating drops of blood. But ultimately, Jesus decides to hold onto the plan.

We're told Jacob holds on, even under the threat of death, but Jesus held on to the cross to the point of death, and unlike Jacob who held onto God to secure a blessing for himself, Jesus held on to secure a blessing for us. So that we could know our true name. So that we could know our worth.

You are loved, and as you struggle, we have to remember that we're loved. We have to remember that we have a God who condescends, who comes to such a weak and humble and vulnerable place so that

He can engage with us. That we have a God who validates our fears and our doubts and our anger by engaging us in the fight. He doesn't just destroy us. He says, "Bring it all. Bring your boxing gloves. I'm ready."

Not only that. We have a God who wants for us to be truthful about who we are, to admit our sins so that He can redefine us. So that He can say, "Yes, you've been living this way, but that's not who you are. In fact, I have a new name for you. I have a name that I had had in mind for you way before you ever even existed. I had something specific in mind when I thought you up, and now because you fought Me, now because you've wrestled through your stuff, now because you've admitted your sinfulness, I can now tell you who you are and you can begin to truly live that out."

So if you want to begin living into your true identity, into your true name, you've got to admit that you're in a fight. You've got to struggle with God. You've got to be truthful and then ultimately, you have to listen for Him to say what your true name is, and it will have something to do with being a son loved completely by Him. Let's pray.

Father God, I thank you for Jacob. I thank you that Your scripture is full of men who are broken and messed up like us who are our example. Father, I pray that as we wrestle through some of the names that we've been given, some of the identities that we've even chosen, that we would see that they are all just a costume. That our true name only can be heard from Your mouth. So Father, I pray that as men, we would seek out that name. That we would want to live into the name that is most true. That we are a beloved son of You. And we pray all of this in the one who secured the blessing for us by His death, Jesus Christ, and it's in Him we pray. Amen.