

To Walk with a Limp – Jacob Wrestles with God

*Bible commentary by Joseph F. Harwood
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In Genesis 32:22-32, we read the account of the time when Jacob wrestled with God for a blessing, and he came away walking with a limp. We might wonder why God, in response to a petition from Jacob for His blessing, would afflict him in such a way that he would afterward walk with a limp.

God fully intends to bless His people, not with things that bring temporal gratification, but with things that have eternal value (Consider Luke 6:20-26). Such blessings come about through God working in our lives as His people to bear fruit to His glory, and in fact, this bearing of fruit is evidence that we are in truth Jesus' disciples (John 15:8).

Jesus revealed the way in which spiritual fruit is born in our lives through the teaching that He gave in John 12:24-26. Using a grain of wheat as a metaphor to symbolize His life and the lives of all who will follow Him, He taught that *unless* a “grain of wheat” falls to the ground and “dies”, it abides alone, but if it “dies”, it bears much fruit (Verse 24).

Immediately following in verse 25, Jesus said that he who loves his life will lose it, but he who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life. In verse 26, He said that everyone who serves Him must follow Him, and that where He was, His servant would also be.

Jesus was, at the time He gave this teaching, at the point of laying down His life to die on the cross for the sins of His people (Matthew 1:21). Through the suffering that God had ordained for His life, He would bear the fruit of “bringing many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10).

Let us call to mind again that Jesus taught in John 12:24-26 that everyone who serves Him *must follow Him* (verse 26). This means that we also, as Jesus did, will bear fruit in our lives, not through suffering for wrongdoing (1 Peter 4:15), but through suffering “according to the will of God” (1 Peter 4:19). And we

will endure these sufferings in our lives according to God's plan and purpose for each of us individually. Such sufferings are for us a share in the sufferings of Christ, which every believer will experience, in order that we may also share in His eternal glory (Romans 8:17).

So, spiritual fruit born to God's glory brings about the eternal blessings of God, and this fruit comes about through the "death" of the "grain of wheat," as Jesus taught in John 12:24. That grain of wheat symbolized not only Jesus' life, but it symbolizes our lives as well, as those who serve Him and must follow Him (John 12:26). The "death" of the grain of wheat is symbolic of the death, or the loss, of all that we want to have, or keep, or experience, or enjoy for ourselves in this life, if God should require it of us. (Consider Matthew 26:39, Luke 14:27, 33).

As we suffer in this way, experiencing the "death" of things that we want for ourselves in this life, we will share in the sufferings of Christ. (Consider Isaiah 53). And through these sufferings we will follow Jesus and bear fruit to the glory of God.

The things that we want for ourselves and request from God our Father may be completely honorable, with no sin in them at all, but God may will other things and other places of service for our lives (Jeremiah 10:23). God Himself will work in our lives to bring these things to pass, as He has ordained them for each of us individually.

In Mark 14, we read:

They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here until I have prayed."

And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled.

And He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch."

And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by.

And He was saying, "***Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.***" (Mark 14:32-36, emphasis added)

As the passage continues, we see that Jesus prayed to His Father with the same request two more times. And in verses 41-50, we see that Jesus received the

answer to His prayers. His Father would not remove the cup of suffering that He was facing. It was His Father's will that He suffer and die on Calvary's cross to bring many sons to glory.

When we pray to our sovereign God for His blessing in our life, for something that we want for ourselves, or for some burden to be removed, His answer will be revealed as the circumstances of our life unfold. When our circumstances reveal that God's answer to our request is "no", as it was for Jesus in Gethsemane, then we will drink from Jesus' cup; we will be baptized with the baptism He was baptized with (Mark 10:35-40). And we will be called upon to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, and follow Him (Luke 9:23). As we experience these sufferings and losses in our lives, we will share in Jesus' sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory (Romans 8:17).

Jesus taught us that not even an event as small as the death of one sparrow occurs apart from the sovereign will of God the Father. He taught us further that God is infinitely aware of every detail of our lives, even down to the number of hairs on our head (Matthew 10:29-31). God ordains all the events of our lives as they happen to each of us (Psalm 139:16).

The limp that Jacob experienced when he wrestled with God for a blessing was a foreshadowing of the share in the sufferings of Christ that every believer must experience in order to bear fruit, and thereby realize the blessing of a share in His eternal glory (John 12:24-26, Romans 8:17). The hard and painful things, and the bitter losses that we experience and know that we will not recover from in this lifetime, will cause us to "walk with a limp", as Jacob did. However, God's word promises us that through these sufferings we will bear fruit, and they will all work together for our good and blessing together with Christ in eternity (Romans 8:28).