

## **Wrestling with a God you can't quite get hold of!**

*Genesis 32<sup>22-31</sup>; Psalm 121; 2 Timothy 3<sup>14-45</sup>; Luke 18<sup>1-8</sup>*

*Proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke and encourage with utmost patience in teaching  
[2 Timothy 4<sup>2</sup>]*

If we are honest, all of us, from time to time, wrestle with God. We almost envy Jacob, because at least the God with whom he wrestled was a God he could get hold of, while our struggles can often begin by finding the God we want to struggle with!

- ✠ We recognise the strength of the parable when the woman has the resilience to pester the Judge into submission and we understand the extension - that as Christians we should have the tenacity to bother God so that he does what we want (which goes against a great deal of New Testament teaching on prayer).

But Luke probably wants us to understand that the ability to influence a lazy, malleable judge (obviously a Gentile as Jewish matters were dealt with by the Elders) stands in stark contrast to the prayer that grows out of a relationship with a God who knows and loves us, a God restricted by his inability to do any less than the best for us, even if we don't understand it at the time.

Finding a God you can keep hold of when prayer becomes desperate isn't something that I can give bland assurances about. The key word in the text is **justice** - a justice that has to be prised out of a flawed human or a justice that is prized by God and his people.

- ✠ We applaud Paul's conviction that **all Scripture is inspired by God** and that it is useful for **teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness**. When we read the Bible it is a simple fact that some of it is challenging, some of it is affirming, some of it is confusing and there are bits that are thoroughly distasteful.

Yet, we have to be quite sure that we understand, as I am sure Paul wants Timothy to understand in this personal letter to him, that we don't worship Scripture in itself, we worship the God whom we perceive in Scripture. When you plough through the passages about how the furnishings of the Temple are assembled, what do you perceive about the God who is worthy of the best we can offer in worship; when you read the passages of nations

being displaced and of the genocide that so often accompanies that, when you read it through the lens that understands the expectations of the times, you read of a God who is for you even if that means excluding others.

- ✠ The Psalmist asks that question, **where does my help come from?** A question not unfamiliar to most of us. Were it not for the fact that the writer is in trouble from what is seen on the hills, it could appear shallow. But precisely because he is in trouble, that validates the confidence that God will shield against all known threats and guarantee safe passage, **IS** faith in action.
- ✠ Back we come to Jacob, who despite being a Patriarch of the Hebrew people, isn't a nice chap. He is worried about his twin brothers' reaction all these years after he tricked him out of his father, Isaac's, blessing. He is putting the women, servants and his children first, in case there is any wrath to be absorbed. Staying safely behind I doubt he was expecting God to turn up and to wrestle with him.

What a lesson this is on the restraint God shows - just like my grandfather did with me when or after watching the wrestling on TV on a Saturday afternoon - of match Jacob just above the level of his strength and of leaving Jacob with a reminder of God's grace: the limp isn't evidence of a hurt inflicted but of the restraint of grace.

It doesn't really matter that we don't fully understand all of Scripture; nor does it matter that we don't comprehend why God responds to honest prayers in the way that he does; nor does it matter that we can't quite get a hold of God to wrestle him into submission; and it certainly doesn't matter that we can't quite accept why the life of faith sometimes leaves us wounded when we anticipated that it should have been 'Hallelujah! All the way!'

It does matter that we perceive in all that happens to us and around us the hand of God working for justice; it matters that we are shaped by Scripture and that Scripture isn't what is left when we cut out the bits we don't like; it matters that we know God is for us; it does matter that, even in the wounds, we perceive grace.

It isn't so important that you get hold of God - but it is vital that God holds you!