

GENESIS 32: 22-32
"THE GOD WHO SETTLES ACCOUNTS (BEFORE BLESSING US)"

Illustration of Cass Bank asking us questions about our Audit every year. Banks are meticulous about settling of accounts.

Lincoln is gracious when he asks us these questions.

God **endows us with specific gifts**, but our **gifting sometimes has a dark side**.

An **evangelist has an entrepreneurial gift**, but he may be unstable and have a low attention span. **A pastor can be stable and sober**, but sometimes he **may be too careful** and not entrepreneurial enough. He may miss opportunities.

Jacob's mixed gifts: diligent, a **fighter**, **yearning for God** and for blessings from him. But **calculating, deceiving**, scheming in his search for the blessing.

God recognized his virtues and his calling, but he could not use him to the level that he wanted with his character and spiritual defects.

He had to break him, purify him, prune him.

When God calls each of us, **he does an assessment of our character flaws and spiritual needs**.

He will then spend a lot of time and effort pruning us and shaping us. He will deal with us much **like a life coach** deals with a client in order to develop us in the light of our weaknesses.

Jacob's **twenty-year journey in Laban's home**, his sojourn there, was **a journey toward finding himself**, and confronting the areas of sin in his life.

With **Laban Jacob meets his match**, another deceiver just like him.

God **gives him an opponent to worthy of his own treacherous character**. It is a **trip to the desert**, like Moses. For his spiritual and character formation.

For him to **grow up, get married, have children**, to acquire **property, gravitas and spiritual heft**.

The birth of Sonia before we become pastors. It was necessary for our future spiritual position.

This is about the **formation of one who is to be a patriarch** of Israel. He is not just any person.

The bigger the call, the more demanding the process of formation has to be.

To shape and use us, God has to settle accounts with us sometimes. His justice and integrity demand it.

God is a **God of settled accounts**. (**Cass Bank** and LVM's yearly questions).

He **doesn't leave us with our inconsistencies or spiritual debts**. He had to work on Jacob's character.

And **frequently, to achieve this he places us in the desert. Like Elijah**.

He struggles with us in **hand to hand combat** until he overcomes us. But in the process he blesses us.

And sometimes he **crucifies** us. He takes us through places of **personal confrontation**. Of shame. Of personal failure Like **David**. He disqualifies us. Like **Peter**.

God **does not like loose ends**.

Interesting is **the incident with Laban** after Jacob **clandestinely** leaves his home.

God **does not want Jacob to flee clandestinely**, but to leave **with dignity**, having settled accounts with his father-in-law.

That is why Laban persecutes him, so that Jacob's name is cleared, and so that he **comes out with honor**, as he should, being recognized by Laban for who he is, **a prince of God**, not just any thief.

Sometimes, during the process of our formation, God brings us to **terrifying moments, not to destroy us, but to bless us**, to force us to act according to what we truly are, **princes of God representing his kingdom**.

Our sin has led us to personal shame, and **what we want to do is hide and flee**, and God tells us: "This is not how a servant of mine proceeds."

This happened to David in the incident with **Bathsheba** and Uriah. He had to be confronted.

"**You have to confront the situation**, and even if it is unpleasant you have to do it. But I will make sure you are not **disgraced and destroyed** in the process."

"I will cover you and defend you, I will preserve your honor. I **will even bless you in the process**. But you have to go through the bitter pill of settling accounts".

Hank Moses, Harvard and the Modern Languages department award, after my work as a Resident Adviser.

Jacob has **four head-on encounters with God** during his spiritual journey.

We don't have time to discuss them all. The **third meeting** in **Peniel** ("Face of God") is the most powerful and evocative of all.

Without a doubt, it is **a very symbolic struggle** that God himself originates.

And in which God himself is involved.

The angel is **the Angel of the Lord**, a projection of God Himself.

Gustave Doré's painting. Show it.

All the themes of Jacob's life are found here:

Jacob the **fighter**, the warrior.

Jacob the **persistent** and stubborn.

Jacob the one who has an **insatiable appetite** for God's blessing and spiritual things.

Jacob the one who **always gets what he sets his mind to**, no matter what the means are.

Through this titanic struggle, several things happen.

Doré's painting shows that the angel is in control at all times. He could throw Jacob down the precipice if he wanted to.

He **doesn't break a sweat**. He is in control. Like a dad holding a kid who's out of control until he calms down.

Finally, the angel **dislodges Jacob's hip** to force him to let go, showing that he has ultimate power.

But in a sense, Jacob has won.

Sometimes God **likes us to "beat" him in a struggle**. The Syrophenician woman "defeated" Jesus. The woman with the issue of blood outsmarted him. Bartimaeus the blind man overcame Jesus' ignoring him.

That **persistence that pesters God but also honors God** simultaneously. The friend at midnight.

It indicates that we believe in him, that we take the things of **His Kingdom seriously**.

But also **those encounters between God** and our own sinful humanity **can be dangerous**.

The angel dislodges Jacob's hip.

For the rest of his life, **Jacob would walk with a limp**. An illustration of **his humbling and discipline**.

That confrontation occurs just before Jacob has another encounter that constitutes another **settling of accounts that ends in honor**: the encounter with his brother/enemy Esau.

Describe the encounter. The ritual of sending Esau all kinds of gifts in succession. Esau honors Jacob and forgives him.

Jacob feared humiliation. But now he is treated according to his new rank as patriarch of God's spiritual family.