**Struggle**

Based on [Genesis 32:22-32](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Ge32.22-32)

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Lenten Midweek 2

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The season of Lent is a penitential season, that means it is a season of repentance and sorrow over sins. **But even more generally, Lent is touches upon the struggle of life as a sanctified Child of God. Life won’t be easy this side of heaven. Life in this world as a christian is a struggle. It is a struggle against evil, but it is also a struggle with God.**

The struggle against evil is evident. We talked about temptation last week, which is always the purpose of evil. The powers that are opposed to God do not simply seek to hurt and injure--evil seeks to devour and consume. The evil one is not satisfied with hurting the body, he wants to corrupt the soul.

To give in to evil and forsake God is a fools bargain, as anyone with a moment’s sober reflection would understand. Jesus put’s it plainly, “**For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?**” The devil doesn’t want to steal your soul; he can’t take it by force. It is his ambition that, through constant attacks, and his sweet persuasions he can convince the faithful to give up their faith to make life easier. He wants you to give it up freely by giving in to temptation, to turn away from God’s word for temporary gain, to sell your birthright for a mess of porridge. To rebuke and resist the devil in this is our struggle against evil.

But there is also a struggle with God, a striving--not against Him--but *with* Him as is apparent in the Scriptures and the Christian life. There is a literal struggle with God in the Old Testament. It is the account of how Jacob gets his new name, “Israel”. “**Israel’ means “to struggle with God”. He was given this name by God because he wrestled with God until the morning**. He was not struggling with God to conquer him, instead he wanted a blessing. And he would not give up or let go until God blessed him.

This is a mysterious event that has led theologians to much speculation. But one thing it clearly teaches is that there is a way to struggle with God that is not rebellion, that is not impiety, that is not blasphemy. It is a struggle that is edifying and a way in which God disciplines those whom He loves.

One very helpful example of the pious struggle with God is prayer. Prayer is an activity of all the saints, and it is a pious struggle with God. **It presumes to ask God for blessings, and holds God to his promises.** In the parable of the persistent widow, Jesus describes a woman is praised for her resolve in returning to the judge repeatedly for help. And the concept is this, if one hungry for justice does not weary in asking earthly judges (judges who are sinful and reluctant); how much more will one who hungers for righteousness never grow weary in asking God, (a judge who is righteous and eager to give us all things!)

Consider the Psalms. The Psalms is the songbook and prayerbook of the nation of Israel. The verses are like a dance with God, or perhaps a struggle. As prayers they are not very efficient. **They don’t always get right to the point, and you could paraphrase their message in a few lines. But they are drawn out, patient complaints, petitions, and praises to God.**  The structure of some are just that way. They first list a complaint about present trials, and then give a recounting of God’s faithfulness in the past, and finally the psalmist confesses assurance that he will come and has come to lift up the psalmist through his prayer.

For example, the 13th Psalm begins this way, “**How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?**” The scriptures are true, and so the Psalmist is not lying here or exaggerating his suffering, or complaining without cause. God has forgotten him in a sense, and has hidden his face from him, which is the right of God who works in a mysterious way. But the psalmist does not complain in order to bring a charge against God or curse Him. He doesn’t accuse God of wrongdoing or divine malfeasance. Instead he struggles piously with this absence of God, in order to steep himself in the Word, and draw strength from the knowledge of God.

And so he calls upon the Lord again, and he remembers his faith. He knows that he has trusted in God and God won’t let him down. He moves from complaint, to confidence until the final verse which is pure thankfulness and rejoicing, “**I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.**” Such confidence in God in the midst of suffering, this is truly the work of the Holy Spirit. So, when we struggle against God we perish in sin; but when we struggle with God, we grow in holiness and love.

There are many accounts of those who piously struggle with Jesus, though no actual wrestling happens. Jesus is always speaking in parables so that, “s**eeing they may not believe, and hearing they may not understand.**” His parables were generally not understood by his disciples, and became impatient with him and left him. But the twelve continued to follow Jesus struggling with both the knowledge that he is the Lord, but also with a great number of things he did that they just didn’t understand…things that even went against what they expected him to be and to do.

He taught a crowd that he is the bread of life, that whoever eats his flesh and drinks his blood will have eternal life. Because of this hard and cryptic teaching, many of his disciples left him, but Peter said, “Lord to whom shall we go…you have the words of eternal life.” Jesus never says he is the Son of God, but when others say it, he affirms them. It might seem coy, or evasive. But the faithful do not lose patience with God or his Son. He is God and behaves as though he has all the time in the world. And he does, for “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Any struggle you have only seems long as you are going through it, but when it has finally passed, it is like a dream. For now, the struggle is long, but always temporary for the children of God. In the words of St. Paul, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” As inheritors of that glory, through the forgiveness we have in Christ, let us struggle with God trusting in his will to work all things for our good.