

Wrestling Jacob

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Introduction

- A two-part drama
- Genesis 32:24-31
 - ▶ Audacity of the story
 - ▶ Enriched with Gospel themes
 - OT Characters
 - NT experience

Large Structure

- Two main sections, seven stanzas each
- Refrains
 - ▶ First Refrain — the words of a seeker.
 - ▶ Second Refrain — turning point, seeker becomes finder

Poetic Devices

- Highly active words — *wrestle, misery strugglest unutterable superior* - many more.
- Alliteration — “nature” and “name” – central dramatic and theological elements - many more.

The Hymn

For the text, please refer to the hymn handouts.

- **Section I, Stanzas 1-4**
 - ▶ An important theme: Darkness to Day
 - ▶ Personal pronouns draw the singer into the heart of the conflict
 - ▶ The wrestler’s name
 - ▶ Three important questions and their answers
 - ▶ Progression: unknown to known
 - ▶ Biblical sense of knowing:
 - Jn 17:3 this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.
 - ▶ **Sing** Stanzas 1-4. Tune: WRESTLING JACOB

- **Section I, Stanzas 5-7**
 - ▶ An important change from stanza four to five
 - ▶ The Central Paradox
 - ▶ The brokenness by which a Christian conquers
 - ▶ Weakness that will itself become triumph!
 - ▶ All of grace
 - The touch to Jacob's thigh
 - The Wrestler's strength is gone
 - Anadiplosis: *strength, fall, stand*
- ▶ **Sing** Stanzas 5-7. Tune: VERNON (Hesperian Harp, 1874)

Transition

- The case for stanza 8
 - ▶ First mention of Traveller's new name
 - ▶ New refrain partly introduced
 - ▶ Two sections of seven stanzas
 - ▶ The Wrestler's "nature dies" in 7
- The case for stanza 9
 - ▶ Still seeking in 8
 - ▶ 8:6 "*if thy name is Love*"
 - ▶ Answer (Name) comes and rejoicing begins in 9

The Drama of the Names

- The wrestler never openly states his name
- Intense pleading does not uncover the Traveller's name until stanza 9
 - ▶ point of arrival 11:1 — "unknown" of 1:1 resolves into "I know thee"
- A meaningful irony:
 - ▶ The only names actually spoken in the narrative are the Traveller's names—
 - ▶ Traveller
 - ▶ Especially, his "new" name, Love

What is the Same

- ▶ a man struggles with God ▶prevails ▶obtains a name and a blessing

What is Different

Genesis 32

Jacob asks for a blessing v. 26

Jacob's adversary asks Jacob for his name
Jacob gives his own name v. 27

The new name is given to Jacob by his adversary
v. 28

Jacob asks his adversary for his name
and the adversary refuses to answer
v. 29

Jacob is blessed v. 29
Jacob's new name

showed that he had been given a new nature v. 28

The Hymn

The wrestler asks for the Traveller's name 2:5 ff

The Traveller's request is not mentioned
The wrestler says he does not need to state his
name - it is already known, 2:1

The new name belongs to the Traveller
4:2

The wrestler asks for the Traveller's name
The traveller whispers it inwardly to the wrestler
9:2

The Wrestler obtains "grace unspeakable" (10:1-
2)

Inwardly knowing the Traveller's new name,
brings the Wrestler a new nature 12:3, 13:3, 14:2

- ▶ **Why is the Wrestler's name not given? Why is the story changed?**
 - ▶ Allows the hymn to be a re-enactment the OT narrative
 - ▶ Simultaneously, allows it to describe a present drama in the life of the singer
 - ▶ This name, Love, symbolizes the new covenant
 - ▶ Central to Wesleyan theology - the perfection of love that casts out fear and the bent toward sinning
 - ▶ This drama draws our focus to
 - The central 'problem': a sinful nature that must be conquered
 - And its solution : The change in our nature through knowing Christ
- **Section 2, Stanzas - 8-11**
 - ▶ The questions answered (9-11)
 - ▶ The hidden is revealed, the unspeakable spoken
 - Ex 33:17
 - The unknown of 1:1 is resolved
 - ▶ **Sing** stanzas 8-11. Tune: MELITA
- **Section 2, Stanzas 12-14**
 - ▶ Sun of Righteousness, cf. 1:1
 - ▶ Withered to be healed
 - ▶ Enjambment
 - ▶ **Sing** stanzas 12-14. Tune: CANDLER
 - Tune to which the hymn is set in the current UM Hymnal

Conclusion

This hymn offers insight, both comforting and terrifying, into the struggles of the soul.

Here we see God, almighty, yet condescending to engage us in struggle; wounding us so he can heal; deferring to our audacity — even inciting us to it — faithfully remaining with us in this struggle until we are humbled enough by his touch of grace to receive the blessings he delights in giving. We see blessing obtained at staggering cost to the seeker, and yet we see that very blessing eclipsing its own cost.

“Wrestling Jacob” is a rich gift, from two great seekers of God, one who knew God before the Old Covenant was fully revealed, and another whose view of New Covenant grace was bold and glorious. This gift is for those of us who would seek God like they did.

The question before us: What do we do when God engages us as he did Jacob?

- We can't choose when and where - God does that.
- The response is ours to embrace.
- Will we, like Moses, say, O God, show me your glory?
- I want to see the unseeable, I want to know the unknowable (3:19).

Wrestling Jacob

Genesis 32, KJV

24 And Jacob was left alone;
and there wrestled a man with him
until the breaking of the day.

25 And when he saw that he prevailed not against him,
he touched the hollow of his thigh;
and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint,
as he wrestled with him.

26 And he said,
Let me go, for the day breaketh.
And he said,
I will not let thee go,
except thou bless me.

27 And he said unto him,
What is thy name?
And he said,
Jacob.

28 And he said,
Thy name shall be called
no more Jacob, but Israel:
for as a prince
hast thou power with God
and with men,
and hast prevailed.

29 And Jacob asked him, and said,
Tell me, I pray thee, thy name.
And he said,
Wherefore is it
that thou dost ask after my name?
And he blessed him there.

30 And Jacob called
the name of the place Peniel:
for I have seen God face to face,
and my life is preserved.

31 And as he passed over Penuel
the sun rose upon him,
and he halted upon his thigh.

Wrestling Jacob

Charles Wesley

1 COME, O thou Traveller unknown,
Whom still I hold, but cannot see!
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with thee;
With thee all night I mean to stay,
And *wrestle* till the break of day.

2 I need not tell thee who I am,
My misery and sin declare;¹
Thyself hast called me by my name,
Look on thy hands, and read it there;
But who, I ask thee, who art Thou? <
Tell me Thy name, and tell me now.

3 In vain thou strugglest to get free,
I never will unloose my hold!
Art thou the Man that died for me? <
The secret of thy love unfold;
Wrestling, I will not let thee go,
Till I thy name, thy nature know.

4 Wilt thou not yet to me reveal
Thy new, unutterable name? <
Tell me, I still beseech thee, tell;
To know it now resolved I am;
Wrestling, I will not let thee go,
Till I thy name, thy nature know.

[5 'Tis all in vain to hold thy tongue
Or touch the hollow of my thigh;
Though every sinew be unstrung,
Out of my arms thou shalt not fly;
Wrestling I will not let thee go,
Till I thy name, thy nature know.]²

6 What though my shrinking flesh complain,
And murmur to contend so long?
I rise superior to my pain,
When I am weak, then I am strong
And when my all of strength shall fail,
I shall with the God-man prevail.

[7 My strength is gone, my nature dies,
I sink beneath thy weighty hand,
Faint to revive, and fall to rise;
I fall, and yet by faith I stand;
I stand and *will not let thee go,*
Till I thy name, thy nature know.]

8 YIELD to me now, for I am weak,
But confident in self-despair;
Speak to my heart, in blessings speak,
Be conquered by my instant prayer;
Speak, or thou never hence shalt move,
And *tell me if thy name is Love.*

9 'Tis Love! 'tis Love! thou diedst for me! <
I hear thy whisper in my heart;
The morning breaks, the shadows flee,
Pure, universal love thou art;
To me, to all, thy bowels move; <
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

10 My prayer hath power with God; the grace
Unspeakable I now receive; <
Through faith I see thee face to face, (<
I see thee face to face, and live!
In vain I have not wept and strove;
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

11 I know thee, Saviour, who thou art. <
Jesus, the feeble sinner's friend;
Nor wilt thou with the night depart,
But stay and love me to the end:
Thy mercies never shall remove;
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

12 The Sun of righteousness on me
Hath rose with healing in his wings,
Withered my nature's strength; from thee
My soul its life and succour brings;
My help is all laid up above;
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

13 Contented now upon my thigh
I halt, till life's short journey end;
All helplessness, all weakness, I
On thee alone for strength depend,
Nor have I power from thee to move;
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

14 Lame as I am, I take the prey,
Hell, earth, and sin, with ease o'ercome;
I leap for joy, pursue my way,
And as a bounding hart fly home,
Through all eternity to prove
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

¹1780 *Collection*: 'or'

²Stanzas 5 and 7 omitted in 1780 *Collection*

