

Creationist 2.0

Creating Prevails

06 August 2023

Call to Worship – Psalm 17

Listen while I build my case, GOD, the most honest prayer you'll ever hear.

Show the world I'm innocent—in your heart you know I am.

Go ahead, examine me from inside out, surprise me in the middle of the night—

You'll find I'm just what I say I am. My words don't run loose.

I'm not trying to get my way in the world's way.

I'm trying to get *your* way, your Word's way.

I'm staying on your trail; I'm putting one foot In front of the other. I'm not giving up.

And me? I plan on looking you full in the face.

When I get up, I'll see your full stature and live heaven on earth.

Glory be to God the Father

Horatius Bonar

Glory be to God the Father,

Glory be to God the Son,

Glory be to God the Spirit,

God Almighty, Three in One!

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Glory be to him alone.

Glory be to him who loved us,

Washed us from all sin and stain!

Glory be to him who bought us,

Made us kings with him to reign!

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Praise the Lamb that once was slain!

Glory to the King of angels,

Glory to the church's King,

Glory to the King of nations;

Heav'n and earth your praises bring!

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

To the King of glory sing!

"Glory, blessing, praise eternal!"
Thus the choir of angels sings.
"Honour, glory, power, dominion!"
Thus its praise creation brings.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Praise the mighty King of kings!

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Holy God

Joy of the universe

Your love for us is beyond our understanding
Your love for us is deeper than we can comprehend
Your love for us encompasses oceans and valleys
Your awesome love brings us here

Your love for us speaks to the depths of our hearts
Your love for us lifts our spirits
Your love for us gives peace and rest
Your awesome love holds us close

As we rest in your love, awaken within us a love response
Cause us to hunger and thirst for your truth and beauty
Lead us beside still waters
Let our eyes be always on you

Bless us with an understanding of what is best
For us, for those we love, for the other we meet along the way
Satisfy us with your truth even if it causes us discomfort
Confront us with your holy beauty
Knowing it may us pain before it brings healing

Remind us we need your saving grace to set us up for this new week.
Help us to open our lives to the mercy which is always here for us.
To you, Saviour-Friend, we bring both our failures and our successes.

We are sorry for any way in which we have added to the frustration and hurt
of others.

We are glad for our successes, yet realise that even our best deeds are always
flawed.

We acknowledge that our lives are a tangled skein of good and evil, and we need your grace.

Please do for us now what we cannot do for ourselves. Grant us an honest repentance, sure forgiveness, profound peace, and a new vigour of spirit.

Let us make amends wherever that is feasible, and may we have the faith to leave the rest in your wise hands. This we ask in the name of Christ Jesus our Saviour.

Amen!

The Lord be with you

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Lift up your hearts

We lift them to the Lord

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God

It is right to give him thanks and praise

The Peace

Notices

Reading Genesis 32:22-31

²² The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. ²⁴ Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶ Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." ²⁷ So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸ Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." ²⁹ Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. ³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." ³¹ The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

Reflection

You might remember a few weeks back I talked about how I don't like playing games where I have no chance of winning. What I didn't mention then is that if I end up playing a game like that anyway I will try with everything that is in me to win. I will watch my opponent closely for clues on how to play, I will work up strategies, and I will go to war with the only purpose being to win this game that cannot be won. Truth is, I can relate to Jacob. I'm reasonably sure that Jacob knew from the outset that he had no chance of winning this encounter. But that didn't stop him from trying with all his might. And even when his hip was dislocated in the effort he didn't give up and he didn't let go.

Now I have never had the misfortune to dislocate my hip, but from what I can gather it is incredibly painful. We are talking about some of the strongest muscles in the body pulling in the wrong direction against one of the largest nerves in the body. I suspect that there are very few people in the world with the ability to work through that sort of pain and hold on. But that is what Jacob did. Not only that, he refused to let go until he had been blessed.

I want to spend some time digging into this, but first we are going to get a small definition sorted. There is a difference between disciplined determination and stubbornness. When someone engages discipline and determination there is a considered process in action. That process may have been directed by circumstances, as in Jacob's case here, or it may have been carefully planned and formulated. There is a clear goal in place and a way to achieve that goal. The goal is important – it is always to improve, to move forward, to get better in some way. I am determined to grow and develop and I will do what it takes to achieve that goal.

Stubbornness, on the other hand, has a different goal. The goal of stubbornness is to hold on to what is past. I am not going to move because this is where I have always been and where I intend to finish. We often see it in children and we might chide them for being stubborn in holding on to something they cherish when it is long past its use-by date. We frequently see it in older people who insist on staying in their home far past the time when they can manage safely. It is my home and this is where I plan on dying, even if it puts others at risk and causes worry and grief to those who love me.

The truth is that there are frequently times when it can be difficult to discern the difference between the two approaches. I might be splitting straws here, and you are most welcome to challenge me. I think Jacob was showing

discipline and determination in his encounter with the man by the ford of Jabbok. He had understood that this had the potential to be life changing and he was prepared to do whatever it took to come away with the very best he could manage. He understood that it was going to be incredibly difficult to achieve the outcome he desired. He understood that he would have to invest every bit of his strength and ability if he was to prevail. This situation was not a time for half-measures and easy choices. He was going to have to put absolutely everything into what came next. So that is what he did. He wrestled with the man until daybreak. And when the man saw that he could not win he put Jacob's hip out of joint. And still Jacob would not let go.

I have a suspicion that our lives are too easy. I suspect that many of us have forgotten how to prevail, if we ever learnt. I know that is a terrible generalisation and that some who are listening to me are having to invest every bit of your strength and ability to be here, listening today. (I will forgo the obvious joke at this point). If you are fully invested, then listen for those you know and love. It is difficult for me to look you all directly in the eye at this point, so please imagine that is what I am doing. I ask you the question: Will you invest every bit of your strength and ability to prevail? Let me be more specific. Will you invest every bit of your strength and ability to prevail for the people you love, and for the people you don't love – the Other?

Jacob knew that the blessing he asked for would be about more than just him. He knew it would encompass vastly more than he could even imagine. He was willing to endure wrestling until daybreak and then suffer the pain of a dislocated hip to receive that blessing. All so he could be blessed and through that to become a blessing to others. Jacob prevailed through discipline and determination. He prevailed because he saw beyond himself to a future that stretched beyond anything he could conceive.

So, I ask again, for you, for your church community, will you put everything you have, no matter how puny or insignificant it may feel, will you put all of it into prevailing with God?

My chains are gone

John Newton, Chris Tomlin

Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed

My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Saviour has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love, amazing grace

The Lord has promised good to me
His word my hope secures
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow
The sun forbear to shine
But God, who called me here below
Will be forever mine
Will be forever mine
You are forever mine

Reading

Matthew 14:13-21

¹³ Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵ When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." ¹⁶ Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." ¹⁷ They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." ¹⁸ And he said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹ Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he

looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰ And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹ And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Reflection

I'm quite sure the disciples spent a large portion of their time as a foil demonstrating how not to do things. It's almost as if they are set up to fail at every step simply so Jesus could make a point. In some ways they are the very opposite of Jacob because they seem to give up whenever the opportunity presents itself. Sick person, we can't do that. Argument with the Pharisees, hang on while we call Jesus. Hungry people, no money and nowhere to spend it. What do you want from us Jesus? We're just ordinary people and you keep expecting the extraordinary. Does that sound at all familiar to you? I'm ordinary. Nothing special. I have no particular talents or skills to make me stand out in the crowd. I'm old, I'm slow, I get tired. I've nothing to offer. Tell them all to sort themselves out so I can sit down and rest.

And Jesus said to them, 'They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat.' How invested are you in this little project of ours? How hard will you fight to receive the blessing on offer here? I'm not asking you to do what you can't do. I'm asking you to do what you can do then trust me for the rest. Can you do that?' Hear that again. 'I'm asking you do what you can do then trust me for the rest.' Can you talk to a neighbour? Do that, then trust me for the rest. Can you bake a cake to give away? Do that and trust me for the rest. Can you give a word of encouragement to someone who is struggling? Do that, then trust me for the rest.

I attended a meeting the other day where a young man was sharing how he was working to encourage and send out young people into the harvest. We won't go into his basic premise, but I asked him how older people could get involved – the ones in their 70s and 80s and 90s. He stammered for a moment and ended up saying, 'Well they could pray, and they could give financially.' It made me quite angry because I look around at all the people who are of that age and I know very well they have more to offer than prayer and finance. When I think of the encouraging words so many of you have spoken to me. When I look at the crafts made, and the food cooked, and the groups organised and attended I see so much more than prayer and finance. I see a

community engaged in acts of faith. When an Other comes along we don't need to send them away to fend for themselves. We have the resources among us to give them what they need.

'But we have so little,' I hear someone mutter. Think about five buns and two fish among 5000. Jesus only needs your little, my little, to achieve special things. This is the other part of prevailing. In God's economy we don't have to bring the entire kit. We simply have to bring what we have. There is no way the disciples could feed 5000 people. They didn't have the cash and there was nowhere they could spend it if they did. It would be a bit like turning up in the middle of Fiordland with 5000 people, doing a whip around to get some cash together and then looking for somewhere to spend it. Not going to happen! In the same way, Jacob was never going to win his wrestling match with God. The point is that it wasn't about him winning. It wasn't about the disciples having the resources. It was about them investing what they had.

God knows very well that we don't have the resources to prevail in the situation we find ourselves. He knows our weaknesses. He looks us up and down and says, 'Bring me what you have.' Then he blesses what we have. Then we move on and share what has been blessed.

In the end prevailing is not about what we don't have. It is about how we use what we do have. If we bring disciplined determination together with a desire to receive God's blessing then God will surprise us with a blessing. Jacob received a blessing that flowed on to his family and from there through the generations to us now. The disciples received a blessing that flowed out to feed thousands of people. What blessing might we receive if we bring what we have?

We are created to be creators. It is not an idle expectation that we might somehow pop out something new or different. The deepest part of our creating comes when we offer all we have to God, determined to receive a blessing. When that happens, when we prevail with God, something changes in the world around us. People are fed, physically and spiritually and the kingdom of God draws nearer.

How do you need to prevail today?

We Pray

God of blessings, rich and deep, we come to you today. We know how often we give up before the going has got tough. We know how often we look at the little we have to offer and think it is too small to be of any use. We know the times we have walked away rather than push through difficulties we see ahead of us. We know that we have missed out on seeing your blessing in our lives because it is easier to say, 'I can't,' than it is to say, 'I can.' Forgive us for our lack of faith. Forgive us for our failing to trust you with the little we have to offer. Teach us to prevail with you, to push past the fear and to hold on until you bless us. Through Jesus who takes our little and makes it more than we can imagine, we pray. Amen.

Jesus, we enthrone you

Paul Kyle

Jesus, we enthrone You
We proclaim You are king
Standing here, in the midst of us
We raise You up with our praise

And as we worship build Your throne
And as we worship build Your throne
And as we worship build Your throne
Come Lord Jesus and take Your place

Offering

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning>

God of power and glory, as we bring our gifts and offerings to be dedicated to the building of your kingdom here on earth, we are reminded of all the blessings we have received. As we hear again the story of Jacob wrestling with the stranger to receive his blessing, remind us that some blessings come when we are working hard, breaking a sweat, getting our hands dirty working for justice, compassion, and mercy for all your children. Steer us away from being content with easy blessings. In Christ, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

We think...

We pray... Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer

For the thin skinned who wear every comment as a thorn, and the tough-hided who are insensitive to the needs around them.

For the too-generous who can't seem to say no, and the mean-spirited who shut their hearts tightly against compassion.

For the anxious who imagine unseen dangers around every corner, and the over-confident who do not think before they leap.

For the young who sometimes think they know it all, and for the foolish among the old who believe that ageing automatically bestows wisdom.

For the peacemakers who risk themselves for the cause of reconciliation, and for the belligerent who put others at risk to attain their selfish ends.

For politicians who well understand their ignorance and weakness, and those who are self-deluded enough to see themselves as the wise and infallible.

For the churches who act as if they have all the answers, and for the churches that are too reticent about the Gospel committed to their stewardship.

For the sick and injured who long for healing, and for some who become so attached to the sympathy they remain an invalid.

For the dying who pray that the end will come quickly, and for others who cling frantically to every moment of breath.

For the grieving who wonder if their tears will ever stop flowing, and for some whose grief seems banked up like a dam within their hearts.

All these things we pray through our Lord Jesus who taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, holy be your name

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.

Amen

Where the road runs out

Colin Gibson

Where the road runs out and the signposts end,
where we come to the edge of today,
be the God of Abraham for us,
send us out upon our way.

Lord, you were our beginning,
the faith that gave us birth.
We look to you, our ending,
our hope for heaven and earth.

When the coast is left and we journey on
to the rim of the sky and the sea,
be the sailor's friend, be the dolphin Christ
lead us in to eternity.

When the clouds are low and the wind is strong,
when tomorrow's storm draws near,
be the spirit bird hovering overhead
who will take away our fear.

Benediction and Grace

As we go may we place our little in the hands of the God who can bless it
beyond our imagining...

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the Love of God,
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.

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