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Ps 17:1-7, 15; Gen 32:22-31

Ro 9:1-5; Mt 14:13-21

If you wrestle with God, your name is Israel. Israel means “the one who strives with God.” And when you and I finally allow God to call the shots, you will see Him do amazing, impossible things! God’s love is the greatest power in the universe.

It is a big deal to strive with God as Jacob did. You and I strive in our calling – in our prayers – in our desire for deliverance and blessing. It is an even bigger deal to hear the Lord Jesus Christ (as He did in the Gospel passage for today) say, “(Don’t) send (the people) away. You give them something to eat.” I will bless your effort, says the Lord. Jesus’ compassion overcomes our lack.

I once heard a Bible teacher say, “God is the Lion with the Lamb’s heart.” Unlimited cosmic power, **and** deep, tender compassion. The symbol of great power (the lion) inhabited by love and gentleness (the lamb). This is a good description of the character of the One who sent His only Son into the world. The love of Jesus accomplishes for the nation what military defeat could not – what famine, plague and natural disaster could never accomplish. In Christ, at last we recognize the one true Creator God is both holy and loving. Always giving **grace and justice** in precise measure: That is our God. Jesus is the Lion of Judah – He is the Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8),

The Apostle Paul sadly describes his fellow Israelites – his family – brothers and sisters – nieces and nephews. The heart of his people is as hard as rock. They are swimming in grace and blessing. They are adopted as God’s children, sharing His glory, enfolded in God’s covenants, free to worship even in the Roman occupation. **Still** they are blind to the fulfillment of God’s promise of Messiah in the Lord Jesus Christ. We in the 21<sup>st</sup> c can’t look down on the church folks of Paul’s time. How are we any different? Do we test the words of those who wield power in religion, politics and culture? Do we carefully examine the arguments in the marketplace today? Do you know what you believe? We need to be ready to tell somebody what makes Jesus Messiah. As we strive with our God – we grow in grace and the knowledge of Jesus – we need to be making a difference in the marketplace – a difference in the nation. Your witness is a vital part of the kingdom of Christ. Prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness – our covenant promises to Jesus.

Paul says he would give anything – even his own salvation – to have his people believe the wonderful good news of Jesus Messiah. These Israelites are descended from the very Patriarchs and Matriarchs we have studied in the Book of Genesis these past weeks. This is his people’s heritage. And Jesus Himself is an Israelite. His humanity through Mary of Nazareth is the same blood – the same teachings – the same family.

Let’s return to that moment after Herod cruelly and almost casually beheaded John Baptist. Jesus heard the news, and He retreated to a deserted place on the lake. The disciples were with Him. All were grieving over John’s untimely death – murdered at 30-something – never to prophesy and baptize again in the area. And as the crowds learned where Jesus was, they followed Him. They were struggling to be in His presence – to touch Him – to hear Him – for comfort, for healing and blessing. The disciples realized the people were famished and made their own judgment call: “Lord, send the crowds away so they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” Seems logical. Good plan. Why don’t You do that, Lord?

Jesus says, “There’s no need to send them away. You give them something to eat.” (v 16) They start to argue, to talk back to the Lord. This is the moment where we need to camp out. Did the disciples think they were going to change the Lord’s mind? Is Jesus giving them a command?

They see only lack. They say, “can’t do it, Lord. With five loaves and two fish? Seriously. Can’t be done. Sorry, Lord.”

(Continued on next page.)

When we look at the challenge from a human perspective, we decide that it's impossible. We say, "Lord, I can't do that!" The more we entrust everything – every challenge – every crisis – every worry into God's care, the more we see Him accomplish. Especially the impossible.

Later in this chapter, Paul says:

<sup>20</sup> But, my friend, I ask, "Who do you think you are to question God? Does the clay have the right to ask the potter why he shaped it the way he did? <sup>21</sup> Doesn't a potter have the right to make a fancy bowl and a plain bowl out of the same lump of clay?"

<sup>22</sup> God wanted to show his anger and reveal his power against everyone who deserved to be destroyed. But instead, he patiently put up with them. <sup>23</sup> He did this by showing how glorious he is when he has pity on the people he has chosen to share in his glory. <sup>24</sup> Whether Jews or Gentiles, we are those chosen ones, <sup>25</sup> just as the Lord says in the book of Hosea, "Although they are not my people, I will make them my people. I will treat with love those nations that have never been loved.

<sup>26</sup> "Once they were told, 'You are not my people.' But in that very place they will be called children of the living God." We want to pray for what we want and then receive it. But in wrestling and striving we get to know God. In the struggle we experience the splendor and the glory of God's grace poured out upon us – you and me. God's heart is huge and able to love all His creation. God knows you and He likes you – and He won't give up on you. Consider high the price God has paid to buy you and me back from destruction. That is powerful love! He will partner with you to do wonders you have not yet imagined!

Like Jacob, like the disciples, we are still getting to know our Savior. Striving in God's powerful arms, we are transformed by God's love. Amen.