



Transformed

Genesis 32

In *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, the Grinch, a hairy, green, cantankerous beast, looks down on the town of Whoville. What he sees disgusts him. The people who live in Whoville love Christmas. The Grinch devastates Whoville by stealing all their presents and Christmas trees. As he prepares to destroy everything, he hears the townspeople singing in the valley.

The Grinch is bewildered.

The narrator explains: “He hadn’t stopped Christmas from coming. It came. Somehow or other it came just the same. And the Grinch with his Grinch feet ice cold in the snow stood puzzling and puzzling how could it be so.”

Finally, the Grinch speaks: “It came without ribbons. It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes, or bags. Maybe Christmas doesn’t come from a store. Maybe Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more.”

The Grinch throws himself to the ground, convulsing as his heart grows. He laughs. He cries. He says he feels all toasty inside. Unfamiliar with tears, he thinks he is leaking. The story of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is about the transformation of the ugly, mean-spirited Grinch into a warm, gracious and loving being.

The Story tells how God fulfilled His promise to solve the sin problem. It also tells the story of how God seeks to transform our lives as well.

Let’s review: The downward spiral in Genesis 3-11 is filled with God’s mercy:

- promise of the destruction of the serpent
- providing coverings for Adam and Eve
- giving Cain a protective mark
- saving Noah and his family
- the promise of the rainbow

Judgment is not the last word: God will build a new nation to reveal Himself and His plan to get us back. Who is God going to select to start this brand new nation? It all begins in a place called UR where God selects Abram and Sarai.

Why did God select Abram and Sarai to be the parents of this new nation? Is it because Abram is a righteous man like Noah? Did Abram and Sarai worship God? We note Abram and Sarai were old and without children.

This is common pattern in the Bible – God selecting the least likely person. Why? Because when something big happens, people will look around and say, “There’s no way that happened because of people; there must be another reason.” The reason is God. God wants us to look beyond Abram and Sarai to Himself so we will better understand God.

While we don’t have time to talk about all of the Patriarch’s, let me make one observation. When they are self-reliant – when they run their lives, God must rescue them from disaster. You see this again and again: when Abraham goes to Egypt and lies about his relationship with Sarah or has a child by Hagar. We also see it when Isaac pretends his wife is his sister or when he digs wells among the Philistines.

We particularly see this in Jacob, who lives his life as a wheeler-dealer:

- When Jacob is born he comes grasping the heel of Hairy (Esau). He is named, Grasper (Jacob).
- He cheats his brother out of his blessing, by tricking his father into giving him the blessing of the firstborn.
- Fearing his brother will murder him, he flees Canaan and meets his match in another cunning character, Laban.

Fleeing his brother who is intent on killing him, Jacob encounters God in a dream. He sees angels ascending and descending on a ladder. In this dream, God re-affirms the covenant He made with Abraham. Let’s read together:

Genesis 28:12-17

If only the story had ended at this place. We would see a bright light of faith – a man devoted to the God of Abraham and Isaac. But it does not end here. The Grasper, always living by cunning, makes a vow – he acts so much like people I know. It’s kind of like, *Let’s Make a Deal*.

Genesis 28:20-22

Jacob heads off to the land of his heritage, where he is immediately smitten by Rachel. She is the love of his life. In a huge irony that reminds us of Jacob’s disguise to fool his father (Genesis 29), Laban pawns off his oldest daughter, Leah, to Jacob on their wedding night. In a deft move, Laban then gives Rachel to Jacob too, but only in exchange for seven more years of work. The Grasper has met his match! Jacob was “out-Jacob-ed!”

But know this: while he is doing his own thing, God is not letting go of him. Until the “Grasper” will be grasped by God, at a place he names Peniel, the presence of God. The Apostle Paul put it this way: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV).

The transformation process means putting to death our old self so the new self can be created – a new self that reflects God’s character. God calls us to go beyond merely belonging to Him, to being changed by Him.

In Genesis 32, Jacob is going home to face the man he cheated out of the birthright. His only question is, “What will I encounter?” Esau has had 20 years to build up his hatred. But, there is more to the story. God wants to transform the Grasper. What Jacob doesn't know – but God does – is that before Jacob meets Esau, he will face an adversary worse than any he has ever known. God Himself will confront the Grasper seeking to make him into Israel – governed by God.

Jacob is forced to come to the end of himself – and to throw himself exclusively upon God. God is not content to let Jacob remain the Grasper, who may find himself once again capable to defending himself. For three days Jacob descends into despair and hopelessness, yet as dawn breaks on the third day – he prevails with God and receives a new name.

Sacred Meeting (32:1-2)

The first thing Jacob sees are the angels of God. He has seen them before. What did they tell Jacob? We don't know. They could have encouraged Jacob that God was with him. They could have given him strict orders as to what to do. They could have said nothing.

The important thing is Jacob knew who they were – and their presence made an impact on him.

Plotting (32:3-21)

Jacob has left Padan Aram, having been called by God back to Canaan. But, he is coming back to a brother he last saw twenty years ago when he was looking to kill him.

Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob” (Genesis 27:41 ESV)

What would you think, if after offering peace, you learn your brother was coming with 400 men? Jacob must have thought: “It's over – he's going to kill me!” We should feel Jacob’s fear. He is scared out of his wits.

Jacob divides his livestock and his family, and sends gifts to appease his brother. As he comes to the border, the Jabbok river, he sends everyone over and stays alone at the back, frightened of what is coming next. Ever the schemer, Jacob tries to scheme his way out of this situation. His self-sufficiency comes to the surface.



With nothing else left, Jacob prays. God has Jacob right where He wants him – hemmed in, alone, and afraid as night falls!

Genesis 32:9-12

God will answer, but not in a way Jacob expected.

Wrestling With God (Genesis 32:22-32)

Genesis 32:24-31

The wrestling match isn't a dream – it is really happening. This was the last thing Jacob expected. Maybe he thought: “I need to get a good night’s rest before my encounter with Esau – my life is at stake here!” Instead a man shows up and starts grabbing at Jacob and they wrestle all night!

Obviously the angel (see Hoses 12) could have very easily overcome Jacob. Something else going on here. The angel was toying with Jacob, perhaps to exhaust him. God wants Jacob to declare total reliance on God. The angel strikes Jacob in the groin – a blow which could have been fatal, but it merely disabled him. It is a forced surrender. At this point, the man reveals his identity – Jacob has been wrestling God.

Jacob has finally given up. The angel asks his name: “Jacob – the grasper, the deceiver.” God renames him “Israel, God prevails.” God also leaves him with a limp – a reminder of his dependency on the one who called him at Bethel in the vision of the angels on the ladder. Name changes are very important. It tells something about the character of the person. No longer governed by self, Jacob is now controlled by God. This represents a vital change.

Jacob calls the place “Peniel,” which means “the face of God.” He is now ready – not because of his plan, but because he has been transformed by God.

CONCLUSION

The Story is not just the story of God fulfilling his promise to bring the Savior. It is also the story of God seeking to transform us into much better people.

In Genesis 33:20, when Jacob first settles back in Canaan after reconciling with Esau, Jacob identifies himself fully with God. He built and called an altar El-Elohe-Israel, which means “God, the God of Israel.” Until now, he called God the God of his fathers, God of Abraham and Isaac. Now he is transformed; he is depending on God.

The patriarchs, all too human. They mess up, again and again. They need rescued, like we do. But God each time comes back and pursues them. He establishes His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, promising bless the whole world through them.

Are we keeping God at arms length, or is He my God? Is Jesus the Lord of my mom and dad, my grandma and grandad or is He the Lord, the Lord of my life?

A man and his young son from the deep woods come to the big city for the first time. They are amazed at everything they see, but they are especially fascinated by two shiny, silver doors that move apart and back together again.

The boy asks, "What is this, father?" And the father, never having seen an elevator before, says, "Son, I have never seen anything like this in my life."

The boy and father watch as a very old woman moving with the aid of a walker enters the elevator and pushes one of the buttons. The doors close and the boy and his father watch. Then the doors open and out walks a beautiful young lady.

The father and son blink their eyes in amazement. The father leans down to his son and says, "Go get your mother."

God seeks to transform each of us. He wants to bring us into His story. He wants us to fully surrender to Him.

Will you?

