

**November 7, 2004 – First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri**

**Sermon: Cry "Uncle"**  
**Text: Genesis 32:22-32**

Allow me to set the stage for you this morning. Jacob had not seen his brother, Esau, in a long time and he was nervous about meeting him again. You see, many years earlier Jacob tricked his brother out of his birthright and stole his blessing. Because of this Esau was planning to kill Jacob. Jacob's mother found out about Esau's plan and she arranged to have his father, Isaac, send Jacob away to live among her relatives in a distant land. Now after many years had passed Jacob was returning and he was afraid that his brother might still try to kill him.

In our text today, Jacob has come to the Jabbok River and crossing it meant crossing into Esau's territory. Jacob decided that he would try to soften his brother's hate by sending him gifts across the river – ahead of Jacob. He sends all of his possessions, his animals, his servants, and finally his family. Jacob remains behind alone – at the banks of the river. And that night the most famous and perhaps bizarre wrestling match in all of history took place.

Read the text.

## I.

I want to share something about myself this morning that many of you may not know. I am a professional wrestler. Now, many of you immediately had images of something like this in your mind. (display picture of a WWF wrestler). No, I am not a member of the World Wrestling Federation. I do not have an outlandish costume or some stage name such as Damsel of Destruction or the Queen of Terror. I've never been on the WWF circuit and I wouldn't body slam you unless absolutely necessary for your safety or mine. Yet - I am a professional wrestler in every other way.

Have you ever played the wrestling game "uncle" with someone? Maybe it was full body wrestling or perhaps it was pinky wars. The basic idea of the game is to get someone to a point where they have to give up and cry "uncle". Then, you either immediately let them out of your choke hold or you squeeze a little tighter just to hear them say it again. I always loved playing this game with friends. And it wasn't because I like to cry "uncle". I loved to hear my *opponent* cry "uncle". I hungered for the challenge and would give it my all to not have to utter that one word.

Many of you are wrestlers just like Jacob and myself. Many of you hate to cry "uncle". Well, listen up. Because today I'm going to tell you how to cry "uncle" and **still** win! I knew you would want to know this so in

your worship folder is a place to take important notes on how to be a winner by crying “uncle” .

## II.

### How to Cry Uncle and Still Win

#### 1. **Admit** When You Are Wrestling

Jacob was a wrestler from the womb. If you researched Jacob, some of the words that describe him are cunning trickster, liar, cheat, manipulator, con artist, schemer. Jacob was a twin and the second born. He was born clutching his brother’s heel, and was grabbing at things from that time forward.

One great description of Jacob is that he’s the kind of guy that could enter a revolving door behind you and come out ahead of you.

All of us have wrestled with God at times as we struggle to do our things in our way. We’ve wrestled with God as we tried to understand why bad things happen to good people. We’ve wrestled with God and his call on our lives. We’ve wrestled with God over the things he has asked us to give or do for others.

We’ve all wrestled with God and we need to admit it. Name it and claim it. I am a wrestler. Everyone say that with me – “I am a wrestler.” We want to win. We want to prevail. We think we know better. We believe we know what is best for our lives.

We often kid ourselves that we are open to God. We stand with our arms lifted and open to God. (stand that way) But our stance usually looks more like this (bend arms down a little and do the little “bring it” hand motion). “Bring it, God. I can take you.” OK, let me tell you something. God and I have been in hundreds of wrestling matches and you know what the score is? God – 954; Me – 0. He pins me every time.

You see, I am a wrestler. Jacob was a wrestler. Many of you are wrestlers as well. The first step is to admit it. The second step is to understand **why** you are wrestling.

### III.

#### 2. Understand **Why** You Are Wrestling

There is a story of a college student who was asked to prepare a lesson to teach his speech class. He was to be graded on creativity and ability to drive home a point in a memorable way. The title of his talk was “The Law of the Pendulum”. He spent twenty minutes carefully teaching the physical principle that governs a swinging pendulum. The law of the pendulum is: A pendulum can never return to a point higher than the point from which it was released. Because of friction and gravity, when the pendulum returns, it will fall short of its original release point. Each time it swings it makes less and less of an arc, until finally it is at rest. This point of rest is called a state of equilibrium, where all forces acting on the pendulum are equal.

The student attached a three-foot string to a child's toy top and secured it to the top of the blackboard with a thumbtack. He pulled top to one side and made a mark on the blackboard where he let it go. Each time it swung back he made a new mark. It took less than a minute for the top to complete its swinging and come to rest. When he finished the demonstration, the markings on the blackboard proved the law of the pendulum.

The student asked how many people in the room believed the law of the pendulum was true. All of his classmates raised their hand and so did the teacher. The teacher started to walk to the front of the room thinking the class was over. In reality it had only begun. Hanging from the steel beams in the middle of the room was a large, crude but functional pendulum made from 250 lbs of metal weight tied to four strands of 500 lb test parachute cord. The student invited the teacher to climb up on a table and sit in a chair with the back of his head against the cement wall. Then the student brought the heavy metal pendulum up the teacher's nose. Holding the huge pendulum just a fraction of an inch from the teacher's face, the student once again explained the law of the pendulum the teacher had applauded only moments before. "If the law of the pendulum is true, then when I release the mass of metal, it will swing across the room and return short of the release point. Your nose will be in no danger.

After that final restatement of this law, the student looked his teacher in the eye and asked, "Sir, do you believe this law is true?" There was a long pause. Huge beads of sweat formed on his upper lip and then weakly he nodded and whispered, "Yes."

The student released the pendulum. It made a swishing sound as it arced across the room. At the far end of its swing, it paused momentarily and started back.

The student later testified that he had never seen a man move so fast in his entire life as the teacher literally dove from the table.

It was easy for the teacher to believe in the law when it was theoretical. But when his life depended on the law, he showed *his belief* was only theoretical. How easy it is for us to trust God theoretically. But when our life depends on it, our trust is theoretical.

We wrestle because we are afraid to trust God.

Let's look at Jacob in this passage. He finds himself alone in the dark of the night awaiting the unknown. He was at the threshold of crossing into Esau's territory and he was terrified of what awaited him on the other side. Would Esau's heart still be bent on vengeance? Would Esau slaughter all of Jacob's family before turning on Jacob? Jacob knew that his path was leading him back to Esau but he was unsure of what the outcome would be. Genesis 32:11a tells us that Jacob pleads with God to "Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the

hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him." Jacob was afraid. He was scared of where God was leading him.

Many of us have been at places where we have felt alone in the dark of the night awaiting the unknown. We have stood at threshold moments in our lives, frozen in fear of what may lay in wait for us on the other side. We have prayed to God for guidance yet remain frozen in fear of how God may answer our prayers. We want God's help but we don't trust God's help.

Why do we wrestle? Because we are afraid. We are

- afraid of losing control;
- afraid of having too much asked of us;
- afraid of pain;
- afraid of failing;
- afraid of realizing that we really do absolutely need God.

I am a wrestler and I understand that I wrestle because I am afraid.

## V.

### 3. Cry Uncle

At youth camp when I was a teenager, we would do an activity called a trust fall. You would stand on a table or wall and your friends (you hoped) would stand beneath you with arms intertwined. You would stand on the table with your back to them and arms folded across your chest. When you were ready you would say "falling" and they would say

"fall on". Then you would fall straight back into their arms. I hated the trust fall.

In my own struggle with this, I have often imagined in my mind that I needed to be able to do a trust fall with God standing beneath me ready to catch me. Almighty God. Omnipotent God. He-Has-the-Whole-World-in-His-Hands God. And you know what - I want to fall back but I'm scared to fall back.

We want to cry "uncle". We're scared to cry "uncle".

I Corinthians 1:25 tells us that "*God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.*" Yet we find it safer to place our trust in our finite wisdom and our insufficient strength.

But as I studied this passage, I noticed what Jacob did. Look at verse 26 "So he said to him, "What is your name, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." Jacob doesn't fall back into empty air. Jacob falls forward, grabbing hold of God with everything he's got. When he realizes his strength is insufficient, he lets go himself and clings to God. Jacob cries "uncle" and surrenders to God.

## V.

4. Receive the **Blessings** God Desires to Give You

Jacob admitted he was a wrestler, he understood why he was wrestling, and he cried uncle. It was after he cried uncle that God declares him a winner.

Look at verse 28 with me. "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'."

Prevailed? Wait a minute. I'm pretty sure God won that one. In our world, if you lose a wrestling match, you aren't consider to have prevailed. You are considered a loser. But just as God does in so many ways, he flips the world's perspective on its head.

When you surrender to God, you are a winner. When you cry "uncle", you prevail. When you let go and let God, you will be blessed.

What kind of blessings are we talking about? Blessings far more valuable than possessions or trophies.

- The Blessing of Rest. Some of us live in this constant, contorted state of wrestling. Always on guard; always untrusting, always counting on ourselves. We are exhausted. When we surrender to God, God crowns us with rest – his pure and sufficient rest as we trust Him with our lives.
- The Blessing of Peace. A life of wrestling is a life of constant struggling. Constant struggle with ourselves, with others, with the

Spirit of God. When we cry “uncle” God liberates us. He replaces the conflict in our lives with His surpassing peace.

- The Blessing of Joy. No longer exhausted. No longer in conflict. God blesses us with rest, peace, and joy. Joy that comes from trusting God’s promise that He will be more than sufficient for all of our needs.

1. Admit when you are wrestling
2. Understand why you are wrestling
3. Cry “Uncle”
4. Receive the blessings that God desires to give you.

## VI.

### Benediction:

From 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

*May God himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole , make you holy and whole, put you together – spirit, soul, and body – and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ. The One who called you is completely dependable. If he said it, he’ll do it.*