

Pentecost 22
Genesis 32:22-30
October 24, 2010

There is certainly something awesome about these verses! These are God's Words about an event God made happen. These verses teach the Christian who is undergoing fearsome things, uncertainty in life, hard times, important truths about God and His ways. They are truths intended to encourage, indeed to tighten the believer's hold on our Savior.

God Is Our Helper Even When He Seems like Our Adversary
So Cling to God's Promised Blessings No Matter How Things Seem.

Even after God as Savior creates a believer in Him by His Gospel, God knows that every believer in Him is going to need God's Good News continually in order to keep trusting in His Savior/God.

Every follower of Jesus needs to keep following. Whoever trusts in our Savior from sin, death, and hell needs to keep trusting. Because, as St. Paul said, "Otherwise you have believed in vain." Why is that? Because when we don't keep believing, we have stopped believing and have cut ourselves off from Jesus and all of His promises and blessings.

All the focus of hell, of the unbelieving world, and our own flesh, our inner sinful selves, are always out to weaken and ultimately to destroy all faith, all trust, all dependence on Jesus our Savior from sin, the unbelieving world and hell.

Only Jesus' Good News about His work, suffering, death and resurrection on our behalf can help us. That's why God had made wonderful promises to Jacob. Already twenty years earlier, after Jacob had made quite a mess of things for himself, God promised Jacob that He, the LORD of grace, mercy, and love, shown especially in God's forgiveness, would always stay with Jacob, would one day bring Jacob back to Canaan, would bless Jacob personally, would give his descendants the land of Canaan, and promised that from one of his descendants all nations and peoples of the Earth would be blessed. All of these last blessings had been given previously to his father Isaac and grandfather, Abraham.

Just recently, God had told Jacob it was time to go back to Canaan. Jacob had left Canaan with a staff in his hand and the clothing he wore and that was it. He returned a rich man and with a family of eleven sons and one daughter with a twelfth son on the way. And Jacob was finally understanding that he needed to give God 100% of the credit for all those blessings.

That was a truth Jacob learned slowly. Jacob had, for so long, acted as if Jacob had to make everything work out right for himself. Jacob had to fix everything himself. In the beginning, he even went along with misusing other people's weaknesses, lies and deception to get what he wanted. Esau, his brother, was so angry that he nursed in his heart the notion of some day killing Jacob. That's why Jacob took off for his relative Laban's place.

While there, it was Jacob who endured much hardship from kniving Laban. But even up there, Jacob thought his actions – little more than superstition or very mistaken science – had gotten the right colored or marked lambs to be born. In fact, a while later, God showed Jacob that God had taken care of that through genetics. God had allowed only the correct reams to mate with the sheep.

Scripture nowhere even hints that Jacob was an unbeliever while he was messing things up. This warns us about just how weak all of us are. Sin is very much still in us, and it breaks out with extreme suddenness and far too often. But it was to that Jacob that God confirmed His love, care and promises early on.

Our Father in heaven has assured us that He loves us, in fact loves the world, especially in connection with His eternal Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He has forgiven us in Christ Jesus. He has made us His, His own adopted sons and daughters, for the sake of His only eternal Son, our Redeemer. He promises us eternal life in joyous glory in heaven with Jesus in His grand house, made certain when Jesus raised Himself from the dead on the third day. Still we fear. Still we doubt. Still we forget upon whom we need to rely.

God told Jacob it was time, after twenty long years, to go back to Canaan. Jacob headed back, but he was afraid. Jacob did believe God's promises, but it was no perfect faith. There is no such perfect faith this side of the grave. Our trust, our reliance on our Savior–God can so quickly become weak and shaky.

Was Esau still angry? Twenty years had not erased that old guilt. Jacob has never humbly confessed his wrong to Esau. Instead he only tried to run away from the trouble. We, too, try avoidance to fix things. It seldom helps.

Only bearing God's promises again and again can reverse the weakness and strengthen a Christian's hold on God's promises. This is why we want you and all of our members here regularly, to hear God's Word time and time again. This is why we want you to stay for Bible study too and why we want all of our children in Sunday school and why for twenty-one years we have provided a school. It is also why we want you to read God's Word at home and to teach it to your children, and as much as you can to other relatives, neighbors, friends, classmates, co-workers, and everyone.

Then, it really got tough! Esau was on his way (with 400 men). Jacob had entered Canaan. Jacob's heart was likely in his mouth. And then a man, a stranger, showed up and he suddenly grabbed hold of Jacob and started wrestling with Jacob. This battle went on all night. "Who is this man?" Jacob had to have wondered. Just what he needed, another enemy, another adversary! Why now?

The man touched Jacob's hip. Instantly, his hip was wrenched, violently twisted, jerked out of joint – from a touch! And, what Jacob may have begun to suspect, was instantly confirmed. This was God, the LORD! God had been fighting with him! God was his opponent!??

It does sometimes seem that way to us, also. Now, we know it may be so! But wait! God, even here, was helping! The sun started to rise. The man said to Jacob, "Let me go!" Jacob said, "No!" God allowed that. How could a man not let God go? He held God to His promises! That is a hold our Savior has given to all of us. He wants us all to hold Him to His promises. God will never get out of His promises. All of God's promises are "Yes" to us in Jesus Christ!

Jacob was Jacob – Mr. Heelgrabber. He admitted it. Then God said, "No longer! Now you are Israel, struggler with, even over comer of God. And Jacob named that place Peniel – Face of God, for God had enabled Jacob to see God face to face and live. He did not die. He lived. He was blessed again.

Now Jacob knew, believed, trusted that he depended on God alone for any and every blessing. He learned that through hardship. He learned that from struggling with God who made Himself seem like an enemy. He learned that from God's blessing, a blessing that proves that God is our Savior and Friend and Helper even when He may look like an adversary. Cling to God's promises no matter how things seem or look or feel! God wants us to overcome Him by holding onto His promises! Amen.