

HOLD ON FOR GOD'S BLESSED ANSWER!

He loves to wrestle with us in prayer; He promises to bless us with His blessings.

Genesis 32:22-31

TEXT: *That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.*

In Jesus' name, fellow redeemed:

Did the picture of two men fighting on the front of today's bulletin catch your attention? It's a dramatic portrayal of an amazing incident in the history of our Lord's ancestor, Jacob. The Bible says: ***That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.*** When I was young, Sunday School art often portrayed Jacob wrestling with an angel with wings. But this angel, or messenger, this "man" actually is revealed to be the Lord himself! This is the "pre-incarnate Christ." When Jacob realizes this fact he declares: ***I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.***

Who would believe that God Himself would actually come down and wrestle with a man? This account in the history of Jacob often left me wondering. Why would God wrestle with a man? How could Jacob possibly get the Lord into a hold from which God could not escape? Was this for real? Or was it fake?

It was both. It really was the Lord in human form, but it was the Lord limiting His divine power and glory so as to allow Jacob to get him into a wrestling hold from which the Lord could not escape.

Scripture reveals to us what God was doing when He wrestled with this man. From this account we are reminded that: God loves us to wrestle with Him in prayer; and, He promises to bless us with His blessing. Yes, this is all about wrestling with God in prayer. When God wrestles with you, HOLD ON FOR GOD'S BLESSED ANSWER!

The context for this amazing incident is revealed in previous chapters. Twenty years earlier, Jacob had lied to his father Isaac, cheated his brother Esau, and had stolen Esau's birthright. Esau was so angry, he vowed to murder Jacob. The Bible says: ***Esau held a grudge against Jacob ... He said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob."*** Jacob's mother warned him: ***Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you.*** Ge 27 Now, after 20 years, news had reached Jacob that his brother was coming with a large army to meet him. And now that Jacob was the head of a large family, his concern for their welfare was great.

Jacob knew that he was the one through whom God's promised Savior was to come. Also, Jacob's son, Judah, was the next one in the Messianic line. The Lord would somehow spare Judah, that son who was to be part of that plan. But what about the others? The women and children? And now that Judah was born, was God now through with him? Was this to be the end of his life? Was this how the Lord would deal with him for all the bad things he had done in the past?

These are the fears that often come upon Christians. We also know that God is our Heavenly Father, only because He sent His Son Jesus to be our Savior from sin and eternal death. But when trouble comes upon us, all our past sins and failures deluge our hearts and minds. We know that if we die we will go to heaven, but what about all the pain and trouble that is now advancing upon us? Doesn't it seem that when trouble starts there is no end? "When it rains, it pours!" Things pile up at the worst times! What more can I take! God never gives His children more than we are able to bear without giving us the strength to carry them, but is this the season of my grief for not always being the kind of Christian I ought to have been?

Under this intense stress, Jacob needed to be alone to pray. He organizes a strategy, arranging his clan into two groups, and sends them across the river. His thought was that if Esau should attack, perhaps one group might escape. He remained alone on the other side of the river to meditate and pray. But then the strangest thing happened: *After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.* How this wrestling match started, Scripture doesn't say. My thinking is that this "man" who is the Lord Himself, interrupts Jacob's prayers to such an extent that Jacob turns on Him to send Him away. Haven't you, in your great emotional stress, ever wanted to be alone so that you were harsh with those who interrupted you in your distress? Then you know the feeling.

But since this is the Lord Himself, we know that there is a divine wisdom behind this silly behavior. Scripture says: *When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."* Almighty God lets His pitiful creature subdue Him with a hold from which God could not escape. And we say, "How can this be?" There is only ONE WAY that sinful broken pots of clay can ever subdue the Almighty God, and that is with God's own Word and Promise! That is the "hold" we have on God! It is God's Word. The Bible says: *...if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.* 2 Ti 2

With a touch, this man reveals Himself to be the Pre-incarnate Lord, the Christ Himself. That miraculous touch that dislocated his hip made Jacob call that place "Peniel," and declare: *It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.* This is always the result of holding God to His Word. We are spared! We are spared for eternity! He wrestles with us, letting us hold Him to His Word so that even in our darkest hour we can cry out with Job: *I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes-I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!* Jb 19 In Job's case, the Lord allowed Satan to wrestle with him. Yet Job held tenaciously to God's promise and even Satan could not prevail against Job!

Jacob's heart wasn't yearning as much as his hip was hurting. God had dislocated it! But as he limped back to his family, he knew that he had God's blessing. He knew that the Lord would answer his prayer, even though he didn't know exactly how. And this is how we are to pray: holding to God's Word and promise until He answers your prayers with His blessed answer.

Jacob limped back to his family without knowing what God's answer would be. But this is how we are to pray: with bold persistence, holding to Him until He blesses us. He will bless us with His greatest blessings, for prayer is hard work. We may limp away, still not knowing. His answer may be an immediate "yes" to our every request; it may be a "no, for what you are asking is not a good thing for you..."; or it may be a "Yes, but not now -- and not in the way that you are thinking. But surely, later on, and then you will glorify Me!"

We can be so certain for we also have seen God "face to face." In the face of Jesus whose dying face on the cross is still fresh in our minds. But He died to redeem us from our sins! We have seen His face all aglow and smiling as He announced to His disciples: I am alive! And according to that New Covenant especially given to His New Testament Church, we see Him face-to-face in the Lord's Supper where He comes to us with His true body and blood for our forgiveness and the assurance that He is still truly with us as He wrestles with us in our prayers. These are the New Testament Christian's "Peniel."

There's one more interesting feature of this amazing piece of history: *The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.* The Israelites were so comforted by this incident in their father Jacob, that they sought to be reminded of it. They refused to eat that part of the animal that was butchered for their meals. We have something better: the Written Word with all God's promises, sealed in the blood of His Son. So let us ever hold to these promises and pray. Pray the hardest when the Lord chooses to wrestle with you in this trial or that hardship.

You know two things: He loves to wrestle with you; and, He promises to bless you. So don't let go until God answers! Amen