

“I Will Not Let You Go Unless You Bless Me !”

✠ **Desperate need** (vv.22-26)

✠ **Determined faith** (vv.26-30)

In the name of Jesus, my Savior too, dear fellow wrestlers,

You think you’ve got problems! All this trouble of mine started before I was born. That’s right! I was wrestling then too. My twin brother Esau wouldn’t leave me alone. Maybe it was the other way around. Anyway, we fought like tigers when we were still inside our mother Rebekah. It got so bad with us throwing kicks and punches that she finally went to ask the LORD, “What’s going on inside me?” ***The LORD said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”*** (Genesis 25:23 NIV)

Esau never did like that, serving me, I mean. But I was determined from the moment we were born. You know how you might race your brother to the lake? “Last one in’s a rotten egg!” One day while we were rolling around in there, he shouted, “Last one out’s a big baby!” Then he took a dive. I wasn’t going to let him get ahead of me. So I grabbed his heel and that’s how we came out of our mom with me holding onto Esau’s heel. “Heel Grabber,” they called me, “Jacob!”

✠ **Desperate need** (vv.22-26)

That’s how I lived those early years, tricking my brother Esau out of his birthright and then stealing his blessing from our old father Isaac. That’s why Esau wanted to kill me, and why I ran for my life back to Uncle Laban, my mom’s brother. Now it’s been twenty years. I’m back at the Jabbok River near where it empties into the Jordan, between Galilee and the Dead Sea. This would be bad enough if I were all alone. But I have my family with me – four wives, eleven sons, my daughter Dinah, plus servants, herds and flocks. They’re on the other side of the river in two groups where I’m hoping they’ll be safe. I’ve sent back messengers with hundreds of animals as gifts to Esau. I’ve prayed my heart out:

“O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,’ I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’” (Genesis 32:9–12 NIV)

You’d say, “I’m all out of aces.” I’ve done all I can. Esau gets here in the morning with 400 men.

It’s not like you don’t have trouble in your life. But the really big problems must seem far away. That story in your bulletin about floods in Pakistan? 1600 dead and 2300 plus injured, 17-20 million people out of their homes, at risk from starvation and disease. Don’t you love what that one Pakistani said because so many Christians are helping everyone, even Muslims? “I know that your God is the true God because I see his love in you.” He is the true God, the LORD, the God of my grandfather Abraham, my father Isaac, the God of me, Jacob. But when you’re looking death in the eye or suffering family problems like this? Well, it’s worse than water damage on your church like in Boise, Idaho, that outreach to Vietnamese. Their Pastor Kramer is right, that can be an “exciting time” when God you see how helps. But in the darkness of the night, your fears play games with your mind and heart.

That's how it was for me at the Jabbok, anyway. I can't really explain how it happened or where he came from. First, I was all alone. Then "*a man wrestled with [me]*" for hours. Seems strange, doesn't it? He came out of nowhere. I couldn't see His face. But He was so, so strong. Every time I thought I had Him pinned, He would flip me over like a feather and the fight would go on. He could not beat me fair and square – I'm a rancher, you know. I've been wrestling sheep and cattle since I was a boy. Or maybe He just let me, because He finally touched my hip and Bam! Wrenching pain and my hip was out of joint. That was some of the worst hurt I've ever felt! All I could do was grab hold of Him. See, I knew from the way He fought and His power to dislocate my hip like that, this is God. He tried to squirm, "*Let me go, it's almost morning!*" "No way!" I thought, "Not going to happen!" I shouted in the darkness, "*I will not let you go unless you bless me.*"

You'll never know how strong God is until you realize how weak you are. That deep dark night when you don't know what to do, the hour of **Desperate need**, can be a huge turning point in your faith life because that's when you see the hand of God. Look at those hymns on "Trust" and "Commitment" in your hymnal. Most of them came out of hard times for the hymn writers, just like the authors of those *Meditations* in the NPH classic, *For Such a Time as This!* That title comes from a Jewish woman named Esther centuries after me here at Jabbok. Esther became queen in Persia to help God's people *For Such a Time as This!* You can't turn to *Wizards That Peep* (and mutter) the way Dr. Becker quoted Isaiah in his classic book. In **Desperate need** you need to turn to God with...

✠ **Determined faith** (vv.26-30)

Oh, there's a time to give in, and there's a time to be stubborn. Most of my life I've been doing it backwards. But the last twenty years with Uncle Laban, I've found out what it feels like to have someone tricking you all the time. If God had not been watching over me, I would not be as wealthy as I am right now. Fact is, I would not be so **Determined** either. I've learned the hard way that playing people, and trying to get my own way by conniving only digs a deeper hole. No, I've got God in my hands when I pray. He started this wrestling match. It wasn't my idea. He came to me because apparently He wants me to be more **Determined** in my **faith**. "God, you can look at me angry if you want. I sure deserve it for my sins. You can crack the whip on my life and scourge me; I know I deserve far worse. But don't try to get away from me. Don't think I'm going to forget your promises. You said you would make me prosper. I didn't make that up. You said even though I am unworthy, you would still show me *kindness and faithfulness.*" You may seem every so angry, but **I Will Not Let You Go Unless You Bless Me!**"

Let me be blunt, my friends. You can't pray like that if you stop going to church. Maybe your faith is strong now listening to my sermon out of that dark night. But you will forget and you will drift away into your own foolish imagination just like me, if you stop hearing God's Word. You need to guard God's Word from your own schedule and your own family – if they try to get between you and God. That's when Jesus says you have to "*hate [your] father and mother...wife and children...brothers and sisters...[your] own life....*" (Luke 14:26f) You need to pick up your cross, whatever God sends, and follow Jesus with His cross. That's where real **Determine faith** comes from. Don't be a "Heel-grabber."

Be a **Determined faith** prayer, on your knees and in your heart wrestling with God for hours if need be. God will come to you in His Holy Word the Bible. Don't do all the talking when you pray. God has some awesome things to say to you, just as He did to me. You know what He asked after I insisted, "**I Will Not Let You Go Unless You Bless Me!**" He knew my name. He just wanted me to say it like a confession of sin to leave my deceit behind. But then He said something I'll never forget, "*Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel....*" That's like *Wrestler* – "*...because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.*" I guess God doesn't want us to be wimpy Christians. He wants us to study like students in your Sunday School and synod schools, to comfort the sick like certified chaplains. I'll be limping the rest of my life, but I'll never forget this dark night when rejoicing came in the morning. I did not let go. And, true to His promises, God blessed me. God bless you too – for Jesus' sake! Amen.