

It's a common thing in Christianity that people can tend to doubt whether or not they're saved; whether or not they've actually been born again.

OK, God has said, xyz and you'll be saved.

God has said abc and you'll be saved.

You've done xyz and you've done abc, yet you doubt your salvation.

What exactly is it that is being doubted?

Does one doubt that God will do what He said He will do?

Perhaps one doubts that he or she has done what was prescribed in the salvation "prescription".

Maybe one is doubting, thinking that there's something amiss because their "faith walk" so to speak, doesn't seem to be like everyone or maybe even anyone else's. Perhaps some may doubt that even though God has made good on His word, and done His part, namely the incarnation, the cross and the resurrection, they feel like they're not doing their part.

One must then wonder what one's part actually is, no?

So that leads us to ask the question... If one doubts their eternal security, is their eternal security less than secure?

This was a problem that was going on with the Patriarch Jacob, as told in the annals of ancient Israel. Jacob had received promises from God, but didn't believe them sufficiently to act as though those promises were actually going to be fulfilled.

We've been talking at length about our friend Esau, Jacob's twin brother, while I didn't expect to spend this much time with Esau, I guess I'm stuck with him for while, and so are you.

You recall Jacob tricking Esau, and Esau getting mad enough to want to murder Jacob... well Jacob managed to avoid Esau by living out where his mother's relatives were living; and there he took his wives, had his children, and made his fortune. But now, circumstances and the Lord told him that he must move back to the Promised Land, and this is when the matter of his dispute with Esau takes its place front and center once again.

So let's turn in our bibles to the story of when Jacob and Esau finally encountered one another again, after separating because of the discord that arose from Jacob's trickery and the deception of their father Isaac.

Let' see what's going on in Jacob's mind and heart, and see if the Lord's Words will speak to us this morning in the telling of this story.

Let us Pray...

Gen 32: So Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. *Now notice right away, that Jacob knows that he is in the presence of the divine... those creatures, whatever they're like, who spend time in the presence of God, and so show to those who see them that they are God's messengers... the literal meaning of the word angel, by the way, messenger.*

² When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is God's camp." And he called the name of that place Mahanaim. *This word is basically just the plural of the word for encampment. It means more than one encampment. Obviously, God's encampment, as Jacob says, and his own; with his wives and children, and flocks and herds. Ironically, Later in the story, Jacob splits his own company into two camps.*

³ Then Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

⁴ And he commanded them, saying, "Speak thus to my lord Esau, 'Thus your servant Jacob says: "I have dwelt with Laban and stayed there until now.

⁵ I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.' ' "

⁶ Then the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men *are* with him."

What's going on with Jacob here? Jacob has sewn seeds of family discord, hasn't he? He had tricked his Brother Esau into selling his birthright, then he tricked his father into giving him the blessing, then he had been tricked by his father-in-law Laban, and he himself also tricked Laban. Now Jacob has family discord immediately behind him, and family discord immediately before him. Is it any wonder that he is doubting the blessing of God?

If there is family discord in your family, and you've had anything to do with it, then to the best of your ability, make it right. You may not be able to, but whatever you can do, do it. Romans 12:18 "if possible, as much as depends on you, keep peace with all men." Jacob was always more concerned with what he could get, than with who he was. That's about to change.

As we join Jacob encountering the host of God, he had just left off making peace with his father-in-law Laban at the place they named Mizpah. We use that term Mizpah to describe fond feelings of people parting until they meet again; we make Mizpah coins as jewelry, with one half each being worn by lovers who can't bear to be parted from one another; but nothing could be further from the truth. Mizpah, which means watchtower, is what Jacob called the place where he departed from Laban, neither of them trusting one another. If you read the story in Genesis chapter 31, you'll see it was a situation where these two men who didn't trust each other, agreed that they didn't trust each other. Mizpah can be said to mean, I'm watching you because I don't trust you, and I know you're watching me because you don't trust me either.

Jacob was reaping what he had sown, as it were. Laban had done to Jacob, some of what Jacob had done to his own family.

Back to the story at hand... Internal turmoil is happening with Jacob. Jacob, due largely to his own "stuff" is doubting whether or not God is even with him... even though he is encamped with God's messengers themselves! In the very midst of a visitation by God, Jacob is doubting God. This can happen to all of us, loved ones. Even in the midst of God's presence, our past poor decisions, our guilt, and the consequences of many poor choices can convince us that somehow, that God who is manifesting His presence and perhaps His blessing, isn't even real... and if He is, then He certainly means us no good. This is a sad place to be in, spiritually. I caution you against inadvertently inferring that God might not keep His Word. There's a name for this. It is faithlessness. We see it here in Jacob, and it's all too familiar for most of us.

Jacob is at that very moment, being visited by The Host of God; indeed, they are camped together. Apparently Jacob's conscience prevented him from being comforted by that. Perhaps there was some wisdom there on Jacob's part, because the Host of God is really not on anyone's side, but God's side alone. Perhaps Jacob was finally realizing that he hadn't really been on God's side himself, and was therefore properly afraid of the Host of God. His own thinking, his own behavior was making him doubt his security, immediate and eternal.

Thankfully however, the promises of God are not contingent on that, my friends. God will do what needs to be done in order for His plans to unfold in His time. Let's continue and see how that worked itself out with Jacob.

⁷ So Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that *were* with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies.

⁸ And he said, "If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the other company which is left will escape."

⁹ Then Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the LORD who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you': *Turn back a page to chapter 31, and look at verse 3.* 'Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you.'" *Jacob is about to say to God, "I think I heard you, but I'm not sure I actually believe you". Observe...*

¹⁰ I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies. ¹¹ Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me *and* the mother with the children. ¹² For You said, 'I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.' ” *Jacob is praying that God would do, what God had already said He would do, while not believing that He would do what He said He would do. **God has said He'd save me and do me well, and increase my descendants like the sands of the sea... but just in case He doesn't...**By the way, if any of you are applauding Jacob for praying God's stated promises back to Him, I would remind you that He is not. Were Jacob praying God's promises back to Him, we would not see the behavior that accompanies the prayer... trying to deal with Esau through his own cunning and guile... again. Jacob is not having faith in God, Jacob is doubting God. But this is exactly what we talked about at the beginning, with people doubting their very salvation... doubting God's Words.*

Listen Beloved, especially you who may be doubting now, or have a tendency to doubt, and let the enemy eat away at your faith and trust in God... God has said that He sent His Son to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).

Jesus, God The Son said, I didn't come for the well, but for the sick (Matt 2:17).

God said that His Son didn't come into the world to condemn it, but to save it (John 3:17).

God said, I'll take care of what you cannot do yourself, saving you. Faith, the only true faith that ever exists is that faith that believes that singular fact. Do you not think it so? Repeat... and challenge to discuss.

The laws, the commandments that we can't possibly keep, were sent to instruct us that we cannot keep them, and therefore drive us to God for His salvation from eternal death, the price of breaking the law (Gal chapters 3 and 5).

But here is Jacob, quoting what God has just said, yet living like God had never said it! Oh, I wish I could say that I've never done this, but I have... and so have you.

God has told us that we are free from the law of sin and death, yet we don't want to live like that.

*Somehow we feel more comfortable with our guilt; perhaps more familiar with feeling like there's something wrong with us, than feeling like someone would want to give His life for us. But God says, I love you so much, I **have** given my life for you. But you don't always believe it.*

Believe it, loved ones. For believing that singular fact; having faith in that singular fact, is the very salvation you long for, but sometimes doubt.

Not believing that fact is a lie of the enemy... convincing you that what God has said is not true. When we are successfully convinced that what God has said is not true, at least not true for us, then we are saying that God's work has been in vain and/or that He has lied. But God's word is true, and He cannot lie. God's enemy, our enemy, is the liar; not God.

Let me say a word here about confession. We think of confession as something that is done only in regard to our sins. 1John1:9... But it is something that is done with regard to our salvation as well.

The word confession, the Greek word, homologeo, literally means, "same word". What do we do with words, but speak them. So when put into a verb form, an action word, we are to "same word say", or "same word agree" with God. He has said it, and we are to agree with it.

When it says in Romans chapter 10, that we are to confess with our mouths, the Lord Jesus and believe in our hearts that God has raised Him from the Dead, we

shall be saved, that's what it's talking about... "Same word agree" with God, that Jesus was raised from the dead, after dying for my sins. God said, agree with that, and you're saved. But we, just like Jacob, think that somehow, it's too good to be true; or that it can't possibly apply to me.

"Well you wouldn't think that Pastor, if you were stuck here inside of my head, hearing all the thoughts I think." I know. He knows. Agree with Him that it's sin. Confess it, and move on. 1 John 1:9

"But I see myself when no one else is looking, and we know that "real Christians" don't behave that way." Yes they do; just read the Bible and see. Yes you do behave that way, and at times, yes I do behave that way. You're right in thinking that we shouldn't, but we do. And none of that undoes the Words and Promises of God.

Jacob didn't believe God. Jacob disagreed with what God said. Yes, Jacob confessed, but wrongly.

*God hadn't told Jacob, "If you uphold your end of the bargain, I'll such and such." In fact, God had said of Jacob in the womb... "The older shall serve the younger". Now here's Jacob, having heard that from his Mother about God's promises toward him, and having heard from God Himself just a minute ago in chapter 31, and now camping in the very place that he referred to as God's Army encampment, afraid that if he doesn't play his cards right with Esau, none of what God said, or has already done, will be true. It seems ludicrous when we analyze **Jacob's** thinking, doesn't it? But let's bring it home.*

*"What if **I** doubt? Does that mean the whole thing is off, and I'm really not saved?" No, no, and no. Jacob doubted. Jacob was saved. Jacob made some poor confessions. Jacob was saved. Jacob was afraid. Jacob was saved.*

Some Bible Study, and some good doctrinal teaching is essential at this point, largely because it is such a hotly contested matter in Christianity, and because some are in fact, not saved. But we don't have time to resolve all of that today. But let's go back to our hero's story, as we approach that time when he finally runs into his estranged brother Esau.

¹³ So he lodged there that same night, and took what came to his hand as a present for Esau his brother:

¹⁴ two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams,

¹⁵ thirty milk camels with their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten foals.

¹⁶ Then he delivered them to the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, “Pass over before me, and put some distance between successive droves.” ¹⁷ And he commanded the first one, saying, “When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, saying, ‘To whom do you belong, and where are you going? Whose are these in front of you?’

¹⁸ then you shall say, ‘They are your servant Jacob’s. It is a present sent to my lord Esau; and behold, he also is behind us.’ ”

¹⁹ So he commanded the second, the third, and all who followed the droves, saying, “In this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him;

²⁰ and also say, ‘Behold, your servant Jacob is behind us.’ ” For he said, “I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me.”

The look of it would be staggering to Esau. He’d no sooner be thinking, “Oh, what a great gift”, than another one would be on the way.

²¹ So the present went on over before him, but Jacob himself lodged that night in the camp.

²² And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok.

²³ He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had.

²⁴ Then Jacob was left alone; *this is where we must be, in order to wrestle with this matter, beloved; not in church, not at a conference, but alone, where no one can get in touch with us but the One who is with us when we are apart from any other human; when we are alone. Jacob is about to have an identity change. He is about to become a new creature. He will go from Jacob, which means supplanter, tricker, beguiler... to Israel, which means Prince with God. Let’s read on...* Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.

²⁵ Now when the man saw that He did not prevail against Jacob, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob’s hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him.

²⁶ And He said, “Let Me go, for the day breaks.” But he said, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!”

²⁷ So He said to him, “What *is* your name?” He said, “Jacob.”

²⁸ And He said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.”

²⁹ Then Jacob asked, saying, “Tell *me* Your name, I pray.” And He said, “Why *is* it *that* you ask about My name?” And He blessed him there.

³⁰ So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel (or Penuel): “For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”

³¹ Just as he crossed over Penuel (or Peniel) the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip.

³² Therefore to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, which *is* on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob’s hip in the muscle that shrank.

*I love it when Scripture makes the characters so real that I can identify with them. The people in these stories are not people whose standards I can never live up to; these are real human beings, with all the frailties and failings, and doubts and fears that I have myself. Jacob is wrestling with **God Himself** and He knows it. He knows it’s God to the point where he names the place Penuel, which means face to face with God, in other words, I have seen God! But just to make sure, like Gideon casting a fleece, just to make sure, Jacob says, “What’s your name? Who are you?”. Notice the answer here, which never really comes... The Lord says, “Why is it that you ask my name”? Let me paraphrase that for you. “Why are you asking me that Jacob... you know exactly who I am. That’s why you asked me to bless you”.*

Poor Jacob. All the richest blessings of God, and he just couldn’t seem to get hold of them. Pause...

*Poor me. All the richest blessings of God, and I just can’t seem to get hold of them. Get hold today my friends. Confess, again if need be, that God raised Jesus from the dead, and that your sins have been paid for by that covenant fulfilling act of God. **Believe that. Have faith in THAT.***

After believing, we all know you won’t measure up, though I’ll pray that you all get better at trying, and I’ll certainly help you try to please God with a holy life.

But don't let the enemy rob you of the Joy of your Salvation by telling you that you're not good enough. Of course you're not.

Or maybe He'll tell you that God didn't mean what He said. Of course He did.

I will close with this next thought, and it may be of little comfort to you right now, in the midst of your affliction. But I ask that you let it sink into your soul as the Truth of God's Word, intended to comfort us in affliction, and let it come back to you again, and again. The thought is this, that there's another reason that we might tend to doubt our salvation... life is hard.

Here in the prosperous world of 21st Century America, we have been told the lie that if God is real, there'd be no suffering at all, or at least not for His followers. Even among those who do believe that God is real, we've been told that true believers in God are to be healthy and wealthy... or at the very least, cancer free and not starving.

Now we can speculate and argue over where this message may have come from and when, but one thing is certain; it did not come from the pages of Scripture. Let's turn to the book of Acts for our final thought from the Word of God this morning; chapter 14, beginning at verse 19.

¹⁹ Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. ²⁰ However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. ²¹ And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

God is less the problem solver as He is the presence through problems. He is less the protector from difficulties, than He is the presence through difficulties.

Life is hard, for the unbeliever and for the believer; both. Our own bad decisions, don't change God's promises of salvation. Difficulties in this world don't change God's promises of salvation.

Like Jacob, you will mess up, and come to think that there's no hope for you. But that is a lie. God's promises of salvation and preservation are dependent upon His faithfulness.

Like Paul, you may feel like you've been stoned to death; having to come to grips with the fact that "through many tribulations you must enter into the Kingdom of God". But God remains faithful through it all, for that same man Paul, who'd been stoned and left for dead, said of salvation that nothing can separate us from the Love of God which is in Christ Jesus... neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing! Romans 8:38, 39

God has not lied, and you can know that you are saved.

Yes, you can learn religion... you can learn doctrine. But what must take place in you, is that internal wrestling match, like Jacob had, where God Himself makes you a new creature, with a new name written down in Glory; for if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; a member of a new society. Look... behold... the old is gone and all things are made new.

Faith, true faith, is believing just that. The rest is God's.

I will read in your hearing, just this one Scripture, which sums up all that we've said, and we're done...

^{4b} And this is the victory that has overcome the world... our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

⁹ If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. ¹⁰ He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. ¹¹ And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹² He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, **that you may know that you have eternal life**, and that you may *continue to* believe in the name of the Son of God. (1John 5:4b, 9-13)