

## Genesis (2011) 33

- It's a new dawn for Jacob
  - He's encountered the Lord in a powerful way
    - Hand-to-hand combat between the Angel of the Lord and Jacob
    - Not a test of strength...a test of wills, one in which the Lord was determined to show Jacob the folly of striving against God
    - After an entire night of struggle, the Lord struck Jacob with a supernaturally strong blow, placing his hip out of joint
    - And Jacob got the point
  - Jacob demanded a blessing, and a blessing was exactly what the Lord had planned in the first place
    - So now Jacob, or Israel, as the Lord called him, is ready to move forward with a new understanding of what it means to be in covenant with the living God
    - There is still the issue of Esau
      - Esau's arrival has been the event propelling Jacob's fear
      - In fact, fear of Esau created the opportunity for the Lord to pressure Jacob into the moment of blessing
      - Is yet another example of the Lord turning all things to good for His elect, including turning Jacob's struggle with Esau into a cause for disciplining Jacob
  - So now Jacob moves toward the meeting with his brother
    - And as we read last week, the journey continued appropriately enough as dawn breaks

**Gen. 32:31** Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh.

- A new Jacob greets a new day
- But the new Jacob will still do battle from time to time with the old Jacob, as we'll soon see

**Gen. 33:1** Then Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids.

**Gen. 33:2** He put the maids and their children in front, and Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last.

**Gen. 33:3** But he himself passed on ahead of them and bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

- As Jacob crossed the river to join his family, Esau arrives
  - As promised, Esau is accompanied with 400 men
    - The news that Esau was bringing such a large contingent triggered Jacob's worries in the first place
    - So as Jacob sees this large force approach, he's still not sure what will happen
  - Earlier, Jacob divided his family in an attempt to save at least some of them from Esau's attack
    - Now we learn how that division was done
    - Jacob placed the two concubines in the foremost part of his family, Bilhah and Zilpah
      - Together with the maids, he included their children
      - Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher
    - Next he placed Leah and her children
      - Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun
    - Finally, Jacob placed Rachel and Joseph at the back
  - Do Jacob's actions leave any doubt concerning his feelings toward his family members?
    - Clearly he placed the most expendable members of his family in the front ranks
    - And he placed the most valuable members of his family in the rear ranks
      - Rachel has always been the wife he loved

- And now we see that Joseph is the favored son, though he was the youngest
- Don't you think the rest of Jacob's family got the point as well?
  - As they walked toward an uncertain encounter with Jacob's estranged brother, they look around and take note of where Jacob has positioned everyone
    - The handmaids see that they will be first to die should a battle ensue
    - Leah can see that she is clearly less valuable to Jacob than Rachel
      - And likewise, her children count for less
    - Finally, all eleven sons must have been keenly aware of where their father's affections centered
      - By custom the youngest son would have been the least worthy of honor
      - But Jacob has placed the younger in highest regard
  - These distinctions sow seeds for tremendous jealousy and hatred within Jacob's family
    - And the irony is that Jacob himself was the unfavored child though God had directed Isaac to grant Jacob preference
    - Now Jacob seems to be repeating that mistake
    - The ramifications of this behavior will be a serious rift in Jacob's sons
      - And the effect will nearly crush Jacob himself
  - Remember last week I noted that Jacob's new name comes and goes in the narrative of Genesis
    - Unlike Abram, who never used his old name again, Jacob's old name is still commonly used in the story
      - Occasionally, we hear Moses uses Jacob's new name of Israel
      - When he does, it's an indication of Jacob walking with the Lord in some way

- But for the most part, we continue to call him Jacob
      - And the use of that name suggests the old nature of the man is still at work in his life
- As Esau and Jacob meet, he bows seven times to meet Esau
  - Once again, Jacob is suggesting that he and Esau have assumed roles opposite those prescribed by Isaac's blessing
    - Jacob is bowing to Esau as if Esau were the patriarch
    - But Jacob was granted that role and can't give it back
  - Jacob is still relying on deception, in a subtle way
    - He is using the deception of flattery
    - He is granting Esau a title and privilege that isn't accurate in an attempt to win his favor
    - That's what flattery is...dishonesty
  - Christopher James Gilbert said:

**I cannot encourage any fabrication even for the sake of making people feel good. If I were to fabricate consciously and knowingly, I would not only be ordaining myself their enemy, but also ordaining myself God's enemy.**

- Jacob is using false, flattering words to curry favor with Esau
  - Jacob's trust and dependence upon the Lord is still weak, and in stressful moments, Jacob can't seem to help relying on the old tactics of deception and dishonesty

**[Gen. 33:4](#) Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.**

**[Gen. 33:5](#) He lifted his eyes and saw the women and the children, and said, "Who are these with you?" So he said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant."**

**[Gen. 33:6](#) Then the maids came near with their children, and they bowed down.**

**[Gen. 33:7](#) Leah likewise came near with her children, and they bowed down; and afterward Joseph came near with Rachel, and they bowed down.**

- Now we reach the moment that the narrative has been leading us to for nearly two chapters
  - Esau finally sees Jacob bowing on the ground, and he runs to Jacob, embracing him and kissing him
    - The two men weep together, probably for very different reasons
    - Esau seems sincerely happy to see Jacob again after 20 years apart
      - Whatever animosity existed earlier has long since been forgotten
      - His tears are tears of joy and happiness
    - Jacob, on the other hand, is probably shocked and a bit mystified over his brother's reaction
      - He assumed he was moments away from death by the sword, and now his enemy is hugging him and kissing him
      - I suspect Jacob's tears are tears of relief and thankfulness
  - The question for us to answer is what does Jacob learn from Esau's response
    - Does Jacob credit his own tactics or God's blessing?
      - Remember, Jacob sent a caravan of animals and servants ahead of him to greet Esau as he arrived
      - This lavish gift was intended to buy peace with Esau
      - Was that the cause of Esau's friendly arrival?
    - Or was this entire outcome God's doing?
- Before we get the answer, there is the matter of introductions
  - Esau asks who are all these people with Jacob?
    - By the question, it's apparent that Esau didn't expect Jacob to return married, much less with a complete entourage following him
    - Jacob tells him these are the family God has graciously given Jacob

- There's an answer that reflects the heart of someone who knows the Lord is working in his life
- So one by one, Jacob's family meets Esau
  - But notice what each does
  - Each wife and child bows down before Esau
    - The act of bowing was an acknowledgment of authority
    - And since Jacob had bowed to Esau, the family of Jacob was obligated to do the same
    - No one in Jacob's household held more stature than Jacob himself, so if Jacob bowed, all must bow
  - Here again we have a problem in Jacob's approach to Esau
    - According to God, Jacob is the superior and should have been the one receiving Esau's patronage
    - And in eternal terms, the Edomites will be servants of Israel, not the other way around
- Now Esau raises the question of Jacob's gift

**Gen. 33:8** And he said, "What do you mean by all this company which I have met?" And he said, "To find favor in the sight of my lord."

**Gen. 33:9** But Esau said, "I have plenty, my brother; let what you have be your own."

**Gen. 33:10** Jacob said, "No, please, if now I have found favor in your sight, then take my present from my hand, for I see your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably.

**Gen. 33:11** "Please take my gift which has been brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me and because I have plenty." Thus he urged him and he took it.

- Esau asks a rather humorous question
  - What did you mean by sending all that company to meet me?
    - Esau, we now learn, didn't know what to make of the odd greeting Jacob prepared
    - Instead of appeasing Esau and winning him over, the gifts simply confused Esau

- Esau never imagined they were gifts, since he had no reason to expect such a gift
- From Esau's perspective, they were brothers, not enemies
- Jacob had only succeeded in outsmarting himself
  - He thought he was making a sacrifice to reconcile himself with an enemy
  - In the end, his sacrifice wasn't even accepted as such
  - It was pointless and did nothing to gain an advantage for Jacob
- Clearly, we now see that Jacob's tricks amounted to nothing in protecting him and his family
  - God had already addressed the issue in Esau's heart
  - Before Jacob's schemes and plans, God had already put a plan in place to heal the wound and make Jacob's worthless gesture unnecessary
- In the relationship between Jacob and Esau, we can draw a comparison to the Gospel, and the reconciliation God has prepared for us through Christ on the cross
  - Like Jacob, we were once enemies with God Himself, made such by our sin nature
    - In our conscience, we had an instinctive appreciation for a coming judgment day, a day of reckoning when God would settle our debt
    - And since we were enemies of God by our sin against Him, we had little hope of surviving that encounter
  - As a result, many people thought to make preparations to appease God's wrath and earn his favor when they face judgment
    - We may have begun to perform works of one kind or another in the hope God would accept our gifts of sacrifice
    - Those sacrifices were the best we could offer, since we couldn't go back and erase the past
      - Perhaps those gifts came in the form of religious service or personal sacrifice or good works

- But just like Jacob, those gifts were useless
  - Because God has already solved the problem
  - He gave His only Son as a sacrifice in our place
  - And having offered that perfect solution, God will accept nothing less in payment for our sin
    - Like Esau, God declines our offer and tells us it was unhelpful
    - In fact, our gifts of service and sacrifice were of no value
    - If our relationship with God is to be repaired, it can only come from God's sacrifice on our behalf
- So here's Jacob hearing that his gift did nothing for Esau, nevertheless Jacob insists that Esau accept it anyway
  - What's Jacob's purpose in pursuing the gift at this point?
    - If it didn't serve a purpose in appeasing Esau, then what good does it do to give it?
    - In fact, Esau says he has "plenty"
      - The word in Hebrew for plenty is *rab*, which means an abundance or enough
      - Esau is at least as rich as Jacob at this point
      - These gifts aren't increasing Esau's wealth
  - Jacob gives his reason in vs.10-11
    - First, Jacob says he sees the face of God in Esau's welcome
      - Only the night before, Jacob had seen God's face in the form of the Angel of the Lord
      - And that encounter had delivered to Jacob the realization that he had been fighting against God, instead of letting God fight for Jacob
      - Now Jacob sees the Lord's face, so to speak, in the way Esau welcomed Jacob
    - Secondly, Jacob says that God has dealt graciously with Jacob

- Jacob knows that he has offended God in many ways and many situations
- Despite all Jacob's flaws and offenses, God has remained faithful, protecting and blessing Jacob
- This is the definition of grace: unmerited favor
- Finally, Jacob says he has plenty as well
  - The Hebrew word for plenty here is different than the earlier one
  - This word is *kol*, and it means all things
  - Jacob feels he has everything, so that even the loss of this gift means nothing to him
  - In practical terms, Jacob meant that he had received the land of Canaan and a full household and continual supply from the Lord
- So Esau takes the gift at the insistence of Jacob
  - Here we see the new Jacob shining through
  - Where before he wanted to give a gift to solve his own problem, now he wants to give a gift in honor of the Lord's work on his behalf
  - Same gift, but very different purpose and a different heart in the giver
- Once again, this relationship gives us a picture of our response to God's work in the Gospel
  - Once we have recognized the work of God on our behalf, our entire attitude toward our gifts change
    - Where before we might have been inclined to give God gifts of service or sacrifice hoping to appease his anger, now we give out of a new heart
    - We give our gifts and sacrifices in thank, recognizing that we too have witnessed God in our life
      - We've come to know God in the face of Christ

- We've watched the Lord give us grace
- And we've come to understand the depth of our riches in Christ, the eternal inheritance that awaits
- And knowing all these things, we freely and joyfully give back whatever we can in gratitude for God's work
  - This is the heart of Jacob with Esau
- But having made peace with Esau, Jacob also recognizes that they are on different paths with different futures

[Gen. 33:12](#) Then Esau said, "Let us take our journey and go, and I will go before you."

[Gen. 33:13](#) But he said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds which are nursing are a care to me. And if they are driven hard one day, all the flocks will die.

[Gen. 33:14](#) "Please let my lord pass on before his servant, and I will proceed at my leisure, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir."

[Gen. 33:15](#) Esau said, "Please let me leave with you some of the people who are with me." But he said, "What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord."

[Gen. 33:16](#) So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir.

- Esau is so happy about the reunion that he assumes Jacob will bring his family to live with him in Seir
  - Seir is the mountainous region of Edom, the land where Esau's descendants settled outside Canaan
    - Jacob knows that God has promised him a different land
    - And like his father before him, Jacob intends to wait for that inheritance
    - So Jacob has no interest in going to Seir
  - Instead of addressing the issue directly, Jacob decides not to spoil the moment
    - He uses the excuse of a tired family as his reason for not following
    - Interestingly, Jacob still gives the impression he would follow Esau, albeit more slowly

- At that point, Esau offers to leave men behind to escort Jacob back to Esau's land
  - Jacob, again, politely declines the offer
  - We have to read between the lines a little to know what's truly happening, but it would have been clear to Esau
- Esau understands that Jacob isn't coming to Seir
  - Jacob's excuse is the thinnest of reasons not to follow
  - And when Esau offers to at least leave some men to guide Jacob, it was a test of Jacob's sincerity
  - Jacob's refusal told Esau clearly that Jacob had no interest in going to Seir
    - By declining in this polite way, Jacob avoided offending Esau
    - And so Jacob moves westward while Esau returns south to Edom

[Gen. 33:17](#) Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built for himself a house and made booths for his livestock; therefore the place is named Succoth.

[Gen. 33:18](#) Now Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram, and camped before the city.

[Gen. 33:19](#) He bought the piece of land where he had pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money.

[Gen. 33:20](#) Then he erected there an altar and called it El-elohe-israel.

- Jacob first camps in Succoth, a place just east of the Jordan
  - He stays there long enough to build a home and tents for the animals
    - This was probably 1-2 years
    - We're not sure why he decides to stay there for that long, but it gains the name Succoth (which means tents or booths)
  - Later he moves into the land to Shechem, the place his forefathers have frequented
    - But notice again he doesn't move into the city

- Like Abraham and Isaac, Jacob remains a wanderer, proof that he knew and accepted God's promise of a future inheritance in the land
- In fact, Jacob buys a small plot of land to accommodate his family
  - The fact that Jacob buys land in the place that God has already told Jacob He would give him proves that Jacob understood that grant would come in a later time
  - Specifically, it shows that Jacob looked forward to an eternal inheritance in the land
- And on that land he set up an altar called El-elohe-Israel
  - Meaning the mighty God of Israel
  - How Jacob must have rejoiced to be back in the land, safe
  - But Jacob's story has only finished Act I...