

Jacob Meets Esau

HN 18/04/04 pm

Reading: Genesis 33, Luke 15

Study: Genesis 33

Psalms 30:1-4, 105:6-10, 105:11-15, 133

Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him and they wept (33:4). These few words bring the past 20 years of the life of Jacob to a climax. His greatest fear in returning home was his brother Esau who threatened to murder him. Fear led Jacob to earnest prayer, to detailed preparation and a night struggling with God. He expected to feel the thrust of a sword into his side but instead what did he feel? He felt the embrace and kiss of his brother!

Esau was coming with 400 men. What his intentions were we do not know. But we do know that Jacob was afraid of him. He had sent various flocks ahead as gifts to Esau hoping to appease him. Jacob also arranged his family members with the younger (or most loved) at the end. His idea seems to have been they might escape if Esau attacked.

But God wonderfully answered his prayer. Can you share the great relief, the inner joy and thankfulness that Jacob felt. *They wept* we read. I think Jacob probably wept the most because his great fear and dread had disappeared. He was alive in the arms of his brother. *I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God* he said to Esau (33:11). He had seen the face of God in his struggle with Him the previous night. God was very real to Jacob at this time.

You have probably not been threatened with death as Jacob was but I am sure you have similarly felt great relief or great joy at answered prayer. Maybe healing maybe saved in an accident, a safe birth, getting a job or some other way in which God has answered your prayer. David in Psalm 30 shares his feelings after the Lord healed him. He praised God singing *you have turned my mourning in to dancing for me, you have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness*. Can you share in the experience, the feeling of Jacob at this time?

Then again, you have lived under the threat of death haven't you? You were born an enemy of God, you were born in sin and the wages of sin is death. As a believer you prayed Lord have mercy upon me a sinner. You asked the Lord to forgive your sin and save you from death. The Lord was gracious and granted you new life. You felt his embrace not his sword because of the grace of Jesus Christ. You have a lot to rejoice about.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a word we hear a lot but sadly don't see demonstrated very often. This reconciliation between Jacob and Esau stands out in the Old Testament and in the whole of Scripture. 'Such warmth after so many years of hatred makes this scene one of the most beautiful in Scripture'. Indeed we see it reflected in the New Testament don't we. What were your thoughts as you read 33:4? Did you think I have heard those words before? And where?

Jesus used almost the same words in telling the parable of the lost/prodigal son (Luke 15: 20). The younger son grabbed his inheritance from his father, went off to a far country and squandered it all.

He came back to his father expecting to be rebuked and cast out with the servants. But his father saw him and had compassion on him. He ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

Jesus was talking about being reconciled to God in this parable and that is the first reconciliation we must seek. *We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God* (2 Corinthians 5:20). There are many people living in fear, in fear of death, and rightly so. Death notices fill out newspapers – death from war, from accidents, from homicide, from disease- it is there every day.

Everyone knows that one day they will face death. They will face the wrath of God – unless that wrath has been averted. Jacob prayed *deliver me from the hand of my brother*. He came near to him bowing low seven times. The prodigal son *came to himself* – he went to his father confessing his sin. God in his sovereign power had changed the heart of Esau. He was no longer angry but showed love towards Jacob.

How then are we reconciled to God? We have a loving father yes – but he is also just. So it is that *God in Christ was reconciling the world unto himself*. God in his grace sent Jesus to die upon the Cross that we might be reconciled to him. When we approach God pleading the merits of Christ we are accepted, we are embraced by God himself.

This is the ministry of reconciliation that has been entrusted to us- and what a wonderful ministry it is. What a wonderful word it is that we have been given to take to the world – Reconciliation through Jesus Christ, and him alone. Be reconciled to God.

A missionary friend drove this old car with a bumper sticker on it which read – 'at the end of the road you will meet God'. Jacob came near to Esau not knowing how he would be received – would it be death or life. But you can be assured as you come to meet God, you can be assured of life if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Likewise if you do not believe you can be sure it will be death, and the fires of hell.

Being reconciled to God in Christ we are commanded to be reconciled to one another also. We are a new creation in Him and are called upon to live a new life – a life marked by love, joy, peace – and forgiveness. *First be reconciled to one another and then come an offer you gift* on the altar said Jesus in the 'sermon on the mount'. And again *If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your heaven father forgive your trespasses* (Matthew 6:15).

God has the power to change hearts. He changed the heart of Esau. He can change the heart of those who hate us and want to harm us. He can change your heart and mine.

A 'pledge of reconciliation' is what Calvin called the gift which Jacob gave to Esau. The display of hospitality that follows the meeting of Jacob and Esau may seem a bit overt, a bit over the top. Here take this – no I have enough- no you must take it. *So he urged him and he took it*. But this is important, especially important to Jacob.

He needed a sign, a token, a pledge that Esau was genuine in his embrace. Remember the peace child story that Richardson wrote about. A child was given to the enemy tribe when peace was agreed upon to ensure compliance to the treaty. Jacob insisted that Esau accept the 550 animals that he sent to him.

Note also what Jacob said. He called his children and other things gracious gifts of God. He avoided the word 'blessing' with reference to himself. Yet he said to Esau now *take my blessing that is brought*. Jacob felt guilt at what he had done to Esau in stealing the birthright. He seems to have been careful not to raise the issue in this meeting. He gives bountifully to Esau *my blessing*, but could not of course dispense with the promise that accompanied the birthright.

Resolute

Esau wanted to escort Jacob back to his home in Seir/Edom (33:12). Jacob pleaded that his children and young stock could not travel fast. He also refused Esau's offer for some men to stay back and help him along the way. *Let my lord go ahead* he said, *until I come too my lord in Seir*.

While his reasons for not going with Esau may have been valid the question remains – did Jacob intend to go to Seir at all or was this yet another deception. Some argue that even though he proceeded to turn back and go in the opposite direction that he did intend to go to Seir one day. But as the narrative unfolds in the following chapters, there seems to have been little desire on Jacobs part to go to Seir – and rightly so.

He was called to go to the land of Canaan, not Seir. He was bearing the promise of the Lord that related to Canaan. He did not forget that call. He remained resolute in walking with the Lord. We must beware of stumbling/falling after a mountain top experience of answered prayer. We must remain resolute and alert to avoid temptation.

Reaches Canaan

This chapter concludes with Jacob reaching the land of Canaan. After Esau left he headed back across the Jabbok river to Succoth. Here he built a house and cattle sheds so he must have stayed a good while. But eventually he crossed the Jordan into Canaan. He *came to the Salem, to the city of Shechem* – or as some translate he came in peace to the city of Shechem. Shechem it turns out was the name of a person, a prince in this town.

After purchasing some land near the city he erected an altar there calling it *El Elohe Israel*, God, the God of Israel. For the first time God is called the God of Israel. Remember the vow Jacob made at Bethel as he fled from Esau. *If you bring me back to my father's house in peace, the Lord shall be my God* (28:21). He is not yet back at Bethel yet he is in Canaan and so acknowledges God as the God of Israel, the new name God gave to him at Peniel.

Through reconciliation with Esau, and indeed with Laban beforehand, and resolution in obeying God, Jacob reached the Promised Land in peace. This was his pilgrimage and it is ours also. Let us be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, let us walk resolutely according to his word and we will by his grace reach the promised land, the land of peace and eternal rest in Jesus Christ our Lord.

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