

The Story of Jacob
Heroes of Faith Series
Week 11: Jacob's Fear of Esau

Scripture

Genesis 32

Motivation

Where are we in the story? (Genesis 29-30)

- Jacob tricked his brother, Esau, out of the blessing and had to run for his life
- God met him at Bethel and promised to be with him
- Laban deceived Jacob into marrying Leah, instead of Rachel
- Jacob spent 20 years working, waiting, and trying to get ahead
- Family drama, rivalry, and manipulation were constant
- Jacob now wants to leave, but Laban wants him to stay.
- Jacob and Laban strike a deal, and God blesses Jacob's flocks through some strange breeding practices.

Genesis 30:43 (NLT) As a result, Jacob became very wealthy, with large flocks of sheep and goats, female and male servants, and many camels and donkeys.

Information

God's Faithfulness

Genesis 32:1-2 (ESV) Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. 2 And when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" So he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

Faithful to His promise, God has always been with Jacob

This reminds me of Exodus 14:19 when Pharaoh and his army were riding toward the newly freed fleeing Jews because Pharaoh had changed his mind. The pillar of cloud (God), who was leading them, moved behind them and would then protect and shield them.

God does not give up or abandon his people even if they abandon Him. Jacob, seeing God's encampment around him and has confidence that he must do what is right and make amends with Esau.

Jacob's Message

Genesis 32:3-5 (ESV) And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, **4** instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. **5** I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.'"

Jacob wants to clearly establish that he needs nothing from Esau, only to reunite as he heads home. Jacob's response is much like what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus' pattern given at the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:23-25 (ESV) So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. **25** Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.

Jacob grasped what he had done. He had lived with it for 20 years. He knows he must do what is right. As he heads home, he knows he should make amends with his brother, whom he fled from all those years ago.

Jacob's Fear

Genesis 32:6-8 (ESV) And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him.” 7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps, 8 thinking, “If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape.”

Why is Jacob fearful and distressed? Esau just has 400 of his closest, strongest warrior friends coming to witness the reuniting of these brothers. As we learn from I Samuel 22:1-2, David’s 400 loyal followers during the time he was on the run from Saul, they are described as a militia or defensive group because they were men who were in difficult circumstances, burdened by financial obligations, or were discontented with the state of affairs under the reign of Saul.

So, this would be perceived as a very bad thing by Jacob. Perhaps Esau meant to carry out his threat from all those years ago. Jacob was terrified and rethinking his grand plan. Jacob is thinking he just poked the beast, and he is coming for me.

God does not discount our fears. He wants us to recognize

-God is Ever Present

-God is more powerful than whatever we face

-God is actively involved in our lives

Looking ahead, Israel refused to enter the promised land because of fear of giants in an unknown place. In Deuteronomy 1 as they stand waiting to enter the promised land Moses reminds them.

Deuteronomy 1:29-31 (ESV) Then I said to you, ‘Do not be in dread or afraid of them. 30 The Lord your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, 31 and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place.’

Jacob, in his fear, goes against the grain and stops and prays so that the fear will not take over. This is new for Jacob

Jacob's Prayer

Genesis 32:9-12 (ESV) And Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,’ **10** I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. **11** Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. **12** But you said, ‘I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’”

Wonderful prayer - Jacob acknowledges God - not bargaining. Twice, he speaks God's words back to Him (Return & I will surely do you good). Jacob acknowledges himself and shows a greater understanding of God (I am not worthy and he calls himself the servant) and we see Jacob uses that great Hebrew word *Hesed*. He is beginning to grasp that God's steadfast love, loyalty, mercy, and faithfulness are not deserved but are freely given even in the light of Jacob's many failings. Jacob is grasping God's commitment to His Promises and His people.

Unfortunately, Jacob is so much like we are. I wish that at the end of the prayer, we would have a beautiful reunion, but like us (so many of us), Jacob thinks he needs to help God.

Jacob Scheming, Again?

Genesis 32:12-15 (ESV) So he stayed there that night, and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau, **14** two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, **15** thirty milking camels and their calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys.

An extravagant gift of 550 animals plus servants - Almost absurd how many animals he sends to Esau to calm him down. To appease him. Then he comes up with this offering parade of gifts.

Genesis 32:16-18, 20-21 (ESV) These he handed over to his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, “Pass on ahead of me and put a space between drove and drove.” **17** He instructed the first, “When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, ‘To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these ahead of you?’ **18** then you shall say, ‘They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a present sent to my lord Esau. And moreover, he is behind us.’” (19 Repeats so skip to verse **20** For he thought, “I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterward I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me.” **21** So the present passed on ahead of him, and he himself stayed that night in the camp.

Appease Him - Means “Cover his face.” An expression meaning to cover over guilt.

I look at Jacob and his prayer and even my own life and go, Ooooo so close.

Application

Trusting God means we often need to venture into unknown territory. I know God can provide, but somehow, he needs my help. What he needs is for me to get out of the way. To fully trust Him. And for me to stop trying to fix things.

God will take care of you. That may not be a full physical healing. It may not be in your time. It may not be the way you want or expect. But you can let go and trust God. The fear and worry create this illusion that we have some sort of control of

the outcome. It is God. It will always be God. It will always be in his way and his time. And trust me. You don't want it any other way!