

CCLEB SERMON NOTES



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GENESIS 33:1-20

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SEEING WITH EYES OF FAITH OR EYES OF FEAR?



When my wife's water broke at 19 ½ weeks pregnant with our son Daniel, I went numb inside me. All I could see in my mind in the future was pain, my wife birthing a still born son, a funeral, my own grief, a grieving wife, a grieving family -What I saw in my mind was not what was happening in front of me at the moment, but what I thought would happen. In essence what I saw was looking through the eyes of fear. 26 years later, seeing our beautiful son Daniel today, knowing what God has accomplished for him, knowing what God has transformed in Sheri and I because of Daniel, knowing how Daniel has touched so many of you, I can now look back on all that has happened with eyes of faith. Covenant faithful God was there from the beginning, was with us all along the way, and is still with us. To God be the glory! But how do we get to the place in our walk with the Lord that from the beginning of the hard and ugly, and painful parts of life we look with eyes of faith?

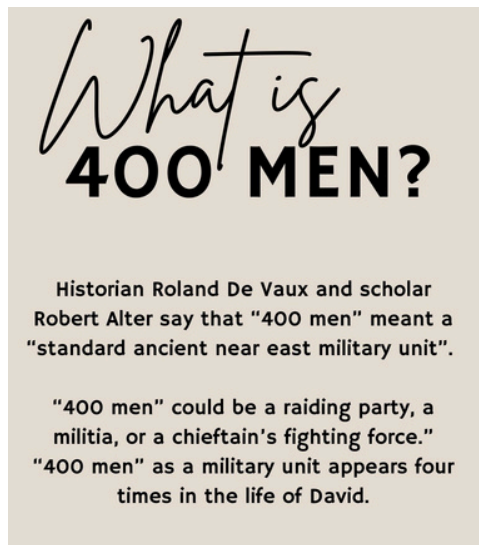
Genesis 33:1a NASB opens with a beautiful phrase, "Jacob raised his eyes, and looked and behold..". We have seen this phrase five times already in Genesis. We will look at two of those. We see the same phrase in **Genesis 22: 13 NASB**. The text tells us that when Abraham raised his eyes and looked, what he saw was the miraculous provision of a ram for a sacrifice. The ram that would be sacrificed instead of Abraham's beloved son Isaac. Isaac who Abraham had bound to the altar in obedience to the LORD. This miraculous provision of a ram for a sacrifice was covenant faithful God miraculously intervening and providing for Abraham on Mount Moriah. "Jehovah Jireh" – the LORD our provider. Abraham raised his eyes and saw the LORD's miraculous provision. Eyes of faith.

Another time we see this phrase "raised his eyes, and looked, and behold.."... **Genesis 24:63 NASB** says that Isaac "raised his eyes, and looked, and behold. If you recall the details of that story, Rebekah becoming the wife of Isaac was clearly a "miraculous provision" by the covenant faithful LORD. Again Jehovah Jireh! The LORD our provider. Isaac raised his eyes and saw the LORD's miraculous provision. Eyes of faith.

Genesis 33:1 NASB opens with the same beautiful phrase, "Jacob raised his eyes, and looked and behold..".

These matching phrases seem to then create an expectation that when Jacob raises his eyes and sees in **verse 1** he would see God doing something, in these the two previous times, it was God's miraculous provision. But in **verse 1** when Jacob raises his eyes and sees, Jacob sees his brother Esau, the one that he tricked out of his birthright twenty years prior. The same Esau that in response to Jacob's treachery said he wanted to kill Jacob. Jacob raised his eyes and saw Esau coming toward Jacob with 400 men and through the eyes of fear he presumed Esau was coming with hostile intent.

400 men. Hebrew numbers often have other meanings. Sometimes Heb numbers have meaning in addition to the actual numerical value, and sometimes they have meaning instead of the actual numerical value. Historian Roland De Vaux and scholar Robert Alter say that "400 men" meant a "standard ancient near east military unit". "400 men" could be a raiding party, a militia, or a chieftain's fighting force." "400 men" as a military unit appears four times in the life of David.



So when Jacob raises his eyes and sees, Jacob doesn't see God's miraculous provision like Abraham saw on mount Moriah, or like his father Isaac saw when he saw his bride Rebekah, rather Jacob sees a military unit coming towards him led by the presumed angry brother Esau.

Is this Jacob seeing with Eyes of Faith or Eyes of fear? I confess, I can be a fearful person like Jacob and I see through the eyes of fear not eyes of faith. How about you? The Lord is doing a work in me on that, and I know the LORD also wants to do a work in those of you who are like me.

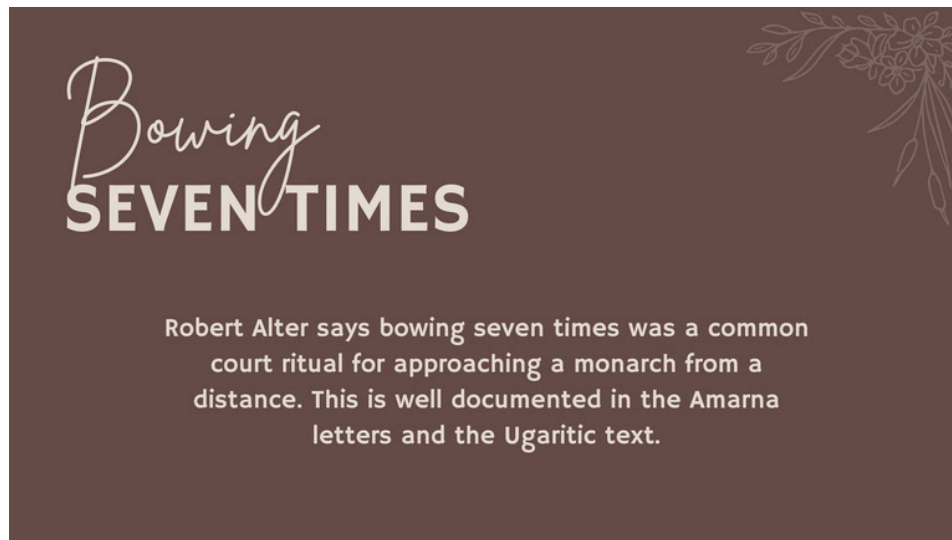
Now we know from Jacob's response in **verse 1-2** that Jacob responds in fear to Esau approaching with 400 men. And Jacob's fear response is consistent with his track record, he responds with what looks like self-preservation schemes.

Jacob's plan was to divide his family into three sections in order – servants and his children through the servants first, then Leah and her children, then lastly, his beloved Rachel and Jacob's favorite son Joseph. Those in the front would face the 400 men first etc. Imagine being one of the children in the front or middle! The jealousy we see between the sons of Jacob later in Joseph's life is for obvious reasons.

This appears to be a similar scheming arrangement that Jacob had arranged in **Genesis 32:7-8** when he divided his family and flocks into two camps, hoping that at least one of the two camps would be spared.

Yet in **Genesis 33:3** we see an unusual act of courage for Jacob. Jacob surprisingly positions himself in front of all. One might even say this was an expression of maturity for Jacob – Jacob actually being responsible. Now compared to **Genesis 32:20** where Jacob positioned himself last in preparation for meeting Esau and his 400 men. But here Jacob chooses to go out front.

So picture the scene, all Jacob's family and belongings and flocks in three sections in a row with an obvious gap between them, and then Jacob comes from the rear.. walks out ahead of all the flocks, probably still walking with a limp from his all night wrestling match with the LORD. And as Jacob walks toward his brother from a distance Jacob pauses every so often and bows, he walks, pauses, and bows, and he does that seven times. Robert Alter says bowing seven times was a common court ritual for approaching a monarch from a distance. This is well documented in the Amarna letters and the Ugaritic text.



Now Jacob uncharacteristically going out in front – sort of as a shield, and bowing in humility to his brother seven times, marks a significant change in Jacob. So what happened? Why the unusual courageous, responsible, mature response from Jacob?

Well the answer is in the previous chapter. We know what happened between when Jacob positioned himself in the rear of the clan in self-preservation in **Genesis 32:20** and when in **Genesis 33:3** Jacob positions himself in front. What happened was Jacob positioning himself first in the rear of the clan, then uncharacteristically positioning himself in the front was that Jacob wrestled with God in the darkness of night and saw God's face, and lived. Was that encounter with God in the darkness of night enough to make this transformation in Jacob? Think about your own wrestling with God in seasons of darkness. It almost seems that God uses the times of darkness in our life to bring about the transformative character change we need. My story and testimony attests to that. I think King David's story does too. **Psalms 23:4** "Even when I walk through the darkest valley..."

Verse 4 Shifts focus to Esau and it tells us how Esau responded to Jacob. The text tells us that Esau "ran and embraced" Jacob and "fell on his neck and kissed him". And then they both "wept". This is a heartwarming, beautiful scene.

Where Jacob expected anger and retribution, Esau showed love and forgiveness in a deep display of emotion. This was not the welcoming from Esau that Jacob expected but it was the welcoming that Jacob's soul longed for.

We later in Genesis see a similar welcoming and similar language play out again with Joseph and his brothers in **Genesis 45:14-15**. Where Joseph's older brothers would not have expected to be welcomed by Joseph with love and forgiveness and a deep display of emotion, that is indeed what they receive. Same words as **Genesis 33:4**, same action, same welcoming – love – forgiveness.

That beautiful response may remind you of another notable story in the New Testament that also is about an unexpected welcoming with love and forgiveness and a deep display of emotion - the story of the homecoming of the lost son. After the son had squandered his inheritance and lived a messed up life he decides to go home to his father, expecting to be treated no better than a slave. In the lost son's thinking, being treated as a slave was still better than what the prodigal son had at that moment.

But we see in **Luke 15:20** a familiar welcoming that we saw in **Genesis 33:4** and **Genesis 45:15**.

Interesting that all three of these beautiful stories are about unexpected welcomings, unexpected forgiveness, unexpected acceptance and love, expressed with deep emotion. And I would suggest that this unexpected welcoming, forgiveness, acceptance, love from Esau to Jacob is the “miraculous provision” that the LORD provided for Jacob, that the LORD wanted Jacob to see. Jacob prayed for this in (**Genesis 32:11**) When Jacob lifted his eyes and saw his brother coming – the miraculous provision was that his brother Esau was not coming in anger, but was coming to welcome Jacob back with forgiveness, love, acceptance. Is that acceptance what you need somewhere in your life today?

Now it's clear back in **Genesis 33:4** that in order for this restored relationship between brothers, that it was not just Jacob that the LORD was changing - but Esau also. And as Danny pointed out last week in his excellent teaching, in the twenty years Jacob was in exile serving Laban, the LORD was doing a work in Esau as well. When we left Esau in **Genesis 27:41** twenty years prior, Esau wanted to kill Jacob. And that is the Esau that Jacob feared. But that was twenty years ago. Clearly by **Genesis 33:1** Esau had a change of heart and thinking.

A lesson in this that Pastor Thom has taught is that we should consider that God has a way of changing people over time. Just because a relationship ended badly, and hurtful hard things were said, doesn't mean that the other person that said the hurtful hard things is still at that place. And because God is the God of restoration, the God of forgiveness, just perhaps God has been working on the other person as well during the long time since the break in the relationship. I hope that encourages some of you to step towards restoration in faith.

Now note back in **Genesis 33:5-8** when Esau welcomed Jacob back with love and forgiveness, Jacob shows a subservient position and posture to Jacob – this is sometimes called a “one down position”. Jacob refers to himself as “your servant” and to Esau as “my lord”. The spelling of “lord” in our English bibles – all lowercase – typically refers to a master as in a master - servant relationship. And I don't think this was Jacob being manipulative with false humility. I think Jacob has owned his treachery against his brother Esau, and truly is taking a “one down position”. A “one-down position” means that when I look at you, I purpose to see you as greater than myself, and my words and tone and posture reflect that. Paul says in **Philippians 2:3**. “be humble, thinking of others better than yourself.” That is what we see here in Jacob.

What does the word “lord” mean?



That spelling of “lord” in our English bibles – all lowercase – typically refers to a master as in a master - servant relationship.

As the story goes in **Genesis 33** Esau questions Jacob's intent regarding the flocks that Jacob sent out front. Jacob reveals what he intended with those flocks in the end of **verse 8** “They are a gift...”

Note that in **verse 9** Esau responds to Jacob calling him master, and himself servant, with language of equality, not the language of an angry master. Esau calls Jacob “my brother”. This is the first time we are seeing these two brothers as equals. Remember (**Genesis 25:22**) that during Rebekah's pregnancy the brothers “struggled” with each other even in the womb. And here Esau sees Jacob as “brother” -an equal.

Yet even when we look at this scene in **Genesis 33:9** where Esau saw them as equal brothers, we the readers have to keep in mind what the LORD told Rebekah would happen between the two brothers in **Genesis 25:23**. Eventually Esau the older would serve the younger Jacob. So what we are seeing in **chapter 33** with Jacob bowing to Esau, and Esau, the person in power looking favorably on Jacob is just a moment in time of the big picture. That Esau the older, and his descendants will serve Jacob the younger.

As the story goes in **verse 9** Esau initially declines the gifts Jacob had offered him. This reveals some things about Esau. Esau had apparently become a tribal leader himself, or the head of a clan. We already saw that Esau has access and ability to command 400 men. All indications of his power and position. And when Esau sees the lavish gifts of flocks that Jacob offered to him, Esau simply brushes the offer aside saying "I have plenty". So obviously the LORD had blessed Esau as well, maybe even in preparation for this moment. And of course we know from history that Esau goes on to become the kingdom of "Edom".. the other name for Esau we learned in **Genesis 25:29**. We will learn more about Esau and the Edomites in **Genesis 36**.

In **verse 10 NASB** we have another indication of welcoming and forgiveness when not expected. Jacob says in **verse 10** "If I have found favor with you". In Hebrew that is more like "If I have found favor in your sight". This is a Hebrew idiom meaning: to receive good will or acceptance from someone with greater power, deserved or undeserved.

"If I have found
favor in your sight"



This is a Hebrew idiom meaning: to receive good will or acceptance from someone with greater power, deserved or undeserved.

And Jacob goes on to say that seeing Esau's friendly face is like seeing the face of God. So what Jacob is saying in this verse seems to be a reference to Jacob's previous night wrestling match with the LORD where he was face to face with God. After that match Jacob says in **Genesis 32:30**. So because Jacob is in Esau's presence - face to face - and Esau didn't immediately kill Jacob, then to Jacob it's like being face to face with God in the wrestling match and being allowed to live.

Now consider these two back to back stories. In **chapter 32** Jacob wrestled with God, was face to face with God and lived. In **chapter 33** Jacob is face to face with Esau and likewise lived. These are Old Testament pictures of a New Testament concept of being welcomed in God's presence because we are seen as righteous in God's sight. We know that after death every person will stand face to face with God, their creator, maker. The question we don't know the answer to is how will it go for them? Will they be welcomed and accepted like Jacob was with God and Esau? God in his great love for mankind, his creation, demonstrates his great love for us by likewise offering all of mankind forgiveness, love and acceptance through Jesus. **John 3:16**.

And because of Jesus paying for our sins on the cross we can as **Hebrews 10:19** says "boldly enter into the". **Jude 25** further adds to our confidence by telling us that Jesus brings us into his God's glorious presence with great joy. So because of what Jesus did for us, paid for our offense against God, we can be face to face with God and be assured of his glad welcome. That God will welcome us as the father welcomed home the lost son, as Joseph welcomed his brothers, and as Esau welcomed Jacob.

Now back in **Genesis 33:11**... Jacob insists on Esau accepting the gift. In the Hebrew the word that is translated here as “gift” in Hebrew is actually the word “blessing” or “beraka” בְּרָכָה which is the exact same word that Esau used to describe what Jacob had stolen from him in **Genesis 27:36**. So Jacob’s gifts to Esau are in a way “restitution”. Jacob is paying back to Esau the “blessing” that Jacob stole from Esau. This is not a bribe, this is Jacob making things right. We then see in the end of **Genesis 33:11** after Jacob insists, Esau finally accepts the gift, the repaid blessing, and he accepts the restitution.



It seems like the story would end there, however it doesn't. **Genesis 33:12-15**.

So all is well now between Jacob and Esau and Esau wants his brother Jacob and clan and flocks to follow him to Seir.

Now the location of Seir is a point of interest, look on the map. There is a Seir in Israel in Judah and there is a Seir in modern day Jordan. **Genesis 32:3** tells us that Esau lived in the land of Edom, what is modern day Jordan. It can then be assumed that Esau was headed back to Seir in Edom, not Judah, and expected Jacob to follow him. Here is the problem, Seir in Edom is not where the LORD told Jacob to go in **Genesis 31:3**.



The LORD told Jacob to return to the “land of his fathers”. The land of Jacob’s father Isaac, and his father Abraham was Canaan, specifically near Hebron.

So where does Jacob go? – Well we see in **verse 15-17** that despite Jacob telling Esau that he would meet him in Seir, Jacob had no intention of going to Seir. Many commentaries see this as Jacob continuing to be deceptive and he is.



Verse 17 tells us then that Jacob journeyed to Succoth and there built a house and shelters – which is what “Succoth” means.



Now we don't know how long Jacob stayed in Succoth... but we see in **verse 18-20** that Jacob is on the move again and ends up across the Jordan River near the town of Shechem where he buys land. Important to note is that Jacob is now officially back in the land, Canaan, where the LORD told Abraham to go, where Jacob's father Isaac settled.



And there Jacob bought land from Hamor. -Note it is here, on the land that Jacob purchased, that Jacob erected an altar called "El-Elohe-Israel" - which means "God, the God of Israel". That altar was a personal testimony of God's faithfulness to Jacob - now named "Israel".



Thoughts for your meditation and application.

1. How do you get to the place in your walk with the Lord that from the beginning of the hard and ugly, and painful parts of life you look with eyes of faith? To look with the eyes of faith is a deliberate choice. In **Genesis 22:5** Abraham looked at mount Moriah from a distance and told his servant "the boy and I will travel a little farther, we will worship there and "we" will come back". That is Abraham looking at an awful painful hard thing through the eyes of faith. That was a deliberate choice.

Here is why this is important. When we don't choose to look through the eyes of faith, our only recourse is to look with eyes of fear, which always results in self-preservation schemes like what Jacob did up to **Chapter 33**.

2. In today's story we saw Esau welcoming Jacob back with love and forgiveness, and consequently Jacob saying that Esau's face is like the face of God. From that one could also say that the face of God is the face of a person that was wronged welcoming back the offender with love and forgiveness. Think of Joseph's face in **Genesis 45:14-15** representing the face of God "weeping with joy", at the restoration with his brothers. Think of the father's face in **Luke 15:20**... that's the face that God offers to all mankind through Jesus. The reality though is that there is another face of God **Matthew 25:41**. That's a different face! What determines what face of God one will face is whether one has put their trust in Jesus to pay for their sins.

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

Genesis 33:1 “Then Abraham raised his eyes, and looked, and behold...” This phrase also occurs in **Genesis 18:2 NASB** when the LORD and two angels visited Abraham at Mamre prior to the destruction of Sodom.

We then see the same phrase **Genesis 22:5** And what Abraham saw when he raised his eyes and looked the first time was mount Moriah in the distance, where he was to sacrifice his son. Imagine what he was feeling. Here Abraham looked with eyes of faith.

And we see the phrase in **Genesis 24:63** when Rebekah sees Isaac.

Genesis 33:1 “400 men”: see also **1 Samuel 22:2, 25:13, 30:10** and **30:17**.

Genesis 33:14-15 Did Jacob lie and deceive again? Jacob’s deceptiveness on this occasion is not as black and white in an honor and shame culture. If someone of power and importance from an honor and shame culture invites you to their house for dinner on Saturday you are culturally expected to accept the invitation even if you know you can’t attend on Saturday. That seems like lying to us in the west. But in an honor and shame culture, they are extending honor to you by inviting you into their home. So to say “no” to the invitation is saying “no” to the honor they have extended to you which is “dishonoring” or bringing “shame” to them publicly. That will end the relationship. Rather, you honor them by first saying “yes publicly”, then later decline in a way that preserves the honor in a carefully crafted “My deepest apologies,please forgive my absence”- sending that, thru the right channels- sometimes accompanied by a gift. So in essence then you are declining the event, not declining the honor the person extended to you.

Now for two individuals on more equal social status, you decline by saying something like “yes I will come of course! But with your blessing could it be another evening?... etc. So you are saying “yes” to the relationship, and the rest is just details.

So applying that to our story in **Genesis 33**... Jacob has a history of deceiving – that is true, however I suspect Jacob’s response and actions in these verses is more about not dishonoring Esau who is the more powerful one, the one who just showed him so much grace. And not dishonoring him in front of his 400 men, and all Jacob’s large clan.

Genesis 33:17 “Succoth” is the same word as the “Feast of Booths” in Hebrew “Sukkot”- that is celebrated yearly to this day to remember the LORD’s faithfulness to the Israelites after they fled their 400 years of exile in Egypt. So on Israel’s exodus from Egypt, while they were in the wilderness, they lived in temporary dwelling places... “booths” and the LORD took care of them. Interesting that for Jacob Succoth happens after his exile to Laban in Padam-Aran on his way back to the promise land. And Succoth happens for Jacob’s descendants called the Israelites after their 400 year exile in Egypt. Both returning exiles have a Succoth. These Gen stories just keep repeating themselves.]

Genesis 33:19 “Hamor” means “donkey” – it’s an allusion to great strength and dependability in work, but considered an unclean animal later in Exodus. And this uncleanness sets up the awful immoral story that happens in **Chapter 34**.