

Genesis 33:1-20

Jacob Finally Meets His Brother Esau

Would you classify yourself as “sincere”?

- Perhaps you should understand what I mean by that term

During the time of Christ, there was a lot of work done with clay

- Pots
- Cups
- A number of other uses

Clay is fragile and brittle

- It can be broken easily

When sellers would offer their items for sale at the market and an item was damaged, they had two choices:

- They could mark it as damaged, thus making the item basically useless
- Or, they would attempt to cover the defect

People became very crafty in covering up defects in the clay

- They would put wax over the cracks, giving the appearance that there was nothing wrong with the item

Due to the amount of abuse of covering items with wax, legitimate sellers became stamping their products with a Greek word, ἀπλότητος (haplotetos)

- “without wax”

Customers would then be assured that the seller did not use wax to hide imperfections

- The product was free from wax
- It was free from defect

Latin uses two words to convey this thought

- sine (without) and cere (wax)
- If you put these two words together – sine and cere – you get our English word, “sincere”

To be sincere is to be free from deceit and manipulation

- Sincere people aren't afraid to confess their imperfections
- Sincere people don't pretend to cover up their flaws
- Sincere people don't pretend to be perfect

In light of this, would you classify yourself as “sincere”?

We have been studying the life of Jacob over the past few months

- Jacob definitely has some character flaws
- He has some moral imperfections

At times, he allows his true colors to show

- Other times, he attempts to hide those flaws

This morning, we will witness Jacob's meeting with Esau

- They haven't seen one another in over 20 years

What will happen?

- Let's find out

Let's read Genesis 33:1-20

Jacob's character is laid bare before us once again

- We see some elements of the new Israel
- But we also see some elements of the old Jacob

This passage highlights three crucial errors that Jacob committed in his dealing with Esau

- He had some cracks in his pottery
- And no amount of wax could cover them up

These are errors that we, as God's people, also need to avoid

- The error of mixed faith (33:1-11)
- The error of mixed motives (33:12-17)
- The error of mixed obedience (33:18-20)

I. Believers need to avoid the error of mixed faith (33:1-11)

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.

Jacob has spent the night wrestling with a Man

- The book of Hosea identifies this Man as an Angel
- We believe him to be the Angel of the LORD – a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ

The Man initiated this wrestling match with Jacob

- He wanted to test Jacob's endurance and tenacity

Jacob proved to be a formidable foe

- But the Man was a stronger foe

After wrestling for several hours, the Man "touched the socket" of Jacob's thigh

- Jacob's hip joint was dislocated
- Yet he continued to hold on to the Man, asking for His blessing
- Finally, the Man blessed Jacob and disappeared from the scene

Jacob became Israel that night because he contended with God

- After being injured, Jacob still held on to God
- He would not let go of the Man until He blessed Jacob

This was a fitting history for the nation of Israel to look back upon

- They would not be referred to as the nation of Jacob – the conniving, manipulative, deceitful man
- But they would be referred to as the nation of Israel – the man who held on to God no matter what

Having wrestled the Man the night before and having been injured in the process, Jacob still has to face Esau

- This was his fear before he wrestled with the Man

God wanted to teach Jacob that he should fear God and not man

- The fear of man would and could bring a snare
- However, the fear of the LORD was the beginning of wisdom

Well, it is the morning after Jacob's incident with the Man

- And verse 1 tells us that Jacob sees Esau coming
- And he is coming with the 400 men

What Jacob has dreaded for over 20 years is imminent

- He has not looked forward to this day
- But he cannot hide any longer

The previous day, Jacob had divided his family into two groups

- If Esau and the men attacked one group, then the other group could escape
- Jacob was certainly planning and expecting the worst

² And he put the maids and their children in front, and Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last.

Verse 2 is a rather awkward realization of what we have seen before

Moses tells us that Jacob placed his wives and children in a particular order

- The two maids and their children would be first
- Then Leah and her children
- Then Rachel and Joseph

This order tells us who Jacob favored

- He loved Rachel more than his other wives – we have known this for 20 years
- He preferred Joseph over his other children

How it must have hurt for Bilhah, Zilpah, and Leah to see that they were placed on the frontlines¹

- If an attack came, they – and their children – would be the first to suffer harm or death

Jacob was clearly protecting Rachel, his beloved wife, and Joseph, his favorite son

You will notice that Joseph is the only child mentioned specifically by name in this passage²

- As you know, Joseph will play a very prominent role in the near history of Israel in the latter part of Genesis
- Certainly, Jacob's favoritism for Joseph would play a part in the struggles between Joseph and his brothers

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

Before his encounter with the Man, Jacob told his servants to prepare this huge gift for Esau

- Each group of animals would be given to Esau in successive waves

¹ Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing*, 564.

² Kenneth A. Mathews, *NAC, Volume 1B*, 566.

Each group was to tell Esau that Jacob would be “**behind**” them (32:18)

- In other words, Jacob would be behind all of his family and possessions

But notice in verse 3 how Jacob has changed after his encounter with the Man

- Jacob “**passed on ahead of them**” (emphasis mine)
- He is now in front of – not behind – his family and possessions

Reading verse 3 may seem a little weird at first glance

- Jacob is bowing down to the ground
- Not once, but seven times!

This was a normal, common practice in the customs of the day³

- It wasn't anything out of the ordinary

Jacob was merely showing Esau the highest level of respect that he could

- Actually, Jacob was treating Esau as his master

⁴ Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

The reader is in the same position as Jacob

- We don't know how Esau will respond

The last words that Esau uttered toward Jacob were words of anger, hurt, and murder (27:42)

- That had been 20 years prior

Was Esau still angry?

- Was this the moment of revenge?

Quite the contrary

- Verse 4 tells us that “**Esau ran to meet him and embraced him**”

Wow...

- What a difference than what Jacob expected!

Esau runs to meet Jacob

- Remember, Jacob cannot run
- His hip joint is dislocated⁴

He couldn't have run – either toward or away from Esau – if he wanted to

Esau initiates this embrace

- He runs toward Jacob
- He embraces Jacob
- He falls on his neck
- He kisses Jacob

³ Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 503.

⁴ Victor P. Hamilton, *NICOT, Genesis 18-50*, 343.

These are all physical gestures that are common among family

- Esau was treating Jacob like a true brother!

After Esau had taken the first initiative, they both weep

- Tears were flowing as they met for the first time in 20 years

There doesn't appear to be any malice, hate, murder, or revenge on the part of Esau

- Otherwise, he would not have shown his feelings and emotions like this

⁵ And 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."

I am sure that Jacob and Esau wept for quite a few minutes

- Esau was overjoyed to see Jacob
- Jacob was relieved of the fears toward Esau

As Esau wipes the tears from his eyes, he asks Jacob, "Who are these with you?"

- Jacob responds, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant"

By this time, Esau is surrounded by Jacob's family

⁶ Then the maids came near with their children, and they bowed down. ⁷ And Leah likewise came near with her children, and they bowed down; and afterward Joseph came near with Rachel, and they bowed down.

The order in which Jacob had planned out in verse 2 is now being carried out

- Bilhah with her two children
 - o Dan
 - o Naphtali
- Zilpah with her two children
 - o Gad
 - o Asher
- Leah, with her seven children
 - o Reuben
 - o Simeon
 - o Levi
 - o Judah
 - o Issachar
 - o Zebulun
 - o Dinah
- Rachel, with her one child
 - o Joseph

Four wives

- Twelve children

They all come before Esau and bow down to him

- A sign of respect
- A sign of honor

It would be a little overwhelming

- And a little confusing!

The last time that Esau and Jacob were together, Jacob was a single man with no children

- Now he has four wives and twelve children

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.”

Now that Esau had met the family, he asks about the huge procession of animals that Jacob had sent

- Jacob responds, “**To find favor in the sight of my lord**”

Jacob doesn't attempt to cover up his motives

- He is sincere about his motives

Jacob truly hopes that this gift will help to purchase pardon and reconciliation with Esau

- But ironically enough, Esau has already taken the initiative toward reconciliation
- Before he even knows what the gift is for!

⁹ But Esau said, “I have plenty, my brother; let what you have be your own.”

Upon hearing this news, Esau revolts and rejects the offer

- He tells Jacob, “**I have plenty, my brother; let what you have be your own**”

Esau doesn't need the gift from Jacob

- Apparently, Esau has been given much livestock

Did you notice how Esau addressed Jacob?

- “**my brother**”

No hints at rage

- No hints at revenge

In Esau's mind, he is glad to have Jacob back as a brother

- The LORD had obviously worked in his heart to take away the bitterness and hatred he had toward Jacob

¹⁰ And 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.

But Jacob will not take a “no” from Esau

- Jacob insists that Esau receive the gift from him
- He practically begs Esau to take the gift

Look especially at the end of verse 10

- Jacob tells Esau, “**I see your face as one sees the face of God**”

This is a very interesting statement, especially coming on the heels of the events of last night

- Jacob had wrestled with a Man who I believe to be Jesus Christ
- He was involved in a hand-to-hand wrestling match
- He was in direct contact with God

The very next morning as Jacob interacts with Esau, Jacob states that seeing Esau was similar to seeing God

- This isn't to say that God had an appearance like Esau

Jacob knows that God has worked in the heart of Esau⁵

- Jacob knows that God had worked in his own heart as well

The timing of the encounter with the Man the night before uniquely prepared Jacob to meet with Esau

- Before that encounter, Jacob would have resorted to cunning, deceptive tactics
- But after the encounter, Jacob saw the work of God before his very eyes

This was a direct answer to Jacob's prayer back in Genesis 32:11

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.

Jacob reiterates his intention that Esau should receive the gift from Jacob “**because God has dealt graciously with me**”

- As it typically true in Genesis, in speaking with someone outside the covenant – an unbeliever – the name of God is Elohim, not Yahweh⁶

Yahweh is the covenant-keeping, faithful name of God

- Elohim is a more generic term for the power and might of God

In verse 9, Esau told Jacob, “**I have plenty**”

- Here in verse 11, Jacob tells Esau, “**I have plenty**”

Most of the English versions don't – and can't – highlight the slight difference in the Hebrew Text

- Esau says, “I have much”
- Jacob says, “I have everything”

I don't think this was intended to be an arrogant response on the part of Jacob

- I believe that he was saying that with the renewed reconciliation, he has everything he needs and wants
- After dealing with Laban, the biggest obstacle for Jacob was his broken relationship with Esau

After further insistence on the part of Jacob, Esau receives the gift

- 550 head of various livestock

⁵ Leon J. Wood, *A Shorter Commentary on Genesis*, 115.

⁶ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 454.

Jacob shows a mixed faith in this first part of Genesis 33

- Even after encountering God face-to-face, Jacob still has apprehension and fear of Esau
- It is not until Esau runs and embraces him does Jacob begin to let his guard down

You would think that after such a monumental encounter as Jacob had with God that he would not falter in this faith

- But he did

Looking in your own life, how many times have you gone from a mountaintop experience, only to have a lapse of faith?

- You aren't the first
- And you won't be the last

I can think of Elijah who faced 850 false prophets on Mount Carmel

- Then Elijah ran in fear for Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-3)

It is a common experience to have a mixed faith, isn't it?

- We have moments of strong faith
- Then we have moments of weak or small faith

Let's take courage

- Let's trust in God's promises

Don't resort to fearing man after God has given you His precious and powerful promises in the Scriptures

Believers need to avoid the error of mixed faith

II. Believers need to avoid the error of mixed motives (33:12-17)

¹² Then Esau said, "Let us take our journey and go, and I will go before you." 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.

Now that Esau and Jacob are reconciled, Esau offers a plan for Jacob and him to take a journey together!

- This is further proof that the reconciliation is real, genuine and sincere
- Esau isn't trying to hide any feelings of hurt

But Jacob tells Esau that the journey would be too hard for the children and the flocks

- Keep in mind that Esau is traveling with 400 men
- They can move quickly

Jacob, however, is traveling with everything he owns!

- He has young children
- The flocks undoubtedly have some newborns

To make such a hard, long journey would be too much

- Perhaps some of the livestock would die in the process
- Perhaps the younger children could not keep up

Jacob is speaking as a true shepherd

- He loves his family
- He wants to be a good steward over the resources entrusted to him

If you think about it, the family and livestock were pushed long and hard as they fled from Laban

- For three days, Jacob pushed his family and the animals as hard as they could go
- He wanted to make it to the Promised Land before Laban discovered that they had left

Now that Jacob is so close to home – and the Promised Land – he wants to slow down and take his time

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.”

Jacob tells Esau that he should go on ahead of him

- Jacob tells Esau, “**I will proceed at my leisure...until I come to my lord at Seir**”

While Jacob leaves the timeframe unspecific, he makes an offhanded promise to Esau that he would – at some point – visit him in Seir

¹⁵ And 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.”

This news pleases Esau

- But he makes another rather generous offer
- Esau volunteers to leave behind some of his own men to help take care of the livestock

This is extremely generous and gracious of Esau

- Once again, this is further proof that reconciliation has taken place

Isn't it humbling to see that Jacob's fears were all for nothing?

- He thought that the 400 men would harm him or his family
- In actuality, those 400 men were sent by Esau himself to protect Jacob on the return trip!⁷

But Jacob refuses this offer as well

- He plays it off under the guise of, “Esau, you have already done too much! I couldn't possibly have your men help out!”

In Jacob's case, it was easier for him to give than to receive

- He insisted that Esau take his gift
- But he was insistent upon not accepting Esau's offers

Perhaps Jacob feared that if he and Esau lived in the same vicinity, there might be further friction⁸

- This may cause old feelings to resurface and problems to rise
- Jacob didn't want to take that chance

⁷ John H. Sailhamer, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Genesis*, 212.

⁸ W.H. Griffith-Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, 311.

If Jacob ever went to Seir, we are not told of the visit

- Of course, the book of Genesis does not record every detail of every person's life

¹⁶ So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. ¹⁷ And Jacob journeyed to Succoth; and built for himself a house, and made booths for his livestock, therefore the place is named Succoth.

So Esau makes his way home in Seir

- Along with the 400 men who accompanied him

But what does Jacob do?

- He “**journeyed to Succoth**”

Esau headed south to Seir⁹

- This is the southeast of the Salt Sea

Jacob, however, headed west

- First to Succoth
- Then to Shechem

Jacob wasn't just passing through Succoth

- He built a home and “**made booths for his livestock**”

The Hebrew word “**succoth**” is where the Feast of Booths comes into place¹⁰

- It was nothing more than a temporary shelter

At this point, Jacob's motives seem to be mixed

- He enjoys the favor and reconciliation with Esau
- However, he doesn't deal with him with complete integrity and honesty

Lest you be too hard on Jacob, look at your own heart

- Are there times when you have had less than sincere motives?
- Haven't there been times when you have had wrong reasons for fulfilling your responsibilities?

If we look at our hearts, we will see plenty of mixed motives

- We need to repent of those
- We need to ask God for pure motives

Believers need to learn to avoid certain errors:

- *The error of mixed faith (33:1-11)*
- *The error of mixed motives (33:12-17)*

⁹ Wood, 116.

¹⁰ Mathews, 573.

III. Believers need to avoid the error of mixed obedience (33:18-20)

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. ¹⁹ And 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. ²⁰ Then he erected there an altar, and called it El-Elohe-Israel.

After being in Succoth for a while, Jacob traveled to Shechem

- He was now back in the Promised Land
- The Land that God had promised him

Shechem is an important city in the book of Genesis

If you remember way back in Genesis 12, God called Abram to leave Haran and travel to Canaan

- Do you know where the first place Abram journeyed in Canaan?
- Shechem is the right answer (Gen 12:6)

Here is Jacob, many years after his grandfather, being led by God Himself to the same area of Shechem

- Both resided in Canaan
- Both pitched their tents at Shechem
- Both established an altar at this place¹¹

Shechem was the first place where Jacob purchased a parcel of land inside the Promised Land

- Evidently, there was a certain amount of peace that existed between Jacob and the inhabitants of the land
- Otherwise, they probably would not have allowed Jacob to purchase land

Not only does Jacob purchase land

- He also erects an altar

He calls this altar, “**El-Elohe-Israel**”

- It means “God is the God of Israel”
- In naming this altar, it is the first time that Jacob uses his new name, Israel¹²

So right in the middle of a land filled with pagan unbelievers, Jacob erects an altar to the true God

- It would be like raising a flag, letting everyone know where your loyalty lies¹³

Jacob was finally in Canaan

- He was now relying on the LORD to bring His promises to fruition

At Bethel, the LORD had promised Jacob, “**I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. ¹⁴ Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. ¹⁵ And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you**” (28:13-15)

- God had been faithful
- God had brought him back to the land

¹¹ Mathews, 574.

¹² Morris, 508.

¹³ Waltke, 461.

We also struggle with mixed obedience

- We often choose what is convenient
- We often choose what is easiest for us
- We often choose what will cost us the least in terms of time, commitment, and sacrifice

But for Jacob, as we will see next week, the place of convenience turned out to be the place of great sin

Esau's reaction to Jacob certainly took him by surprise

- Jacob was prepared for the worst
- Perhaps even for Esau to attack him and/or his family

But instead, Esau ran to embrace Jacob

- The hurt feelings were resolved
- There was a restoration of brotherly love between these two twins

Thankfully, this isn't the only instance of reconciliation listed in the pages of the Bible

- I can think of Paul and Barnabas who had such a sharp disagreement over whether or not to take John Mark on the missionary journey
- The disagreement was so bad that they separated from one another for several years (Acts 15:39)

Later in his ministry, Paul personally requested John Mark and uttered these words, "**Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service**" (2 Tim 4:11)

- Paul reconciled with John Mark

I can also think of another instance of reconciliation

- Jesus told the story about a father who had two sons
- The younger son requested his inheritance, left home, and wasted all of his money

The younger son was so bad off financially that he was eating what the pigs ate

- Certainly, those were desperate times

After coming to his senses, the younger son made his way home, hoping that his father would take him back as a servant

- He certainly didn't deserve to be called a son

But Luke 15:20 tells us an amazing account

- As the younger son arrived close to home, his father did an amazing thing
- Allow Jesus to tell the story, "**But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him**"

There are many similarities between this passage and the account between Jacob and Esau

- The father and Esau both took the initiative to reconcile

What an amazing act of grace and compassion

- What an account of reconciliation

But the greatest account of reconciliation is not with Jacob and Esau

- It is not with Paul and John Mark
- It is not even between the father and son
- It is with sinful humanity and Jesus Christ

You see, sinful humanity is in a desperate condition

- We are born separated from Almighty God

Because of the sin of Adam and Eve, all of humanity has been plunged into the depravity of sin

- We are spiritually dead, alienated from the holy God

Nothing we can do can bridge the gap between God's holiness and our sinfulness

- We can't give enough money
- We can't serve enough community service
- We can't say enough prayers
- We can't obey enough of the commandments in the Bible

There is only one way to be reconciled with God

- That is for God to initiate the process

That's right, sinner friend

- You can't even initiate reconciliation with God

But I am glad to tell you that God has began – and has finished – the way for sinful humanity to become reconciled with God

- Do you want to know how?
- Listen to these precious words from God's Word

“He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21)

- What you and I deserved was a lifetime and eternity without God's grace
- We deserved the wrath of God on account of our sins

But Jesus Christ came to this Earth and lived a perfect, sinless life

- He became the only appropriate and sufficient sacrifice for sin

Jesus did an amazing thing

- He died on the cross, a cruel and extremely painful way of dying

In dying, Jesus bore the penalty for sin

- The Bible tells us that **“the wages of sin is death”** (Rom 6:23)

For a few hours on the cross, Jesus Christ was spiritually separated from His holy, heavenly Father

- His own words are captured in the book of Psalms and the Gospel accounts, **“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”** (Ps 22:1; Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34)

For a few hours, there was an interruption in the fellowship between God the Father and God the Son

- Angels stood by in abject amazement as God the Father purposefully separated Himself from His only Son
- But why?

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16)

- **What greater demonstration of love can be shown than this?**
- **What other way is there for sinners to be reconciled?**

Unbelieving friend, this is the Good News

- It is the Best News!

There is no other way for you to be reconciled to Holy God than through Jesus Christ and His work on the cross

- Trust in Him...right now
- Commit your life to Him...right now
- Ask Him to forgive you of your sins...right now
- Repent of your sins...right now

Church, we have been given the wonderful privilege of taking this message of the Gospel – the message of reconciliation – to the world

- Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:20, “**Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God**”

Christian, is there anyone to whom you need to be reconciled?

- Are you waiting for that person to initiate the process?
- Don't wait – initiate!