
Facing Up to Consequences

Genesis 32-33

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Some of you are in trouble. You have chosen to follow a heart idol... to push until there was conflict... to make sinful choices that now are on the brink of hard consequences.

Facing up to consequences God's way will be both painful and pleasing. There is hope for anyone here this morning who needs to reconcile; both to God and with others. *Reconciliation is a work of God's grace to be sought by faith and acknowledged in praise.* This is what we are about to hear.

Fearing the Consequences of our Sins (32:1-21)

Knowing what he has done to Esau, Jacob is afraid that his sins are coming home to roost – that Esau is out for revenge. He desires to obey the LORD and return to the Promised Land. Yet he realizes that a greater conflict awaits him. How the Lord provides and protects when meeting an enemy of our own making is what these next two chapters are about. When we fear the consequences of our sins what are some tendencies we might employ that are not motivated by faith? When the Lord has you face up to a relationship you have damaged, what do you do? Where is God when we lean upon our own understanding for how to reconcile with the one we sinned against?

In the Presence of God (v.1-2)

Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" So he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

Jacob has made his break with Laban. He has left the world of scheming and its values behind. He has set his face resolutely toward the Promised Land, toward the place of God's presence. Jacob is responding to the Lord's command to "arise, go out from this land and return to the land of your kindred" (31:13). But as his eyes and feet turn again to the Promised Land, he realizes that a greater conflict awaits him; a conflict of his own doing. Jacob fears the consequences of his own sins.

On his way toward the land of promise, he is met by angels of God. Like Bethel in Chapter 28, God is with Jacob. This quite brief yet significant introduction to these two chapters tells us something about God. We see angels or messengers of God. The Lord, prior to Jacob facing the consequences of his sins, communicates that He is present. And this revealing of heavenly beings was interpreted by Jacob in a specific way. Notice what Jacob says in response to this revelation. "This is God's camp". Whatever Jacob saw he explained as "the camp of God".

This term appears to mean "an army camp" (Ross; p.541). Since the parallel with Bethel in 28:16-17 is definite, we are led to conclude that this army of God is a friendly army. God is with; not against Jacob. Jacob is entering not just the Promised Land. Jacob enters God's encampment in which his army of angels had set up their base of operation. The point is clear. Jacob can take comfort from the revelation. Faith not fear is to shape his choices and actions as he faces his own consequences with Esau. Knowledge of His presence, knowledge of His power, and knowledge of His protection are to reassure and reinforce us as we face crises even of our own doing. (cf. Ps.34:7).

In the Plea to Esau (v.3-8)

This topic of fearing the consequences of sin is made clear as we move through the story. Follow along as we pick up the story starting at verse 3.

And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, "I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. 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". And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to our brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him." 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, thinking, "If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape".

We must keep in mind that the imminent crisis approaching Jacob is his own doing. Recall back to chapter 27 and how Jacob manipulated the birth right out from under his brother 20 years ago. When he left town, Esau was plotting to kill him. Now he is faced with the consequences of his sin. Notice how his apprehension gave way to decisions that were not shaped by the reality of vv.1-2. Jacob sent his own messengers and told them exactly what to say. We are to understand that though there is a level of trust in the Lord, Jacob at present is not operating by faith. A low level yet strong concern for his safety controlled his actions. By calling himself Esau's servant (in v. 4) and providing all these gifts, Jacob is trying to achieve reconciliation, not by God's way but by his own way. He was trying to buy Esau off in order to achieve a level of peace.

In the Prayer to God (v.9-12)

Our faith is much like Jacob's. We hear the great redemptive stories of the Bible. We see and memorize precious promises of God. We believe...and then we face intimidating circumstances. We lean on our own ways to make things happen.

Do not try to bribe people so as to live at peace with those you have hurt. Reconciliation is not a work of man but the work of God. Though Jacob's fear and guilt demonstrates a lack of faith, he is a believer. He knows the covenant God has made to Abraham and Isaac. He knows that the LORD has been faithful to His promises and that he has been a recipient of the LORD's steadfast love. And as a result of this belief he prays. This is a classic model of praying for help. Picking up in verse nine we read...

And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, "Return to our country and to your kindred, that I may do you good, 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. 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. 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".

Jacob demonstrates what we all are to do when thinking about the consequences of our own sin and how to reconcile with the one we hurt. He prays. Here we have preserved for us a great prayer after which we are to pattern our own prayers.

What was Jacob's motivation for doing certain things? At times we see him motivated by faith and grace as is reflected in this prayer. But just prior to this prayer we see him motivated by

fear and guilt. When you have damaged a relationship and the consequences are looming, you can waver in fear and guilt trying to patch the relationship through manipulation and well-crafted strategies. And then, you can fall to your knees and pray a biblically sound prayer with passion and faith. Oh, what a mixture we believers are. But oh, what a faithful God He is!

When we waffle under fear and guilt over facing the circumstances of our own sins, we will try to deliver ourselves out of the mess rather than rely upon the Lord.

In the Plans for Morning (v.13-21)

So he stayed there that night and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau, two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milking camels and their calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. 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. "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?" then you shall say, "They belong to our servant Jacob. They are a present sent to my lord Esau. And moreover, he is behind us." He likewise instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, "You shall say the same thing to Esau when you find him, and you shall say, "Moreover, your servant Jacob is behind us" 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". So the present passed on ahead of him and he himself stayed that night in the camp.

The first major section of this text closes by Jacob's needless efforts to deliver himself from Esau. The lessons for God's people are clear. Our sins hurt people. Hurt people can become angry. Our responsibility is to try to reconcile with those we have sinned against. God's people can pray with confidence for help in this process. God's people should rely upon God's faithfulness to give courage and compassion in order to reach out to the enemies of our own making. It is self-centered unbelief when we try to deliver ourselves from our self-made difficult circumstances. Our confidence must be in Christ who provided forgiveness for all these kinds of sins. His death on the cross provides our forgiveness. Our confidence must be in the risen Christ who reigns on high as our high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses. Our confidence must be "that He who began a good work will complete it" no matter what threats come into view. Our confidence in Him must yield our obedience to Him.

Submitting to the Conquering of our Sovereign (32:22-32)

What do we need to respond like that? We see it when Jacob, trying to protect his family, is met by God who dramatically and decisively confronts Jacob.

The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me. And he said to him, "What is your name? And he said, "Jacob". Then he said "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed". Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name? And there he blessed him. So

Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face and yet my life has been delivered". The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.

The sovereign Lord is confronting, changing and crippling Jacob. Here we see how the LORD changes a self-focused, self-dependent person into a God-focused, God-dependent person.

Confronted by the Lord (v.22-25)

Notice how Jacob was confronted by the Lord. Jacob sent his entire family across the Jabbok at night leaving him alone; alone to face a man; a man whose identity was veiled by the darkness, a man who was unable to defeat Jacob until he did something extraordinary, a man who positioned Jacob for a blessing by breaking him. Before Jacob can enter the Promised Land; before he can successfully face the one he sinned against, he needed to be broken. And broken he was!

Changed by the Lord (v.26-29)

This blessing was given to Jacob because Jacob was changed. No longer will he be a deceiver. He will be a determined follower of God. And this blessing is expressed in a changed name. "What is your name?" was asked of Jacob. In telling his name Jacob must own up to his nature. "Jacob" means "a con artist who catches and trips up people in order to get what he wants". By telling the man his name he confesses his sinful nature. And he needed to do this before he could enjoy the blessing.

But we have insight into this mysterious attacker. He says, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel...". The renaming of Jacob demonstrates this man's authority. He gave Jacob a new life, a new status, a new identity. The name Israel means "He strives with God, or "God fights". This new name was given as a way to remember this event. When Moses wrote this book for the Israelites moving toward the Promised Land, God's people needed to remember that "when we strive with God, God strives with us and wins". Being confronted by the LORD is the blessing itself. But this blessing comes with a price.

Crippled by the Lord (v.30-32)

This comes with a cost. Moses tells us of this price. Jacob names the place "Peniel" which means "I have seen God face to face and yet my life has been delivered". This event was shocking for Jacob. Nobody could see God face to face and live (cf. Exodus 19:21; 33:18ff). And yet, he did. By the authority of the unknown assailant, Jacob receives new life.

Seeking the Correction for our Resolution Genesis 33

As a result of the decisive work of God, Jacob now humbles himself, and goes ahead of his family to seek reconciliation with his brother. This whole Jacob-Esau cycle starting in chapter 25 and ending here in chapter 33 is fascinating. On the one hand, we see God's faithfulness. We see the Lord's pursuing, intrusive and relentless love over Jacob. We see what the Lord will do in order to reposition his people to receive a blessing. He will pursue, overwhelm, shatter if He must. Then God will remake his people to carry out His plan. God frequently accomplished his plan in spite of the efforts of Jacob.

And on the other hand, we see Jacob; a man of grace and faith mingled with guilt and fear. He was broken by God's power; he saw the glory of God's face and yet he still struggles with

indwelling sin. Get the point of all this beloved: God is able to bring about reconciliation even though we our faith might be small and weak.

Jacob's Humble Approach (v.1-3)

We notice this first in Jacob's humble approach in vv.1-3.

And Jacob lifted up 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 female servants. And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children and Rachel and Joseph last of all. He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times until he came near to his brother.

Hobbling and humbled Jacob approaches his brother whom he has not seen for 20 years. Jacob exhibits humility and desire as he comes out to meet his brother. Jacob demonstrates the effect of God's relentless love; limping but desiring to obey, Jacob strives for reconciliation.

But Jacob is not faultless. Bowing 7 times – was that necessary? Giving all these gifts – does he need to do this to achieve reconciliation? This narrative portrays the reconciliation of the brothers as an answer to Jacob's earlier prayer. This is all about the Lord changing hearts and changing lives. Reconciliation was God's way of saving Jacob from the wrath of Esau.

Esau's Surprising Grace (v.4-14)

But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him and they wept. And when Esau lifted up his eyes and was the women and children, he said, "The children who God has graciously given your servant." Then the servants drew near, they and their children and bowed down. Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down. And last Joseph and Rachel drew near and they bowed down. Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company that I met?" Jacob answered "To find favor in the sight of my lord." But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother, keep what you have for yourself". Jacob said, "No, please, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand. For I have seen your face, which is like seeing he face of God and you have accepted me. Please accept my blessing that is brought to you because God had dealt graciously with me and because I have enough". Thus he urged him and he took it.

Isn't it noticeable that the change in Esau is the result of the work of God? It is not an effect from Jacob's gift. Notice the motivation at first for Jacob giving gifts to Esau. You can see this when Esau asks Jacob for and explanation for his actions. And Jacob says, "To find favor...". That is why I'm giving you gifts; trying to purchase grace.

Now notice why Jacob gives gifts to Esau. "...if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present". The point of the shift from "to find favor" to "have found favor" is to highlight the fact that Jacob has already received Esau's favor or forgiveness. This came not as a result of anything Jacob did. Grace had changed Esau and Jacob. Now the gift is a token of appreciation, not a purchase of reconciliation.

God's Enduring Name (v.15-20)

The narrative comes to an end.

¹⁵ So Esau said, "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." ¹⁶ So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. ¹⁷ But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

¹⁸ And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram, and he camped before the city. ¹⁹ And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for a hundred pieces of money the piece of land on which he had pitched his tent. ²⁰ There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.

This has been a narrative about how God gives grace to face our own troublesome circumstances. In spite of us, God brings about reconciliation. So many stories in the Bible appear to be about the people in them. But most of those stories are about God who is working through them. That is why we close with God's enduring name.

Whatever guilty fears Jacob had, whatever anxiety he experienced, however fretful he was, because of the Lord we see him worshipping at the end. He did this by setting up an altar to God and calling it El-Elohe-Israel. The name highlights the power and fidelity of God and his promise-fulfilling activities. God never lies. God cannot be stopped. God's purposes will be successful. Reconciliation is a work of the LORD who blesses the efforts of man.

As one commentator well said, "Those who have received God's grace (deliverance at Peniel and bounty of possessions) may be confident of God's promise of protection when they seek reconciliation with others. Reconciliation is a work of grace, to be sought by faith and acknowledged in praise. (A. Ross; p.567. also quoted in the introduction).

To the praise of the God of Israel; the almighty God (i.e. El) , the Strong One, the Sturdy One, the Committed One to His promises (see Genesis 32:11 - "deliver me from the hand of my brother"); praise be to Him.

Reflections

God has reconciled us in Christ; in Christ we may be reconciled to one another.

Often at the center of our fears, anxieties and worries are concerns over the consequences of our sins.

When our eyes are off the LORD and onto our own strategies, we will do almost anything to get out of the personal and at times painful work of face to face reconciliation. When our sin has hurt someone, let us have concerns not over the consequences of our sins but over the Lord's reputation and over the well-being of the offended.

God may shatter us and He will always shape us – He is at work in His person and providence to radically change us.

Beloved, let us not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord. Let us not be weary when reproved by Him. The Lord disciplines the one he loves. He is treating us as sons and daughters – even when it is unbearably hard. Trust in his love. Trust in his care. Trust that He knows what we need in order to receive what He offers.

We must seek the will of God and wisdom of God to deal with the results of our sins in a way that pleases Him.

The tendency when facing the consequences of our sin is to attempt to deliver ourselves from it. Resist the temptation! Make it your aim to be pleasing to Him in working through your consequences of sin. Rely upon the One who makes reconciliation. Rest not in your own devices. And remember that the Bible says, "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift (Matt.5:23f)

Our character is being transformed so as to show the power of indwelling sin and our daily need for the Savior.

Like Jacob, we are a mixture of faithfulness and faithlessness. We trust in Him and then trust in ourselves. This is why we preach the book of Genesis week after week. We must hear that we have been freed from sin and raised with Christ. We must know that God is working through the obstacles and troubles and even sin to bring about His great plan and purposes.

The greatest blessing of grace is to see the face of God and live.

This is why Jacob calls the blessed and decisive work of God, Peniel or “face of God”. If Jacob rejoiced at this, how much more shall we? We have our Peniel, our Face of God, in Christ. And it is so much clearer than what Jacob saw that dim morning before the dawn. In Christ we have the blazing light of the glory of God in the face of Christ. In Christ we have been reconciled to the Holy One. In Christ, we need not fear looking at the face of God. In Christ, seek His face. In Christ, anticipate His smile of acceptance. Even when we are working through the consequences of our sin, the face of Christ is our hope, our joy, our life! Do you know Him like this? When you think of actually seeing the face of God, how does your heart respond? Dread or Delight? Panic or Praise?

Responses

If we leave a message like this without being reconciled to God through Christ, we have missed the point altogether.

Go beloved – be reconciled to God

Talk to Him about your sin

Turn away from your sin.

Trust in His provision for your sin in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Treasure His faithfulness and His favor

Treat the Church as the place to marvel at the glory of God in the face of Christ.

If we leave a message like this without being empowered to go and be reconciled to an offended brother or sister, we have missed the effects of “seeing the face of God in Christ”.

Go beloved – be reconciled to the one you have hurt

Talk about your sin to the one you offended

Turn the conversation toward asking for forgiveness

Take responsibility for making things right

Trust the Lord that he will give you the grace to do all this

Treasure your relationships; don't discard them

Treat the Church as a place where reconciled relationships can occur and be enjoyed