

# United in the Lord

Genesis 33

Go ahead and turn to Genesis 33 in your Bibles.

We've all had those times when we knew a difficult encounter with someone was coming. We dread them. We don't know how things will go, and we worry about all the ways it seemingly WILL go wrong. We hope things will go well. We may even take precautions to ensure that they will. Jacob took precautions. When he heard of the 400 men accompanying Esau as he came out to meet him, the Bible tells us...

## **Genesis 32:7-8**

**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.**

He also attempted to smooth things out a little by sending Esau a present, because "who doesn't like to get a present?" It was no shabby present either!

## **Genesis 32:14-15**

**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.**

Finally, we saw Jacob do what we should all do, which was PRAY about the encounter...

## **Genesis 32:9-12**

**9 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.**

Jacob WAS AFRAID, yet he obeyed the LORD. Jacob followed God into a situation that was very fearful for him, and while he did everything in HIS POWER to protect his family and appease his brother, HE WAS TRUSTING AND SEEKING THE LORD, and THE LORD MET HIM.

This was more than fear that the reunion could get heated and end in an argument. Again, we've all had those difficult conversations that we've had to have with someone, usually because we've made a mess of things, and with our gut grinding, we have to humble ourselves and make things right. Those conversations are hard, but I doubt we've ever worried about being KILLED as an outcome. Jacob had just fled from one hostile family member who could've had it in his heart to kill him, and now he's about to step into another life-threatening situation. Picking up in verse one, we read...

### **Genesis 33:1-3**

**1 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.**

**2 And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all.**

**3 He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.**

Jacob had heard Esau was coming with 400 men (ready to fight it seemed), but now he saw them. THIS WAS IT. This was a massive and fearsome entourage approaching with Esau. It was large enough that it not only struck fear in Jacob's heart, but it was VISIBLE from such a DISTANCE that JACOB HAD TIME to organize his family into droves not unlike the series of presents that he sent ahead to Esau. This time, however, Jacob would precede the droves.

Jacob was taking every precaution he could think of, dividing his children among his servants and wives, those borne by them, likely with the same hopes that, if Esau attacked, some might escape. You notice who he put farthest from danger: his beloved wife Rachel and his favorite son Joseph. He approached ahead of everyone, a barrier of protection, giving his family a chance to flee if Esau attacked him.

Despite his fear, however, JACOB STILL WENT TO MEET ESAU. He demonstrated FAITH in the LORD, either in the extremely slim possibility that they could be reconciled, or that the LORD would protect him and his family in the event of attack.

What effect do you think Jacob's limp had on Esau? Jacob would limp forward a few steps, and then with great difficulty, use his staff to lower himself to the ground and bow to Esau. Then Esau watched as Jacob, with even greater difficulty, stood himself back up, hobbled forward a few steps further, and began to lower himself down again. Jacob would do this seven times, in an effort to make sure his brother knew he came in peace and humility. I imagine Esau seeing this from a distance and thinking, "What's that guy doing?" And then, "Oh! That's Jacob! What happened to him?" And again, "Why does he keep doing that?" And again, "Jacob, you don't have to do that!" And again, "Brother, STOP!" Truly, I believe Jacob would have kept going. Perhaps he was done at seven, but we won't know because the Word tells us...

### **Genesis 33:4**

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

“I’VE GOT YOU, LITTLE BROTHER! I’VE GOT YOU.” It’s a PRECIOUS scene. This is the WORK OF GOD. What had to have happened over those 20 years to have brought SUCH A DRAMATIC CHANGE in Esau’s heart?! Esau was planning to KILL Jacob as soon as their dad died, and now he’s piled on top of him, hugging, kissing, and weeping over him! I told the guys that this is one of those scenes that *The Chosen* TV series would like to take some liberty with, you know, filling in the gaps where scripture is silent.

I could see Esau PERHAPS going to a certain location or doing a certain task and seeing something that reminded him of Jacob. At first, the sight of it enrages Esau; he leaves in a huff, gnashing his teeth, kicking or throwing something and slamming a door. When he comes across that ITEM again a year or so later, he’s once again sent into a fury, though not so outwardly displayed. Later he finds either his mother or father holding the item, mournfully observing it; Esau stoically puts it away. Years go by, and one day, as he searches for something he needs, perhaps talking to a wife or child of his own, he opens or moves something, and THERE IT IS, and ESAU BREAKS. *“I miss you, brother.”* Esau wipes his tears as he hears someone approaching, and continuing the conversation he was having with that person earlier, he turns to find that’s it a servant.

*“Sir, you won’t believe who’s coming...”*

This is what we want, right? Reconciliation. It’s a powerful thing. It touches our hearts to see people reconciled because we FEEL that PAIN of SEPARATION. Lost or saved, we all understand how it feels to be alienated from those we care about, and WE understand that sin is at the root of all brokenness and separation. When Paul wrote about this to the Ephesians, he wasn’t describing something that they had never felt. He wrote...

**Ephesians 2:12-13**

**12 REMEMBER that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having (remember when you had) no hope and without God in the world.**

**13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**

When Tim taught a couple of weeks ago, we saw a family that was broken apart—Jacob and his father-in-law, the girls and their father— but that scene was juxtaposed against this scene of reconciliation. We saw feigned closeness splintering apart into open contempt and now volatile hate giving way to tearful embrace. And what happened in between? A wrestling match with God.

God is the master choreographer. It is no coincidence that Jacob had his wrestling match with the LORD the night before this reunion. Jacob had striven with God, NOT ONLY THAT NIGHT but for most of his life. Every time a problem arose and he attempted to maneuver and figure things out for himself, relying upon himself rather than on God, he was struggling to trust and surrender to God. Even as he

was stepping ever closer to his encounter with Esau, he took precautions. He was a schemer struggling to trust God. However, on the eve of his fearful reunion with his brother, God told Jacob...

**Genesis 32:28**

**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.**

The LORD told ISRAEL that he had striven with God AND WITH MEN, and that he had prevailed. Even though he was fearful, even though he took measures to smooth things out with Esau for himself, ultimately, HE OBEYED GOD AND WENT! Having striven with God for so long, Jacob finally GAVE IN and TRUSTED GOD and PREVAILED!

You see, that's what's going on when we live life in our strength and understanding; we're in a wrestling match with God, and He will let us wear ourselves out as we try to do it all on our own. In fact, He will allow adversity to enter our lives for this very purpose, to show us our inadequacy and utter need for Him, to break us and bring us to a point of greater dependence upon Him. The apostle Paul also wrote...

**2 Corinthians 1:8-9**

**8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was TO MAKE US RELY NOT ON OURSELVES BUT ON GOD who raises the dead.**

Jacob was always looking for an angle, a way to work things out for himself instead of having to put himself in God's hands. Some of us are like that tonight. Jacob's way always made things worse instead of better, though, and we know what that's like too. Yet now, even though he was afraid of seeing his brother again, Jacob trusted the Lord and faced Esau. He had striven with God and had the limp to remind him of his weakness, but now clinging to Him as he had when he wrestled with Him on the other side of the Jabbok, he PREVAILED.

God also said that Jacob had prevailed in his striving with men. Now, given the harrowing flight from Laban and the country of Haran that we just witnessed, you might associate God's declaration with that. While it's always possible that the LORD was to some degree referring to that, I believe Jacob already understood that he had overcome the situation with Laban. He had already attested to how the LORD had been with him through that struggle and had blessed him THROUGH it. It was the LORD who had told Jacob to leave, and he was EAGER to do so. It had also been the LORD who told Jacob to go home, where his brother was, a place he was eager to return to, but a reunion that he was clearly worried about having. Jacob was obviously anxious about seeing Esau; his night of solitude feels like a night of mental preparation and gathering of wits, but the LORD interrupted his quiet evening to REASSURE him that HE HAD ALREADY PREVAILED. Whether or not Jacob understood or believed God's declaration BEFORE seeing Esau, he believed it now as Esau hugged his neck and kissed him. ISRAEL had striven with

men, his brother in this case, and he had prevailed. God had performed two mighty works: Jacob was relying upon Him, and Esau's heart had been softened. As Solomon wrote...

**Proverbs 16:7**

**When a man's ways please the Lord,  
he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.**

Well, with the reunion past, it was now time for INTRODUCTIONS...

**Genesis 33:5-7**

**5 And when Esau lifted up his eyes and saw the women and children, he said, Who are these with you? Jacob said, The children whom God has graciously given your servant. 6 Then the servants drew near, they and their children, and bowed down. 7 Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down. And last Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down.**

"WHO ARE THESE WITH YOU?" Keep in mind that Esau, though now tender toward Jacob, was not a spiritual person, so when Jacob declared that they were the family that GOD HAD GIVEN HIM, he was making a bold statement and witness for the LORD. He didn't hesitate to give God glory before this beloved lost person. We also see Jacob's humility, continually referring to himself as "servant," his family bowing before Esau along with him. Then Esau asks an odd question...

**Genesis 33:8-11**

**8 Esau said, What do you mean by all this company that I met? Jacob answered, To find favor in the sight of my lord. 9 But Esau said, I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself. 10 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 the face of God, and you have accepted me. 11 Please accept my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough. Thus he urged him, and he took it.**

"What do you mean, 'what do I mean by all this company?' Didn't my servants tell you they were for you?" I'm sure they had, but it seems that Esau wanted to hear it from Jacob. He hadn't really accepted them, which bears further witness to the fact that GOD CHANGED ESAU'S HEART, not Jacob's gift. If a person's heart is ever changed for the better, it is always God who does this.

When Jacob answered Esau's questions about the gift, he didn't tiptoe either. Jacob could've avoided the whole topic of why they were separate for two decades altogether. He could've said, "I just thought you'd like them!" Instead, however, he fully acknowledges the bitterness that had existed between them. "I sent them to you 'to find favor in the sight of my lord.'" Don't miss the fact that, though Jacob calls himself "servant" and Esau his "lord," Esau turns down the massive gift as he calls Jacob "brother."

Jacob isn't letting this go, though, just like he refused to let go of the LORD when they wrestled. Jacob urged his brother to take the present he sent him. He even is so bold as to call it a BLESSING, again

calling to memory his last dealings with Esau, when he impersonated him and stole his blessing from their father Isaac. It looks as if he's risking stirring up their old rivalry, but he's really showing us an example of how to reconcile with others. Think about it, when you're cleaning out a wound, do you leave a little gunk in there because it hurts to scrub it out? NO! That will be a source of infection later, just like unresolved conflict will likely rear its head as bitterness and resentment in the relationship later. Jacob wanted Esau to know that HE WAS DIFFERENT TOO! He no longer sought to take blessings from others, but to BE A BLESSING instead, beginning with the brother he had wronged two decades earlier.

He now "URGED" Esau to receive the gift from his hand because seeing his face was like seeing the face of God, and what had he called the place where he wrestled with God? *Peniel, the face of God*. The LORD had showed up on that lonely night of contemplation and fear, and He reassured Jacob in the way he needed reassuring, and in the peaceful and JOYOUS reunion with the brother who sought to kill him when last he saw him, Jacob had seen the LORD show up again. Esau didn't know what he was talking about, but Jacob's sentiment was, *"God said this was going to be okay, and now He has shown me."*

Originally, the gift Jacob set apart from his possessions for Esau was intended as appeasement. After his brother turned it down and Jacob continued to urge him to take it, the gift may as well have been an offering to God, placed in the hands of Esau, but given in thanksgiving to the LORD for reconciling his brother and him. Jacob had seen the face of God at Peniel and he had seen His face again on the other side of the Jabbok, further evidence that the encounter at Peniel had to do with this reunion.

Esau relents and accepts Jacobs gift, and...

#### **Genesis 33:12-14**

**12 Then Esau said, Let us journey on our way, and I will go ahead of you.**

**13 But Jacob said to him, My lord knows that the children are frail, and that the nursing flocks and herds are a care to me. If they are driven hard for one day, all the flocks will die.**

**14 Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, at the pace of the livestock that are ahead of me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.**

Everything was back to being as it should be. Jacob had returned from being gone for two decades, and Esau was ready for him to move in next to him and be NEIGHBORS! They could grill out every weekend! Esau could grill the meat, Jacob could bring the baked beans. It would be GREAT!

However, Jacob is mindful of the company of children and livestock traveling with him. No longer the proud master of two companies, Jacob was a servant to the Lord, his family, and his brother. Neither wanting to afflict his own loved ones or jeopardize his livestock, nor be a burden to his brother, Jacob encourages Esau to lead the way. He would catch up.

#### **Genesis 33:15-17**

**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.**

Esau was apparently THRILLED to have his brother back, and he kept offering to help him get settled with him. Perhaps it was the fact that Jacob was traveling with his entire family and everything he owned that made Esau feel the need to offer assistance. Perhaps it was Jacob's limp that clearly made traveling arduous, and Esau felt sorry for him. Regardless of Esau's reasoning, though, Jacob respectfully and REPEATEDLY DECLINED. WHY?!

I believe Jacob and Esau were truly reconciled, at least, as much as two people with wildly diverse worldviews can be. However, therein lies the reason for the parting of ways. Jacob declined to sojourn with his brother because he knew they were on two separate journeys. Esau was godless, his affections spent on this world (Hebrews 12:16). Jacob had returned to Canaan a broken man, humble before the LORD his God. They were on different paths and therefore couldn't possibly sojourn together. Esau had received his brother back; the Lord had done a great work softening his heart toward Jacob. However, Esau would never be Jacob's family in the truest sense. Jesus explained this once as He was teaching...

**Matthew 12:46, 48-50**

**46 While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him.**

**48 But he replied to the man who told him, Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?**

**49 And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, Here are my mother and my brothers!**

**50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.**

As we've taught before: THE SPIRITUAL SUPERSEDES THE NATURAL. This is the reason that members of a family who don't share the same beliefs about Jesus aren't close. You aren't family according to Jesus. When you began following Him, you became part of His family, and that family, the Family of God, supersedes all other relationships. THE SPIRIT IS THICKER THAN BLOOD. Jacob knew to remain with Esau would mean inviting trouble again down the road. Jacob was thankful for the work of the LORD in Esau's heart, removing his murderous hate and replacing it with a love and longing for Jacob. They were CLOSER, but they were NOT CLOSE.

So, I may have been a tiny bit misleading with my title for tonight's message, and I may have been so intentionally. I wanted to praise the Lord for the work He had done in bringing the two brothers back together peacefully, while also making the distinction that those who do NOT share the same worldview can NOT be united. As Paul rhetorically asks, **"What partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14b)**, the obvious answer being, "NONE." Try as we might to maintain amicable relationships with unbelievers, true fellowship can never exist there. That isn't to be antagonistic, it's just a statement of truth and warning. One worldview will always swallow up or else repel the other. The wayward worldview of the lost person will ultimately be joyously surrendered in exchange for relationship with and the lordship of the Prince

of Peace, the biblical worldview of the saved person will become compromised and ineffectual in the name of INCLUSION (Colossians 2:8), or the relationship will fizzle out and die.

We, on the other hand, are being united in the Lord the more we gather around the Word of God. As we cling to the inerrancy and infallibility of the Word, living it out as proof of our convictions, our relationships with one another will only grow closer, even overcoming difficult circumstances and tricky personality differences. As Paul exhorted the Ephesian believers (and us)...

#### **Ephesians 4:1-6**

**1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

And when Paul teaches about the gifts that the Lord has given His followers, he emphasizes how they're given **"to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the UNITY OF THE FAITH and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"** (Ephesians 4:12-13). We're united in the Lord.

Esau's offer to leave some of his men with Jacob to help him manage until he got where he was going was QUITE GENEROUS, but Jacob points out that there was no need. Jacob and those with him had managed since they left Paddan-Aram, so they could make it a little further on their own.

#### **Genesis 33:18-20**

**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.**

Jacob came safely or PEACEFULLY to the city of Shechem, an UNNAMED CITY in the land of Canaan. You see, Shechem is not the name of the city but of a prince of that city; this detail is setting up for the account of events of Genesis 34. Though the events of Genesis 34 are anything but peaceful, we see that Jacob arrives TO the location where he chose to settle PEACEFULLY, the chances for which didn't look good when Jacob learned that Esau was coming out to meet him with an army (400 men). However, God worked the miracle in Esau's heart and brought to fruition the word he spoke to Jacob when He renamed him and told him that he had striven with God and man and had PREVAILED (Genesis 32:28).

Abraham had bought a parcel of land in Canaan for use as a BURIAL PLOT, but here we see Jacob buy a piece of land nearby this city on which to LIVE. And as was his family's practice, Jacob commemorated



the Lord's work in his life by building an altar and naming it "God, the God of Israel," though it could've been called "the God of Israel IS God." The Lord had certainly proven as much to him.

I know there are those here and throughout our church who are burdened by broken relationships, either within their own families or with friendships that were once close and have faded away. God is able to work in them and bring you back together. If the Lord can replace the murderous motives of Esau's heart with a sincere longing for his brother, He can restore your broken relationship. If it takes an uncomfortable meeting like the one that Jacob dreaded having with Esau, the Lord will go through it with you. If the person is unsaved, the Lord can use you to draw him or her to Himself and bring about true unity and fellowship, not only with Himself, but with you and the rest of the Body of Christ. The Lord is the One who said that it wasn't good for man to be alone, a statement that has as much to do with the rest of life as it does with marriage. He's the One who made us with a need for community, and He's the One who meets that need and brings about the truest unity among His people. May we allow the Lord to have His way in and among us according to His Word and His Spirit.