

The Brothers Part Two (The Rest of the Story)

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*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. ² He put the maids and their children in front, and Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. ³ But he himself passed on ahead of them and bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. ⁴ Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. ⁵ 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." ⁶ Then the maids came near with their children, and they bowed down. ⁷ Leah likewise came near with her children, and they bowed down; and afterward Joseph came near with Rachel, and they bowed down. 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." ⁹ But Esau said, "I have plenty, my brother; let what you have be your own." ¹⁰ 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. 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. **Genesis 33.1-11,***

Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and live there, and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." ² So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods which are among you, and purify yourselves and change your garments; ³ and let us arise and go up to Bethel, and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone." ⁴ So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which they had and the rings which were in their ears, and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem. ⁵ As they journeyed, there was a great terror upon the cities which were around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. ⁶ So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. ⁷ He built an altar there, and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed Himself to him when he fled from his brother. ⁸ Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the oak; it was named Allon-bacuth. ⁹ Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. ¹⁰ God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; You shall no longer be called Jacob, But Israel shall be your name." Thus He called him Israel. ¹¹ God also said to him, "I am God Almighty; Be fruitful and multiply; A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, And kings shall come forth from you. ¹² "The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, And I will give the land to your descendants after you." ¹³ Then God went up from him in the place where He had spoken with him. ¹⁴ Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He had spoken with him, a

pillar of stone, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. ¹⁵ So Jacob named the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel. **35.1-15**

We're looking at the life of JACOB in Genesis. He's the third generation of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the first family of the Israelites and family line from which Jesus Christ was born.

When we left off, last week, Jacob was facing a moment of deep anxiety and uncertainty ...almost like awaiting a diagnosis or test results for a potentially fatal disease... But this verdict COULD have ended in the slaughter of Jacob's entire family.

And...*waiting all week to exhale*...we tune in today to find that Jacob's greatest fears were unrealized. Esau comes NOT in vengeance but in peace! We all breathe a big sigh of relief! There's a resolution to this sibling rivalry and *today we get the rest of the story*.

It is also an opportunity to look back on the life of this rascal, Jacob, and see what God has done to change him. In fact, God has worked in this family for three generations and the promises God made *are now coming to pass* – big progress has been made. If you'd been there you might have missed it but looking back WE see it – “hindsight is 20/20”.

And SO in our own lives...we're in the season of Thanksgiving...*it's a time to look back and be grateful* AND a time to take stock *of where we've been* and how we've changed over the last YEAR or years. We have opportunity to see what progress we've made in the spiritual life – how our character has been altered for good or bad. SO LET'S LOOK AT THE IDEA OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESS and how *THIS* family story can help us *gauge progress* in our own lives.

#1 –Next Steps for the New Man #2 – Redemptive Disappointment #3 – Next Steps for YOU

There are really three whole chapters to this “rest of the story” and three big events that take place. We jumped right over the middle chapter (34) but let me try to bring all THREE events into focus.

Jacob got by on his cunning. He did it from the time of his birth... His mother was an accomplice/enabler and she helps him become what we would call a “climber”. And when he used his skills against his father and his brother Esau...then Esau vowed to kill Jacob and Jacob fled for his life...That's when Jacob first met God and God met Jacob *with promises and with blessing*...We thought God would correct the climber or punish him *but ... God only blessed him*.

Now he's been gone for 20 years and he really has BEEN blessed – very wealthy! And he's coming home AND *he is justifiably afraid of Esau*... Jacob learns that Esau is coming to meet him and Esau brings 400 men maybe warriors – time to pay the piper! Jacob is afraid!

And that's when Jacob meets God again: the wrestling match we saw last week. God appears as a man and God takes on the climber, the heel-grabber, the wrestler Jacob. It's as if God is saying, "*Aren't you tired of conniving and manipulating ...can't you see that your cleverness can only get you so far...and now you've hit the wall... Are you finally exhausted? Are you weak enough to be changed?*"

And Jacob basically says, "I need help!" and God helps him...touches him...injures him...blesses him and changes Jacob's name – HE CHANGES JACOB'S CHARACTER AND HIS VERY IDENTITY.

And now, the new man, Jacob...ISRAEL... emerges to meet Esau... and the changed man goes in faith and goes depending on God's blessing and promise. He's changed and he takes new steps ...limping...weak in himself but strong in God.

Jacob puts it all on the table, displays all his family for Esau to see. He becomes totally vulnerable – like he's baring his throat. He's renouncing all his former manipulations and saying, "Anything I got from cheating and shrewdness and conniving, I now let go! I will NOT be a grabber."

He bows seven times. He's saying, "The prophecy said the OLDER will serve the YOUNGER... but it is NOT up to me to make that happen! If God is going to keep that promise than GOD MUST DO IT!"

And Esau sees that humility and he is moved by it. He greets Jacob with this stunning gesture of grace and forgiveness and affection. Jesus Christ actually used this in His own Parable of the Prodigal Son when the father greets the returning son *NOT with justice and anger* but with surprising mercy, "*Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.*"

Jacob sees that it really is in weakness that victory comes – in repentance and rest (Isaiah 30.15) – and says (v.10) "*As I saw the face of God and lived, now I seen YOUR face and have found grace and forgiveness!*"

Then he says, "Here, brother, take my blessing (lit. in v.11) – the blessing I stole from you – *I now return it because I now see that I didn't have to manipulate for it but that God was waiting to give it to me by grace... and if you have grace you have everything!*"

Then Esau wants Jacob to come back to his town but Jacob knows that's not what God wants so they part company for a while and Jacob settles in a town called Shechem. That's what we skipped in ch. 34 – a really dark episode.

To make a long story short: Jacob's children are now young adults. The daughter of Leah (Dinah) pals around with some of the local girls (Canaanites) and she is somehow violated by the son of a local king.

Jacob doesn't know what to do about it but when her older brothers find out, they show a level of cunning and brutality that shocked even Jacob... Two brothers (Simeon and Levi) go on a *very calculated* vengeance rampage and they end up killing all the men in the whole town. Then the other sons plunder the town and the word gets out that these sons of Jacob are just "bad-to-the-bone" terrorists.

And Jacob cries, "Now everyone will hate us and we'll never have any friends" and they say, "What?! Were we supposed to let them treat our sister like a harlot?!"

Then the third episode: in that first encounter with God at the stairway dream at Bethel...Jacob vowed to return there *but he seems* to be dragging his feet and settles in Shechem (and that didn't go so well!) and now God reminds Jacob of his vows.

So, where Jacob vowed to put God first – he now tells his people to get rid of their idols and amulets and all superstitious stuff. Where he promised to worship, Jacob sets up a shrine. And where Jacob vowed to pay a tenth of all his wealth to God, he sets up an altar for sacrifices.

And God meets him at this sacred place, Bethel. God confirms that great name change. God changed his identity (*Israel*) and now Jacob's character is following. God says, "I am God Almighty (El Shaddai) and now you are seeing that *where YOU are not strong and sufficient*, I AM STRONG AND SUFFICIENT!... I can be trusted. Be fruitful and multiply (*Of course those are creation words* – this is like a new creation, a new beginning for Jacob and for God's first family.)

And God confirms all the blessings that He had promised to Abraham, Isaac *and now again to Jacob and his family!* And they worship God – their hearts are free to worship and they SEE how far God has brought them.

They started as a childless, barren old couple who lived among idol-worshippers... and God promised to give them grace and a land and descendants too many to number. And now just three generations later, here they are...ON THEIR WAY! God has done the impossible and He is preparing a people who will bless the entire world *with the knowledge of God* and the way of grace.

And *in these next steps for the new man*, this new and changed Jacob, we *ALSO* see – while some really promising things have happened, we also feel a bit... disappointed.

It's like when we learned that some of our childhood heroes were not all they were cracked up to be - we learn that Thomas Jefferson owned slaves and fathered children by one. The founder of a major Christian aid/development organization had a family life that was a wreck. A very famous missionary to inland Africa *did great good* and was also addicted to morphine when he died. Sports stars and politicians – we look for a hero and we hope to find them ...of all places, ...in the Bible.

But the Bible...doesn't wait for an expose' to uncover the hidden flaws of its heroes ...the flaws are included right there from the very start. Moses doesn't whitewash these patriarchs for his original readers. It almost makes the Bible a little ...embarrassing to read sometimes.

Even when Jacob becomes a new man – very next scene, he's procrastinating on his vows – he lingers in a place that's comfortable and his daughter pays the price. Then his sons become violent thugs... Then they go back to Bethel and they get rid of their idols (we wonder: what are they doing with idols anyway?!) and yet *they don't destroy the idols*, instead they bury them (like Achan buried that gold in his tent; Joshua 7). Why don't they destroy the idols?

Then, after meeting God at Bethel – huge breakthrough! – next scene, Jacob's beloved wife Rachel gives birth to Benjamin (son #12!) and then, she dies in childbirth!

It's all a little...disappointing.

And yet... *seen in the whole context of the whole Bible* – it's a redemptive disappointment. It leaves us wanting a real Hero and finally from the line of the Patriarchs...in the fullness of time...HE COMES.

He, Jesus Christ, IS the true older Brother. We await His approach and know He should be angry with us – like Esau *should have* hated Jacob – and yet, when we meet Him humble and bowed down and weak and acknowledging our faults – the sinner finds that Jesus Christ runs and “*to meet him and embraces him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.*” It's the surprise of grace – no disappointment!

AND He, Jesus Christ, stands in contrast as the perfect Avenger. Simeon and Levi were right in a way: sexual abuse should be met with justice...and yet *theirs* was an unrighteous justice that was worse than the crime itself and it left many orphans and widows in its wake.

But the Hero we want/need – He is able to bring a perfect justice because *He Himself was also the object of justice* – Jesus Christ came into the world to *take* the justice that I deserved. *It fell on Him!*

And that's why I can trust Him to bring about a perfect and equitable solution to all the abuse humanity has inflicted on itself. *He knows justice from both sides!* When it says that He will judge the world, I can truly rejoice in that and see it as Good News. THESE stories are never truly resolved *but the Big Story will be resolved* and that's the greatest comfort.

AND whereas Jacob *f l n a l l y* pays his vows and returns to Bethel to worship...I find a fuller, richer and *more satisfying conclusion to the Big Story* in that Jesus Christ could say, “My FOOD is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work” (John

4). And at the Last Supper He could pray with joy, "Father, I accomplished the work which You have given Me to do." No procrastination... *only a passion*, a hunger to obey!

And of course with His dying breaths could say, "It is finished" – all My obedience, all that My people failed to do *with their shoddy, half-hearted and disappointing compliance* – all THAT I have accomplished – It is finished!"

Abraham dies...Isaac dies...Jacob dies but the true Hero of the story rises over death... "our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim 1.10).

And yet it's because there IS a true Hero that we can hope to see real progress in our lives. Jacob meets God the first time and gets blessing (instead of correction or justice for his cheating) and we say, "Hey, that's not fair!"

But here in the rest of the story, we see that God will not leave Jacob's character undisturbed. No, God will pursue Jacob and change him. God doesn't simply forgive sinners; *He changes them!* And we see real results in Jacob's humility. He has progressed.

And WE have the same hope. We should look for real substantive change in our lives when we come under the influence of grace. *You may not SEE it as you look at the last month* but over the last year or several years ...I hope you can see it. YOU WILL SEE IT – YOU HAVE TO SEE IT. God forgives AND changes!

Not perfection but progress...Are you getting freer to acknowledge your faults? Are you less inclined to manipulate and freer to rest and trust God for help? Are you seeing strengths changed under the influence of grace (like Jacob's strong will and self sufficiency was changed into promise keeping)? *And are you seeing weaknesses made opportunities for humility and repentance and compassion for others?* Are you growing in generosity (less grabbing)?

It starts when you meet God – but it doesn't end there! God welcomes you with grace and mercy as He first welcomed Jacob and spoke down the stairway, "I will be with you..."

But God also wants to deal with those flaws in your life as He did with Jacob's. If you really meet Him, He will give you grace in Jesus Christ, He will change your name AND He will change your very self, *your character, your motives and goals and loves.*

This is an opportunity to look back and ask, "Lord, HAVE I met You in Jesus Christ (*the True Bethel*) and ARE You changing me?...Not perfection but progress! Lord, bring it about."

If you don't see much progress...your first inclination will be to try harder and YET God is actually calling you to rest and repentance. That's when real change comes.