

SERIES: Unwavering Faith (Genesis Vol. 3)

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Message Title: Is It Jacob Or Israel? Pt. 2

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Now, I think Jacob could not in his wildest dreams have ever imagined this reunion. As he is looking into the face of Esau, he sees the handiwork of God and he realizes God had gone before him. There was no reason for fear. There was no reason for worry and anxiety. Once again, God had prepared the way just as He promised He would. God dealt with Laban one way; God dealt with Esau in a different way. But God again had prevailed.

You also see this supported in the use of two different Hebrew words. They are both translated “plenty” in the English. When Esau says, “I don’t need your stuff; I have plenty,” that is a good translation. But when Jacob says, “I have plenty,” that is a different Hebrew word, which literally means “I have it all.” In other words, he was saying, “Esau, I want you to keep all this stuff because I realize now, I have it all. God can do anything. I will never lack for anything.” It is a statement of faith. He is starting to get it. Esau has plenty. Jacob has it all, because he is realizing God can do what he couldn’t even have imagined. God promised in Genesis 28 to Jacob, “I will protect you. I will provide for you. I will be with you.” But Jacob has struggled to understand, what does that mean?

But we still wrestle with that same question: What does that mean? What does it mean to practice the presence of God on a daily basis? Does that mean if I am a person of faith that I sit in the La-Z-Boy and God does it all, while I just sip my Diet Coke? That is not what it means. It means that, as a person of faith, I have to fulfill my responsibility. I have to do what I can do. I need to be obedient. I need to be diligent. I need to control the things I can control. I can control my own choices. I can control my own attitudes. I can control my own obedience.

The problem is, that is not what causes my fear. What causes my fear are those things around me I can’t control. But I understand if I have the presence of God in my life, I don’t have to live that way—because even though I cannot control these people and I cannot control these circumstances, God can. God can...just like He did with Laban and just like He did with Esau. Therefore, I do my part, and that which I cannot control I don’t try to manipulate. I don’t try to intimidate. I don’t need to lie, deceive, scheme and plot. I just need to believe that that which I cannot control, God can. Therefore, rather than fear, I have *faith*. I have *faith*.

So it creates a dramatic difference between those who have the presence of God and those who don’t. That is what Jacob is starting to learn here. I think he has it. I think he understands that God prevails and he has it all. The people around us may have plenty, but with the presence of God we may have it all. I think Jacob has it. I think he has got it... doesn’t he? Hmm.

Then Esau said, “Let us take our journey and go, and I will go before you.” 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. 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. [*In other words, "I will meet you there."*]

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." So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. (NASB, 33:12-16)

One of the issues in the ancient world was the danger of travel. It just was very dangerous to travel. And Leah and Rachel must have struggled with the danger to the family all the time. Now here comes Esau with this grand reunion. He has 400 men and he basically says, "Let's go home and I will escort you all the way home." They are home free. (Rachel and Leah had been praying about this in Titus Women for weeks.) [*Laughter*] They must have said, "Finally, we are home free. God is so good." And Jacob said, "No thanks. The cattle are tired and the children are tired, so you go on home and we will come at our own pace."

So Esau says, "I'll tell you what: I'll just leave some of the men and they will come at your pace." And Leah and Rachel were saying, "Yes; we are home free." And Jacob said, "No thanks; we don't need it." Now what is he doing? Are these great steps of faith where he realizes God is his protector and he doesn't need Esau's men? Maybe that is what it is. Maybe Jacob is taking great steps of faith ... or maybe not.

Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built for himself a house and made booths for his livestock; therefore the place is named Succoth. (Vs. 17)

You have to understand the geography here. Seir was almost straight south of where they were. Succoth is northwest, almost the opposite direction. As a matter of fact, to go to Succoth from where he was, Jacob and his family had to once again cross the Jabbok River, which was very dangerous. They had crossed it in order to have this encounter with Esau, and now they were home free. Instead, he goes the opposite direction, back across the river. You think, *Well, maybe he is just taking the scenic route.* No, he built a house. He is moving in. He promised Esau he would meet him in Seir. As a matter of fact, when God came to Jacob in Chapter 28, he said, "Jacob, I am going to bring you back here and this is your home, Bethel." This was down in the area of Seir. When God appeared to Jacob when he was in the land of Laban, He said, "It is time to go home. It is time to go back to Bethel." Jacob is going the opposite direction.

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. 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. Then he erected there an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel. (Vs. 18-20)

Now nobody knows how long a time lapsed between Succoth and Shechem. Shechem was about 30 miles farther northwest, so he is still going the opposite direction.

There are a lot of interesting things that happened in this area of Shechem. For example, in Genesis 12, when Abraham first entered the Land of Promise, it was right in this area where he

built the altar to God. Probably it was not still standing; that would have been 200 years earlier. This area of Shechem would become the burial place for Joseph.

In John 4, Jesus has an encounter with the Woman at the Well. We are told in that Gospel that this encounter with the Woman at the Well was the well that Jacob dug when he was at Shechem. There is a lot of history right here. The problem is, this is not where God told him to go. He was supposed to go to Bethel. He bought a piece of ground for 100 pieces of money. He did not have to buy anything. God said in Genesis 28, “I will give you this land.” He did not say to go out and make an offer on it. This was all wrong. What is going on here? Jacob is still driven by his fears. He just does not believe that Esau is on the up and up. He does not want to live by him. He wants a river between him and Esau. Because of his fears, instead of going where God said to go, he went somewhere else—almost the opposite direction.

On top of that, Jacob lied to Esau. He said, “You go ahead. We will meet you there.” He is still the same old Jacob. He is a liar. He is a deceiver. He is a schemer. As a matter of fact, he is still Jacob. In Chapter 32, God said, “I am changing your name. You will now be called Israel.” But throughout this story, he is not called Israel. He is called Jacob, because he is still acting like Jacob.

When God changed the name of Abram to Abraham and the name Sarai to Sarah, from that moment on they were referred to as Abraham and Sarah 100% of the time. But from the moment God changes Jacob’s name to Israel, he would continue to be called Jacob 45 times, and over his lifetime he would only be called Israel 23 times, because that is the way he continued to live. He was driven by his fears rather than his faith.

There are a couple of things that we can say with certainty. First, Jacob has been a man driven by his fear. And secondly, he has a track record for bad, disastrous choices. Do you suppose those two go together? What if you were to make a list of your worst decisions of your life—the top ten worst decisions you have made? I would suggest to you that probably almost every one of those was driven by fear. I would also suggest to you that not one of those was driven by faith.

The reality is, God has remained remarkably faithful. Jacob just keeps doing his own thing and God continues to be faithful. Jacob said it twice in this text—that God has been gracious to him: “He has poured out to me what I don’t deserve over and over again.” If I were God, I would have taken him out a long time ago. But God just continues to be faithful. He will faithfully get him down to Bethel where he belongs, but Jacob will still live with the consequences of his choices. This decision, driven by fear to go to Shechem instead of Bethel, will effect a disaster in his family. For the rest of his life he will grieve his choice to go to Shechem. The fact is, yes, God will be faithful. But we still live with the consequences of our choices.

So is it a big deal? Sometimes we talk about faith and we are thinking, *Yes, I need to believe that to accomplish great things for God.* But we are talking about the everyday decisions of life. It is a big deal, unless you want to make a disaster of your life. If so, then have at it. But if you don’t want to make a disaster of your life, then yes, this fear thing is a big deal, because fear never drives us to make wise decisions.

What are the big issues in your life? What are the big issues...the people... the circumstances? What would be a response driven by fear, and what would be a response driven by faith? If you

allow yourself to be driven by your fears, you will make a disaster with your business, with your relationships, with your life.

It is a big deal. We have to deal with this fear within us. It is not necessary. I do what I can do, and beyond that I just have to trust by faith. I don't have to control it. I don't have to manipulate it. I don't have to intimidate. I don't have to scheme and plot. And I don't have to live in fear of it. **I do what I can do, and I trust God with the rest.**

What will it be for you? **Will you be driven by fear...or will you be driven by faith?**

Nat: Just about the time you think Jacob really gets it, he just goes and makes another dumb decision. I mean, these fears and patterns of behavior run deep in all of us today, don't they?

Bryan: They do. They absolutely do. If my girls were here, they'd laugh at this, because they've heard it so many times. But a well-known "Bryanism" is, *patterns are patterns because they're patterns*. And it's just the idea that a pattern is a pattern, because it's been a pattern. In other words, these things don't change easily. It's been a way of life. And we've seen that with Jacob over and over again, but it is a very disappointing moment in the story. About the time it seems like he's going home and the family's going to be reconciled, I don't know if he thinks he's being clever or cautious or just fearful, but I think he makes a poor decision. And then I think about poor Esau; he's been, you know, Jacob is the one that gets the blessing. So Jacob is the one that gets the favor of God, but Jacob's also the one that now has done it to him again. It's like, how does Esau form a right view of God, based on how Jacob keeps treating him, supposedly representing God? I feel for Esau.

Nat: Yeah, it seems like continuing the story. One minute you're clapping and celebrating on your feet going, *Yes, you got it*. And then the next minute your heart breaks, because you're going, *Man, what a fool. He doesn't get it*. But I think what I experienced in the story is, it's a great reminder that God choosing Jacob and blessing him wasn't because Jacob was such a high performer, was it?

Bryan: Right. So there's always this tension between the sovereignty of God and our will to choose. And I think Jacob's story is really helpful for seeing that God made a promise and He will be faithful to that promise. But Jacob also has a will and he makes choices and makes messes. Somehow mysteriously both the sovereignty of God and Jacob's choices co-exist. And God's going to ultimately get him where He wants him. But God chose Jacob because he chose him, not because he was some high performer.

Nat: Right. So God will be faithful. But that doesn't mean that there aren't real consequences to our choices. I mean, Jacob will learn that again, the hard way, just as we too often suffer the consequences of fear driven choices, right?

Bryan: Right. Absolutely. So grace doesn't mean God puts frosting on our bad choices and there's no consequences. Consequences are real. I do talk to people that they're convinced they can sin, they can confess, no harm, no foul. But sin always has consequences, so always a cost to it. So the more we trust God, the more we travel His path, the more we obey, the more likely it is we're going to find the life that our souls long for. I mean, life's hard enough without making it more difficult by disobedience and bad decisions.

Nat: Right. So what would you say to our listeners today who might be struggling with that balance and that battle between obedience and that that unfortunate perception that you have freedom to sin? It's almost a battle of license and legalism.

Bryan: It is. I see both license and legalism flowing out of the flesh. So I don't see it as a tension between the two of them, but when we're living in the flesh, it manifests itself either in license or legalism. And the alternative for us as New Covenant believers is the life of the Spirit, which is the life of freedom. And that's only possible through the grace of God. So I think it's understanding you can't be too filled with the Spirit. So the more yielded and surrendered and obedient we are, the more we're going to experience the life that God wants for us.

Nat: Right. I think that you nailed it right there on the head. It's really related to the Spirit. One of the things I've reminded people, and even my own children from time to time, when they're struggling with obedience, either out of obligation or a way of earning that type of good graces, I remind them that as believers, God doesn't want us going through the motions. He doesn't want us doing things for His approval or for Salvation or anything like that. He wants us to follow Him and to love Him out of love, because we love Him so much. Not purely because of a consequence or reward, but out of the outflow of our love for Him, and a thankfulness for who He is and what He's done.

Bryan: Right. I don't want my kids to, when they were little, to obey me because they're afraid of me or intimidated by me. I want their obedience to be because they love me and they respect me and they trust me. [Yeah] That's what God wants.

Nat: Yeah. I think that's been so freeing for me in my life, and I hope it's freeing for you, to those who are listening. Thanks Bryan.