**Jacob becomes Israel**

**(The reunion with Esau) - Lesson 32**

**Genesis 32, 33**

**Last week**

So just to recap on what we learnt in our previous session, we discussed how Jacob was on the run from Esau. Having tricked his father Isaac into blessing him instead of his brother Esau. When Esau found out he was infuriated and the feelings of anger and rage consumed him to the point that he had the sinful desire to take revenge upon Jacob; seeking to take his life.

Well we remember how Jacob fled to the land of Padan Aram; following the heart wrenching cry of his mother instructing him to head to the land in which her brother Laban and family dwelt.

Along Jacob’s journey towards that land we recount on how he stopped off for rest and how he must have been contemplating all that had transpired.

It was in these moments that as he rested a dream was given to him from God. This was a supernatural encounter. Jacob could see what appeared to be a ladder or staircase stretching from the ground all the way up into Heaven itself; with angels ascending and descending upon it.

**2**

He also heard the voice of none other than the Lord God Himself calling out to Jacob from above this ladder. The Lord spoke to Jacob declaring that He was the God of his Father Isaac and Grandfather Abraham, promising that He would be with Isaac and that the very land in which Jacob rested upon would be his. He also decreed that Jacob would have descendants, so much in fact that their number would be *as the dust of the earth*.

Jacob was so taken aback by all these things that as he awoke in the early hours of the morning; filled with holy fear and awe, he took the stone pillar from which he used as a pillow and propped it up into the ground as an altar to the Lord.

He called that place “Bethel” and there made an oath that if God would really provide for all of his needs that he would devote his whole life and being to God.

**Planning to return home**

Well we fast forward some time in today's session, many years have passed and so much had changed since Jacob had originally left home.#

**3**

Jacob had been through so many ups and downs during his time away, and yet he knew the blessing of the Lord. We now meet Jacob at a stage in his life in which events really have turned around for him. He was now a married man with a large family, owning many servants and more animals/livestock than he could have ever imagined.

In no uncertain terms, Jacob was a wealthy man. It is at this point in his life in which we pick things up again, and see that the Lord has instructed Jacob to venture onwards and make that long awaited journey back home.

**Fears resurface**

It is true many things had changed, but still there was one thing that remained… Jacob still wondered about the state of his brother Esau. This is one thing that Jacob couldn’t shake no matter how much time had passed.

He wondered to himself whether Esau had calmed down and forgotten all that had happened or if he was still filled with wrath. He pondered what would happen if he were to return home; had Esau been harboring hatred in his heart for all these years, waiting for an opportune time to take his revenge?!

Well these fears and doubts would not leave Jacob alone and so he sought away to test the waters before fully committing to this journey home.

**4**

**A fearful report**

In the mind of Jacob it seemed a good idea to send some of his servants ahead, towards Esau as a way to help ease this sudden change of circumstances and find out the condition of his brother’s heart now.

The servants upon arrival before Esau were to explain that Jacob was now blessed of the Lord with many servants and animals (which could serve as great gifts towards Esau) and that Jacob desired to seek Esau's favor once again.

Well this seemed like a wise way to go about things but to the dismay of Jacob; the servants returned with a report that struck fear into his heart.

Whilst Jacob had been preparing all this time to head towards Esau… it turned out that Esau was on his way towards him! Not only that but with what appeared to be a large company of men near to the number of 400!

**Drastic measures**

Jacob felt as if his worse nightmares had come to surface; fears, doubts and panic began to set in.

Feeling boxed in with no other means of escape, his mind switched to self preservation. If this danger was heading straight towards him, maybe just maybe he would be able to mitigate some losses.

**5**

He came to the conclusion that the camp should be divided in two sections. In a desperate plan to protect his family he made this movehoping that if one half of the camp was met with Esau and attacked… then at least enough time would be given for the second half of the camp to escape.

At this point Jacob did the only thing that He really knew to do in times of trouble, he turned to the Lord in prayer. He sought the protection of Almighty God, confessing his own unworthiness and his utter dependence upon the Lord. He pleaded with God, bringing to surface the many promises that had been given to him and the Lord’s faithfulness to see them come to pass. Jacob was now leaning upon the grace of God.

Alas even after Jacob’s time in prayer he was still fixated with the present circumstances and began to think of what else he could do to calm Esau’s wrath.

He thought that maybe he should prepare gifts for Esau. If Esau was met with many gifts that could pacify him surely. So Jacob took to the idea and began to group together sections of his livestock.

Some 200 female goats and 20 male goats, 200 ewes and 20 rams, 30 camels with their colts, 40 cows and 10 bulls, 20 female donkeys and 10 foals. He then set servants in charge of the groups. He gave the instruction that each group should set off ahead but with space in between each other. That upon meeting Esau it should be

**6**

made known that it is Jacob who has sent all ahead to be presented as gifts and that he is also not too far behind them.

Jacob sent the groups of herds ahead of him and then took his family across the ford of Jabbok, for he needed to spend more time alone with the Lord.

**Wrestling with God**

Well this was to be another unforgettable night.

As Esau prayed and pleaded before God struggling with the matters at hand, he found himself no longer just wrestling in the spirit but now this struggling took upon a physical experience.

Our lord God is Omnipotent; there is nothing too hard for Him to do. In this time what we see here is the Lord Himself coming down in a preincarnate appearance - a "Christophany".

This wrestling match continued on for hours all throughout the night and the One before Jacob continued to resist him.

Jacob continued to persevere and in a mighty show of power the One before Jacob touched his hip, dislocating it out of joint!

This was indeed a strenuous struggle and yet, even with this added ailment Jacob was still allowed to push through and persevere.

**7**

**Persevering with God**

The sun began to rise and the One before Jacob demanded to be let go. Jacob was adamant to be helped and refused to let go, crying *“I will not let thee go, except thou bless me!”*

At this point the Lord changed Jacob's name to Israel meaning “he has struggled with God and men and prevailed”

**The blessing given**

Jacob asked the Divine One before him for His name in which he received the reply “why do you ask me for my name?”

After this mighty ordeal, Jacob was blessed and he then *called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved"*

**Preparing to face Esau**

After this experience Jacob knew that he could not escape what was to come. He began to create more groups amongst the people, keeping his most beloved wife and son towards the back and having other groups put in front of them.

Jacob himself then went up ahead to face Esau.

This was the dreaded moment. This was the moment in which Jacob had been anticipating for so long. Jacob

**8**

would now appear face to face with his brother Esau and he thought this might be the end.

**Reconciled and instructed**

Esau finally met before Jacob; who fell down upon his knees, bowing down in a manner of pleading and seeking mercy… and yet to the great surprise of Jacob, Esau ran towards him and embraced him!

By the grace of God Esau was no longer angry, forgiveness and peace had prevailed and the brothers could now continue on putting the past behind them and knowing the joy of reconciliation.

**Persevering through struggles**

So what can we take from this account in the life of Jacob? Well we see here a lesson of perseverance.

To the believer, Jacob wrestling with God represents to us an example of the attitude we should keep when faced with situations that can be challenging. We may encounter many struggles in this life and sometimes doubts, situations and fears may strive to press in upon us; causing us to question our faith and whether or not we really do believe God’s word, His promises and His kind/loving nature towards us.

But as we see with Jacob persevering through his struggles, wrestling in prayer and faith, we see that the blessing of the Lord will be given to those who press on.

**9**

We read in 2 Corinthians 12:9 that *My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.* The Lord in His grace and mercy will uphold the believer through all situations and it is His pleasure to reward those who persevere in faith. We must not weary therefore, though we may go through challenging times, even stages in which we are struggling with our faith, we must press on relying upon the grace of God to pull us through.

The Lord is ready to bless all those who seek him, granting assurance to the sincere; assurance that we are His, that Christ is our Savior, that the penalty for our sins has been paid for on the cross and that we have received the free gift of the righteousness of Christ, through faith leading to everlasting life with God.

**Taking faith seriously**

These are matters of utmost importance indeed and lastly to any who have not yet closed with the Lord, we learn from this experience of Jacob wrestling with God that true faith is no light matter.

There are many things in this world in which you can just “turn up” and “sign up” for. Whether it be a particular sport or hobby, club or group of people, but true faith isn't a mere "signing up" or “agreeing with those in a group”.

**10**

Jacob did not rely upon the faith of his Father Isaac or Grandfather Abraham. No instead Jacob had his own personal relationship with God.

He felt sorrow for his own sin and had a deep heartfelt desire to be forgiven. If you have not yet come to know Christ as your own personal Savior and Lord then I would encourage you this day to take these things seriously.

As human beings our greatest need is the forgiveness of sins; reconciliation with God and He is willing to grant all these to those who turn to Him in repentance and faith. As you persevere in this way knowing that it is the Lord who *draws all men to Himself*, you will be greatly helped of the Lord to understand the gospel; receiving the blessing of God’s saving grace applied to your own soul.

So persevere, as a pilgrim and you too shall know the blessing of the Lord; forgiveness of sins and everlasting life with the Savior.