

Truth & Forgiveness

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[0 : 00] Jacob looked up and there was Esau coming with his 400 men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two female servants. He put the female servants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear.

He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother. But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him. He threw his arms around his neck and kissed him.

And they wept. Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. Who are these with you? he asked. Jacob answered, they are the children God has graciously given your servant.

Then the female servants and their children approached and bowed down. Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down. Esau asked, what's the meaning of all these flocks and herds I met? To find favour in your eyes, my lord, he said. I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself.

[1 : 07] No, please, Jacob said. If I have found favour in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favourably.

Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need. And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it. Then Esau said, let us be on our way, I'll accompany you.

But Jacob said to him, my lord knows that the children are tender and that I must care for the ewes and cows that are nursing their young. If they are driven hard, just one day, all the animals will die. So let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I move along slowly at the pace of the flocks and herds before me and the pace of the children, until I come to my lord and say, Esau said, then let me leave some of my men with you.

But why do that? Jacob asked. Just let me find favour in the eyes of my lord. So that day, Esau started on his way back to Seir. Jacob, however, went to Succoth, where he built a place for himself and made shelters for his livestock.

[2 : 16] That is why the place is called Succoth. After Jacob came from Paddan Aram, he arrived safely at the city of Shechem in Canaan and camped within sight of the city. For a hundred pieces of silver he bought from the sons of Hamer, the father of Shechem, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent.

There he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks, Hallie, for reading. Thanks, Robbie, for leading me.

Let me pray as we start. So, Father, we pray that we would find favour in your eyes now. We pray that you would speak to us, that we would hear your word, and that we would grow to love you and need you more dearly.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, just watching Sam Oldsbury's video there reminds me of when stuff goes wrong in life and when you need forgiveness.

And it might make you wonder what is it to forgive someone? And what is it to be forgiven by someone?

[3 : 28] And so, growing up in South Africa, the end of apartheid, forgiveness was really a big question. What's that going to look like? And I wonder if you've ever had any experience with needing or giving forgiveness.

So, I had a friend who went through a particularly bad relationship breakup. I won't give the details. It was really messy. And the question came, at what point do you start talking about forgiveness? And forgiveness is something that we need if we're going to cope well in life. We're all going to need to give it at some point. And we're all going to need to receive forgiveness at some point.

But here is the thing. Forgiveness is actually quite tricky. What do I mean by that? Well, at the heart of forgiveness is trust.

As in, do I trust what the other person is saying? And so, if you're offering forgiveness, you might be wondering, can I trust them?

[4 : 36] How do I know that they won't just hurt me again? And if you are accepting forgiveness, you might be wondering, how do I know that this person is actually really going to forgive me?

Or how do I know that they're not simply going to hold this over me for the rest of my life and bring it out against me whenever it's convenient? And so, it's hard, isn't it?

We know we need forgiveness. We know that forgiveness means that we need to trust someone else. But where can we find it? And forgiveness is probably hardest in family situations.

And so, if you've joined us this evening, we've been looking at the story of Jacob in Genesis. And what we have seen is that Jacob is the wily, self-sufficient younger brother of Esau, who's robbed and cheated his way up to the top.

And he's been on the run from his brother Esau, who's wanted to kill him for 20 years. And what we have seen, also seen, is that God has given Jacob some great promises.

[5 : 46] So, he's promised that his descendants will be a great nation. That God would give him as descendants the land of Canaan. And God has promised Jacob that God will watch over him and bring him back safely to the promised land.

And all these promises have been given to Jacob, not because of himself, but in spite of himself. God is going to do all of this for Jacob out of his grace.

And we've learned that in order for God to do this, Jacob is going to need to become right with God. He's going to have to give up grasping onto things and going to have to grasp hold of God.

And so, if Jacob, or any of us here for that matter, if we're going to become right with God, there's two things that we're going to need. We're going to need to meet with God.

And we looked at that last Sunday evening. And then secondly, we're going to need to be forgiven by God. And we'll look at that this evening. But if Jacob, or any of us, are going to be forgiven by God, then we're going to need to know that we need to trust what God has said and what he has promised.

[7 : 10] And so, what drives this passage and what drives the heart of forgiveness is the question, will we trust God and what he has promised?

And so, if you've got a little handout there, we're on our first point in the handouts. Jacob has a tear-filled reunion because trusting God brings gracious power from reconciliation.

And our passage opens up with a bit of a cliffhanger. Jacob leaves from his miraculous encounter with God that we looked at last week. And immediately, he's faced with a test.

Just look down at verse 1 of our reading. And so, Jacob looked up and there was Esau coming with his 400 men.

And so, Jacob looks up and he sees Esau, ferocious Esau. He's got his 400 men. And he might be wondering, are they carrying welcome mats or are they carrying spears?

[8 : 09] And he might be wondering, can I trust God's promise? Can I trust that God will watch over me and bring me back to Canaan?

Will he go with what he sees? Will he see Esau or will he go with trust? And I wonder if you've noticed how deceptive eyes are and how deceptive your sight is. So, a couple of years ago, a friend gave me a chocolate bar.

I was living in a flat, flat chair. It was one of those great big massive Cadbury chocolate bars. And I hid it in the fridge. And I was living in a flat chair. So, I hid it under the vegetables so no one else would find it. And lo and behold, one day I walked into the lounge.

And there was my flatmate holding what looked like my chocolate bar in his hand. And he was happily grazing away. And I tried to be reserved about it.

So, I was like, are you enjoying that? Well, yes, I'm loving it. I was like, are you sure that's your chocolate bar? Yes, came the answer.

[9 : 13] And at this stage, I was wondering, what's going on here? So, I asked him, look, my friend gave me that chocolate bar. Are you sure that's not my chocolate bar? And what happened was, my friend Holly had given all the flatmates the exact same chocolate bar.

And so, I felt rather sheepish and embarrassed. But that's how deceptive our eyes and sight can be. And so, as Jacob sees Esau coming, he is in great fear and distress at the thought of Esau coming

with his 400 men.

And we see this in how he arranges the family caravan. He puts his least favorites at the front. And he puts his most favorites. Rachel with her son Joseph.

So, that if stuff does go wrong, Rachel can escape with Joseph. And then, what do we see? Jacob graciously, he goes to the head and he's going to meet Esau first.

He's going to be the canary. If everything goes wrong, then anyone else has got a better chance of getting away. And then, we see his fear and how he starts bowing profusely to Esau.

[10:27] And it's perhaps echoing how he stole Esau's blessing earlier. And he's trying to pay him back by honoring Esau in blessings. And it's a bit comedic, isn't it?

But at this point, I wonder if you noticed if you've been unclear about what is motivating Jacob's actions here. Is Jacob, having met with God, a really changed man here?

Is he acting proactively out of obedience, expecting God to save him and deliver him from the hand of his brother Esau? Or is it the old Jacob we're seeing here, up to his old tricks, trying to work an angle on his brother, governed by his eyes, rather than trusting God?

And of course, the question at the heart of those two questions is trust. Who is Jacob and what is Jacob trusting? Does he trust that God will bring him back to the land safely, as God has promised to do?

Or will he trust his own eyes? Does he trust that God will forgive him, despite all of his faults? And that question of trust is probably a bit natural for us.

[11:43] I think a number of us might be here this evening. We might be struggling to trust God in certain situations. We think of exams. We think of relationships.

You think of job. Some days you might trust God more. Some days it's a little harder to let go of the reins and trust God.

And then what happens next is entirely unexpected. Just look down at verse 4. But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him. And he threw his arms around him and kissed him.

And they wept. And Jacob's still looking at Esau. He's still bowing away when suddenly Esau breaks ranks. And he comes running out to meet his brother. And it's not spears in his hands, but tears in his eyes.

And he embraces his brother. And he kisses him. And the brothers weep together. And all the pain and all the lost years and all the fears are washed away.

[12:44] And it's a picture of perfect reconciliation. So it reminds me a bit of the story of Jacob de Shazah. Who's Jacob de Shazah? I can hear you calling.

So Jacob de Shazah, he was a World War II bomber pilot. And when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, he was peeling potatoes. And he says, Japan are going to have to pay for this.

So he became a bomber pilot. And he enlisted to start bombing Japan. The Americans flew missions out of Guam. And they're bombing Tokyo in Operation Doolittle.

If you know anything about World War II and Operation Doolittle, Operation Doolittle made the bombing of Coventry and Glasgow and Dresden seem like a church picnic. They absolutely flattened Tokyo.

Tokyo was made of wood. It burnt up. The whole city was destroyed. And de Shazah went on to bomb Nagau. And the missions became so ambitious that they were working on such a time schedule that on one mission, they ran out of fuel on the way back.

[13:50] And so they ditched their plane and parachuted down and landed in enemy territory. And de Shazah was captured by the Japanese.

And he spent 34 months in solitary. But when he was captured, he asked his prisoners if he could have a Bible. And they graciously gave him one.

And he became a Christian in this Japanese prison during World War II. And so in 1948, he returned to Japan as a missionary.

And he began writing tracks. And he wrote this one track on his experience in this prison of war cap. And this Japanese fighter captain, Captain Matsuo Fushida, read this track.

And he had been the captain who had been in charge of bombing Pearl Harbor. And he became a Christian. And so de Shazah and Fushida eventually came together in a mission and evangelized a city together.

[14:53] And de Shazah eventually planted a church in Nagoya, the very city that he had bombed. It's a great picture of reconciliation. And Esau here is a picture of what it looks like to be forgiven

and accepted by God.

And it's a forgiveness that's undeserved. It's a forgiveness that's in spite of yourself. It's a forgiveness that's radical in its breath and astounding in its depth.

And just notice where Jacob sees this forgiving coming from, this forgiveness coming from. Just look at verse 10 and 11.

If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God now that you have received me favorably.

Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me. He sees forgiveness as coming from God.

[15:59] And what we see is that Jacob trusts God and he obeys God. And he faces his brother on his way to the promised land. And he takes God at his word and he finds forgiveness from God, even when it looked impossible.

And so we, having found forgiveness, we move on to our second point. Jacob says goodbye because trusting God means heading for the promised land. And as overjoyed as the brothers are in their reunion, there is a problem.

I wonder if you might just flip back and glance back and look at chapter 32, verse 3. And the issue there is Esau lives in Seir, in Edom, outside the land of Canaan.

Outside of the land that God has promised Jacob. But Jacob has been called by God to go to the promised land. God said to Jacob, go back to the land, your fathers and relatives, and I will be with you.

So when Esau says in verse 12 of 33, let us be on our way and I will accompany you, there is a question in our mind. Which way is that?

[17:15] Where are they going to go? Are they going to go back to Canaan, the land God had promised Jacob? Or are they going to go back to Seir, the land outside of God's promises?

And for us tonight, it's a bit of dull, ancient geography. But for Moses and his hearers then, this would have been a bit like a pantomime skit that you might give to kids.

Shall we go to Seir? No! Shall we go to Canaan? Yes! You can imagine them shouting as they heard it saying. Will Jacob trust God or will he follow Esau to Seir?

And gratefully we read that Jacob makes his apologies and he tells Esau to carry on with him and that he'll catch up with him. But immediately he goes in the opposite direction.

So in verse 16, So that day Esau started on his way back to Seir. Jacob, however, went to Succoth. And Succoth is just outside the promised land, on the way to the promised land.

[18:29] And the question there is, is Jacob, in speaking to his brother there, is he being deliberately deceptive here? Is he going back to his old tricks?

We're left wondering. And so throughout this reading, there's this undertone of slight distrust between the brothers. Do they accept one another truly?

Do they really forgive one another? Is Jacob merely trying to get not caught out in wanting to go somewhere else here? Is there real forgiveness?

Or is Jacob acting in faith here? Is he trusting God's promises? And that's why he asks to go another way.

For many of us, the temptation might be to not trust God's promises, but rather to follow Esau to Seir.

[19:26] Seir might be where our friends are. It might be the place where good job prospects are. Seir is the place where we can live how we want, watch what we want, date who we want, sleep with whoever we want, say what we want.

And we can live for ourselves there. And it's very comfortable. Otherwise, Esau wouldn't have been there in the first place. But Seir is outside of God's promised land.

So will we follow Esau to Seir, or will we keep trusting God's promises? And that brings us to our third point there.

Jacob buys a plot because trusting God means acting as though God will keep his promises. And in the final verses of our reading, Jacob comes back to the promised land safely.

Just look at verse 18. After Jacob came from Padamaran, he arrived safely at the city of Shechem in Canaan and camped within sight of the city.

[20:34] And it's been a remarkable adventure. But here we see Jacob buying a plot of land in the promised land. God has honored his promises to bring Jacob home.

And the key thing about Jacob is that it hasn't been dependent on whether he's been good or bad. It's been about God's promise that he made him. So in Genesis 28, I'll just read that again for us, that promise.

I will give you and your descendants the land. I am with you. I will watch over you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised.

And Jacob, now called Israel, was a flawed man. But he believes the promises of God. And that faith is belief in action.

So just look what he does in verse 19. For a hundred pieces of silver he bought from the sons of Hamer, the father of Shechem, the plot of ground, where he pitched his tent.

[21 : 38] And having arrived, Jacob did the only sensible thing that he could do in verse 20. He worships God. So verse 20. There he set up an altar and called it El Eloi Israel.

And your Bible might have a little footnote at the bottom where it says that means mighty is the God of Israel. And we've seen that, haven't we?

We've seen God make great, mighty promises and then go on to do them. We've seen God promise to prosper Jacob and then prosper.

And we've seen him promise to bring Jacob safely back to the land and he's done it. We've seen God promise to give Jacob descendants and he has children. We've seen him promise to give him the land.

And here we see Jacob buying a piece of the land. And we've seen God promise to go with him always. And God has. And what we see is the first fruits of those promises being worked out according to God's word.

[22 : 42] So a number of years ago I had the great privilege of going to Cain Canal. Any nods there? No. Does anyone know Cain Canal? Well, so the start of World War II, Operation D-Day, as the Brits were coming through the D-Day operations on the beach, there were some bridges inland that they needed to capture so that the advance could go through.

And the most important of these was the bridge over Cain Canal. And so these gliders came in the night before D-Day on the 5th of June. And they landed there and they launched this assault on the bridge.

And they rushed across the bridge and they rushed into this house. And in the upstairs window of this house there was this young English girl watching these chaps come through.

And you can go to Cain Canal and she is still there in the very first house that was liberated in German occupied land.

And I remember we sat there around the kitchen table sharing tea with her, drinking tea, on the very table where they brought wounded soldiers through and operated on and healed them.

[23 : 54] And that first house that was liberated, she's set up as a shrine to soldiers and military folk. And it's a house that's been liberated with the hope and expectation of better things to come.

And the promises that we've seen given to Jacob are the same promises that we have tonight that are a hope and an expectation for us of better things to come.

So here tonight we have God's presence around his word by his spirit. Here we have all nations being blessed.

There's lots of different people here from all, even South Africans. I've used that joke before. Even Scots and Irish folk. Here we have a church building that we can call a place to worship, which is a picture of our heavenly kingdom where we'll be together worshipping God.

And we have the promise that Jesus will go with us always, even to the end of the age. And there we'll be in the presence of Jesus. And what we've seen in the life of Jacob is that Jacob has been saved, not through anything he has done, but by putting his trust in the Lord.

[25 : 17] See, having met with God and having been forgiven by God, Jacob trusts God to do what he has said. So maybe you're sitting here tonight as someone who knows that you need to meet with God.

But it might be that you're afraid to meet with God because you know that you've said no to God in many ways. You know that you are a sinner and that you need forgiveness.

And you're afraid to ask God for forgiveness. Because you might ask, How do I know that God will really forgive me? How do I know that he won't just use it against me?

Or it might be that you're sitting here tonight as someone who knows that they need to forgive others. And you ask, How do I know that they won't just hurt me again?

And the answer is, Trust God and he will do all that he has promised. Why should I do that? How do I know that? Because he has done it already.

[26 : 24] He has already proved his love and faithfulness to you. You see, when Jesus died on the cross for our sins, He both gives you the forgiveness you need, and he receives the forgiveness you need on your behalf.

He is so big and so loving that he gives the forgiveness you need. And because he gives it to himself, you don't have to wonder, Am I really forgiven?

And he's so big and so loving that he receives the forgiveness that you need for your sins from himself. And so you never have to wonder, Isn't he just going to use this against me?

And so the question for our hearts and from this passage is, Will we trust God in what he has promised? Will we come to him with open hands and ask him, Please, Lord, won't you accept me as I am?

Won't you accept me in the brokenness and mess of my life? Won't you accept me warts and all? Won't you accept me and forgive me and heal me?

[27 : 38] Not because I deserve it, But because Jesus died that I might be forgiven. And Jesus accepted forgiveness on my behalf.

And what will it look like to trust God and what he has promised? And Jesus tells a parable about a man who had two sons. And the one disowns his father.

And he goes to a foreign land. And he lives a debaucherous life. But miraculously, he comes to his senses and he thinks, What am I doing? And so he decides to go home, back to his father, and make amends.

And so he says to himself, I'll sit out, I'll go back to my father, And I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

How would you react if you were that father? But while the son was still a long way off, His father saw him and was filled with compassion for him.

[28 : 41] And he ran to his son and threw his arms around him and kissed him. And his father later said to the elder brother, We had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead but is alive again.

He was lost and he is found. And in Jesus we have been made alive. And in Jesus we have been truly found. Let's pray to close.

So Father, we thank you that in Jesus we find forgiveness. Please give us the strength and the courage to trust that you'll do what you said you'll do this week.

In Jesus' name, Amen.