

Oct 27/24 – Leader’s Guide –

Genesis 28 / 32 “The Means of Our Hearts’ Turning”

Read Genesis 28: 10-22

1. What events in Jacob’s life have brought him to this place?

It may be helpful to read Genesis 25:19 – 28:9 ahead of you meeting for you as a leader to get a sense of the narrative so far, but if time doesn’t permit here are some of the details Tim gave in the sermon that he thought important to give context for all that follows:

The story of Jacob opens with a significant crisis in the preserving of that messianic line – Abraham’s son Issac and his wife Rebecca are unable to have children – after a period of prayerful agony - Rebecca becomes pregnant - twins – in her womb she senses them fighting – and wonders what it all might mean – her wondering turns prayerful and she receives a prophetic word – God speaks to a woman not a man – undermining patriarchy – the prophetic word speaks of two nations in her womb – the elder would serve the younger – undermining the right of primogeniture.

Rebekkah gives birth to the twins – Esau the firstborn – and holding on to his heel is the second born – appearing like he was trying to climb over his brother to get out first – they call him Jacob – meaning –over-reacher – supplanter – trickster – swindler.

Both boys grow up – Genesis tell us that Esau was a man’s man – muscled – outdoorsman – hunter – Jacob - a dweller in tents – more the home economics type – Esau favored by Dad – Jacob favored by Mom

Two instances mark the nature of their sibling relationship.

One day Esau comes in from hunting - famished – Jacob is cooking a stew – just what he needs – can I have some? – Jacob the swindler sees his opportunity – only if you sell me your birthright – let me be treated as first born – what good is my birth right if I’m dying of hunger – he sells it - for a bowl of stew.

Later in their story - their father Isaac is on his death bed – he calls Esau – I’m about to die and want to give you my blessing – a last word of love and affirmation to carry you when I’m no longer here – go hunting - make that amazing game stew I love and I will bless you – Esau grabs his hunting gear and heads out.

Rebekkah's overheard – conspires with Jacob to steal the blessing – your Dad can't see – just go get a goat from the herd - I'll prepare the stew the way he likes it – just disguise yourself as Esau – take his blessing.

The ruse works – the blessing comes to Jacob – but when Esau discovers – he's livid – spewing bloody murder - vowing upon their father's death – to run Jacob through

Jacob flees in search of possible safety with his mother's relatives – and now our text picks up the story

2. What is the meaning of what Jacob sees and hears?

Here is the unedited portion of the sermon that will help reflect on this question:

Jacob is given a vision of a ladder that connects heaven and earth – with angels ascending and descending – which we might imagine as a massive aluminum extension ladder – with rungs large enough to have angels passing one another – but that isn't what Jacob's seeing – he's seeing a ziggurat – a what now?

A ziggurat - a temple – a circular pyramid like structure – with a large circular base – with smaller circles on top creating a staircase of sorts – it's the structure seen in Genesis 11 – that humanity sought to build in babel – in pride saying there is nothing we cannot do – we will build a ziggurat – a staircase to conquer the heavens.

That is what Jacob sees – a ziggurat - but not from earth to heaven – from heaven to earth – it will be God who will join heaven and earth once more – it will be God who will bring about the restoration of all things – it will be God who will descend to us – to meet us right where we are...

As God meets Jacob with incredible lavish grace exactly where he is - in his loneliness – I am with you – in his fragility – I will protect you – in his poverty of place and family – I will give you a land – a family – a future – reaffirming the messianic promise – through your offspring – singular – all the nations of the earth will be blessed – restored to reflect my glory bringing life to all.

3. What does Jacob's response reveal about the state of his heart?

How does Jacob respond? Is he bowled over? – with awe – wonder – gratitude – well yes – there is awe and wonder – but gratitude? No - true to character – the swindler – trickster – supplanter – wants to put as much as he can within his grasp – so he makes a deal with God – if I stay alive – if you give me bread and clothing – if you bring me home eventually – then – and only then – will you be my God – will I respond in gratitude – in worship – you do that for me – then I'll do this for you...

Lavish undeserved unconditional grace – met with conditional wheeling and dealing – his response revealing the true state of his heart – but perhaps that was what was intended all along...

4. How does encountering God's goodness, grace, and love reveal to us who we truly are?

Perhaps it would be helpful to see it this way. We were made to reflect the goodness and glory of God as a mirror to bring life to others. As our lives become oriented toward God, towards his goodness and love, as a mirror gets oriented toward the light we can then see the smudges, the dust, the dirt, that areas of our lives that don't reflect his goodness and glory.

Another way to look at it. Let's say you take up piano and find that you are excelling at it. Others around praise you for it. You pour tons of time and energy into seeing your gift grow. You end up in a school with other players. There is one player that is exceptional and in comparison to them you can see all your mistakes, all your missteps, every area you need to grow in.

When we encounter the goodness and holiness of God we can't help but be undone recognizing who we truly are in the light of his holiness.

Read Genesis 32: 9-12

5. God calls Jacob to return home. As he prepares to meet his brother, the brother who vowed to kill him, he prays. What do we learn about the state of his heart from his prayer? How has grace already done its work?

He is obedient. He returns home at the call of God.

He is humble. I am not worthy of the kindness and faithfulness you have shown me.

He is grateful. You brought me from nothing to something.

He is not making deals, he's leaning into grace – save me!

His life has given evidence that God has been faithful so he trusts God to fulfill the only remaining promise, to bring him home in peace. What he has discovered of God has shaped Jacob in this way...

Read Genesis 32: 22-32

6. How does God meet Jacob? What do you think would be the impact of this encounter on Jacob?

Here is the unedited section of the sermon that relates to this question:

Again – God meets Jacob in a way we would not expect - God jumps him – grapples with him – puts him in a headlock – seeks to overpower him – the play on words in the Hebrew is that God in this moment Jacobed Jacob – utilized the tools of the heel grabber - swindler – the over-reacher – jacobed Jacob - now Jacob has no idea who this is – he and this stranger wrestle all night long – but Jacob has the edge – winning – on the verge of victory – and then the mystery assailant reaches out and touches – and the Hebrew there denotes the lightest possible touch - and Jacob's hip pops – in that moment Jacob realizes - this is no ordinary assailant - this is God...

The stranger revealed - the very nature of the fight changes – now he grapples not to escape his assailant – he grapples so as to not lose hold – bless me – we might expect a reiteration of the promises given – that would be blessing – but no – the Lord asks his name – why would he need his name – he's God – he already knows his name – Jacob - is the response – Jacob is not just an identifier – Jacob is his character – Jacob - his way of being – I am heel grabber – swindler – usurper – over-reacher – manipulator – trickster – there's a lifetime of sin in that name - and he gives it – what's God's response – does he rub his nose in it - yes you are – yes you are – finally admitting it eh? - no – he says – you're not that – you're Israel

Jacob now Israel asks the reciprocal question – what's your name? – by name he means - reveal to me your character your nature - I want to see more of you - to which God responds – why do you ask? – and there blesses him – but we don't hear what the blessing is – why? – because the blessing

*has already come – Jacobs new name reveals who God is – for Israel means
- God protects – God preserves – God rules.*

*Ok Ok – I get the blessing of chapter 28 - God’s lavish fulfilled promises of
presence -protection – future – but this is no blessing – to be wounded –
brought to admit your sin – and all he gets is a new name – common - how
the _____ is this blessing?*

*Perhaps it would be helpful to see it this way – last week I used the picture
of a mirror – that we were made as a mirror to reflect the nature and
character of God bringing life to others – now as our lives become reoriented
toward God – toward his goodness and love – as a mirror gets oriented
toward the light – we then see the smudges – the dust – the dirt – the areas
of our lives that don’t reflect God’s goodness and glory – and it is not our
wounds which often reveal that? – as our sin patterns get played out – and
we find ourselves in a place we never wanted to be – looking behind us to
see a trail of hurt – find ourselves suffering the agony of a broken
relationship – more our fault than we care to admit – or the pain of the
person who in love took the risk to try and bring that thing to our attention
and we turned on them – cut them out and off – or we suffer the same thing
we’ve put others through – as Jacob got Jacobed - is it not those kinds of
wounds that are by God’s loving grace leading us to see ourselves – to name
ourselves – I am Jacob – I am anger – I am jealousy – I am bitterness – I
am resentment – I am unforgiveness - I am control – I am lust – I am self-
centered – I am... - I am...*

*Now I’m not for a moment suggesting that all of our wounds are of this
nature – but likely more than we imagine – and if those wounds are borne of
God – they are borne of love – for our sake – others sake - intended to draw
us close – to repent - to let those things go – that with open hands we might
receive more of who God is – more of his love – more of his grace – more of
his mercy – and finding identity in him – behold his nature and character
that we would reflect that out into the world to bring life...*

*The sun rises on a new day – rises on a new man – Jacob limps away from
his encounter – the wound - a blessing – the man Jacob who has lived
crooked most of his life now literally walks crooked – but maybe for the first
time he’s walking straight – each step reminds Jacob of who he is – not
Jacob - Israel - each step reminds him of who he’s encountered – each step
a fresh reminder to return to grace*

Read Genesis 33:1-5

7. How does Jacob's encounter with God get reflected in this reunion with Esau? To what impact?

Esau abandons his plan in favor of a new one. He'd intended to meet Esau last using his family as human shields. He now meets Esau first. In the pattern of seven successive waves of gifts, he comes with seven successive waves of contrition. He bows low with deep humility and repentance. He had admitted who he was before the living God and was met with lavish love and forgiveness. What does he now have to fear in admitting this to his brother?

Impact? Esau runs, throwing his arms around him. They linger, weeping in embrace. Jacob's encounter with the living God has now been reflected outward bringing life and wholeness.

Read John 1:43-51

8. What do we learn about Jesus in his linking himself with Jacob's dream?

Jesus is saying I am the ziggurat (the ladder) in Jacob's dream. I am the one who will bring heaven and earth together once more. I am the one who will make all things new. In me humanity will be restored to its vocation – reflecting the nature and character of God to bring life to all.

9. In the sermon Tim reflected that God's dealings with Jacob reveal to us the means by which our hearts are turned toward God that we might reflect his goodness and glory bringing life. A restoration of what we were created for – a covenant of vocation. What have you learned about the means of God's turning our hearts? Where does it invite you to press in?

I think most of what you will need to guide your group through this question has already been given but in summary.

Encountering the goodness and glory of God leads us to see ourselves as we are. To behold the areas of our life that do not reflect his nature and character. As a mirror turned to the light we can see the smudges, the dirt, the dust.

Our Lord at times lovingly "wounds" us so that we might see our sin, admit who we are, and come before him with our hands open that we might

receive more of his love, more of his grace more of his mercy, and finding a new identity in him we might reflect that out into the world bringing life.

As a leader perhaps reflect on where you have seen overlap with your own spiritual journey...

Or...

Where getting this perspective invites you to see things differently, to respond in a different way.