


Messy Life:
The Story of Jacob
Part 12
Jacob Returns Home

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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A publication of  the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

Observation—*What do I see?*

- Jacob experienced a situation that we describe as **"out of the frying pan, and into the fire!"**
Review Genesis 31:22-23 and 32:3 and 6.
No sooner had Jacob escaped from angry Uncle Laban and "some kinsmen" than he encountered the brother he'd betrayed, Esau, and "four hundred men"! What was Jacob's state of mind (see Genesis 32:7a)?



Look up "distress" at Dictionary.com. What do you learn?

Which of the following statements describe God's relationship to these difficulties?

- ☐ God was unaware of them. ☐ God allowed them, but as unable/unwilling to prevent them.
- ☐ God actually planned them—but out of spite. ☐ God planned them for Jacob's edification.

What Scriptural basis do you have to support your opinion?

Interpretation—*What does it mean?*

- What all had God promised Jacob way back in Genesis 28:10–16 as he left his homeland?

Now, as he returns to his homeland, has God rescinded his promises (see Genesis 31:3)?

How do God's promises to Jacob relate to these distressing situations into which God placed him?

Application—*What do I do with this?*

- Read Romans 8:35–39. What does God promise us in the midst of distressing circumstances?

What sorts of values appear to drive God's definition of "loving treatment" towards us?

- What decision, what course of action, are you wrestling with right now? Where do you need wisdom?
 - ☐ Does your proposed course of action reflect prudence—the way faith should act?
 - ☐ Or does it reveal self-reliance, the inclination to lean on our own savvy and ingenuity?
 - ☐ Or worse still, does it reflect envy or revenge?

Sermon Summary Genesis 32:1-21

Last week we saw that God gave Jacob a directive to go back to his homeland and Jacob obeyed. But Jacob leaves one conflict only to run into another. Remember, Jacob is going back home. That's where Esau lives—the brother he swindled out of his birthright, the one who threatened to murder him. This is his worst nightmare! Even though God is the one who commanded Jacob to return home, he is still afraid. You can be doing God's will and still face a lot of trouble (Gen.32:1-2). Clearly, this encounter with the angels was a supernatural event, where for a moment in time the invisible world became visible. Remember the New Testament tells us that we do not wage war against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers of darkness. There are good angels in this world and there are evil angels, called demons. Jacob encountered good angels. Apparently, God opened Jacob's eyes to this invisible world to remind him of His presence and protection (2 Kings 6:16-17).

Now interestingly, Jacob names this spot Mahanaim, which in Hebrew means, "Two camps". I'm assuming Jacob is referring to (1) the camp of Jacob and, (2) the camp of God. So, Jacob has this reassuring vision from God and immediately sends a message to his estranged brother, Esau, whom he has not seen in 20 years. After tricking Esau out of his birthright, Jacob is not convinced that Esau's anger has subsided. He is taking no chances. Jacob sends messengers with instructions ahead of him. As you hear his instructions, remember that the family inheritance is now legally his. He is the head of the family now. By virtue of the birthright being Jacob's, Esau is subservient to him. But as you will see, he is not addressing his brother that way. He is doing just the opposite (vv.4-5). Through his messengers, Jacob is trying to convey several things to his brother. First, he is saying, "I want you to know that since we saw each other last, I've not been in hiding. Second, and perhaps more importantly, he seems to be saying, "I've not come to lay claim to inheritance rights."

The messengers brought back this response (v.6) and Jacob was then very afraid (vv.7-8). Jacob is trying to think strategically. He is trying to minimize his losses should Esau attack. This fear of attack moves Jacob to prayer. This is a great prayer—a model prayer really (vv.9-12). From this prayer we learn several things about how we should pray: **First, we begin by calling on God's name.** What becomes clear is that Jacob's God has a "history," a past in which he has proven himself to be faithful to Jacob's forbearers, way before he ever came along. And that is true for us too! **Second, we plead God's promises back to him.** When we face difficulties and trouble, we too should take God's promises and turn them into prayer. What might that look like for us? In a world that denies God and mocks God's people, we might pray some of these verses: Psalm 46:1–2, 10-11; 1 Peter 5:10; 2 Cor. 12:9. Are you full of worry and anxiety? Pray back to God the promises of Philippians 4:6-7. Are you worried about food, shelter and clothing? Plead God's promises in Matthew 6:31-34. Do you ever wonder about your final salvation? Remind yourself of God's promise in John chapter 6:39-40. **Third, when it comes to prayer, acknowledge God's goodness and your unworthiness.** Gratitude should find its place even in times of crisis. Over the years I have heard distressed Christians do this many times. I visit or counsel them in their current trouble, and while pouring out their heart to me and to God, they pause and give testimony to God's past and ongoing faithfulness. I can't think of anything more encouraging than hearing this kind of testimony come tumbling out unsolicited.

Often times we face a challenge and we pray - and then we follow up that prayer with some kind of action (vv.13-21). Jacob acts by sending a gift of livestock to Esau, one group after another. He is not just sending one present, but multiple presents. Jacob is shrewd and he figures this is an excellent strategy to appease Esau's anger. Just as the sacrifice of Christ was designed to propitiate or satisfy or appease God's anger, so Jacob's gifts were designed to appease Esau's anger. We all know that Jacob is shrewd. Were Jacob's actions an expression of faith, or did they demonstrate a lack of faith?

How are we to sort all of this out? We do need to use Jacob's case as a test case for highlighting our need for discernment. As we face our own dilemmas, we must ask ourselves if our proposed response expresses faith or contradicts faith. What decision, what course of action, are you wrestling with right now? Where do you need wisdom? Does your proposed course of action reflect prudence—the way faith should act? Or does it reveal self-reliance, the inclination to lean on our own savvy and ingenuity? Or worse still, does it reflect envy or revenge? In any given instance, only God can know for sure. But we should always seek to act in faith (James 1:5).

"Lord, you are the God of our salvation. We look to you for wisdom and guidance. Lead us in your truth, teach us your way. We pray. We know that we are a mess. We are sinners. We ask that you deal with us in compassion and lovingkindness, for that is who you are. That is who you have always been. You alone are good and upright, and wise; Show us how we should respond in any given situation. Oftentimes, we really don't know what we should do. But your word tells us that you give wisdom to the humble. So, give us humble, trusting hearts, so that we can live wisely and deal with others in lovingkindness and truth. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen." (Adapted from Psalm 25.)

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

Many believers have experienced distressing situations, as Jacob did. Psalm 107 gives us great insight into handling distressing situations...

Monday— Study Psalm 107:1-3.

Tuesday— Study Psalm 107:4-9.

Wednesday— Study Psalm 107:10-16.

Thursday— Study Psalm 107:17-22.

Friday— Study Psalm 107:23-32.

Saturday— Study Psalm 107:33-43.

Need blank copies for doing more
"Five Question Bible Study"?
e-mail: Dan.Clement.TCC@gmail.com

Bible Text: _____

Date: _____



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) it is found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would **this text** answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text? [and what was their response?]