Esau and Jacob Reconciled
Gen 33:1-11
SS Lesson for 10/28/2007

Devotional Scripture: Ps 133

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The major outline of the lesson came from Bible Expositor and Illuminator. The lesson examines Reconciliation - and how two long-estranged brothers were reconciled to each other. The study's aim is to show that it takes an act of forgiveness to begin the process of healing and reconciliation. The study's application is to understand and practice making decisions to forgive others and recognize and yield to God to do the actual healing of our broken relationships.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Reconciliation is God’s way. Yet this hard truth accompanies reconciliation attempts: There are no guarantees when we try to repair relationships. Apologies and paybacks may be rejected. But in cases where the humility of the wrongdoer meets the grace of the one wronged, the results are priceless. Tales of wounded pride are all too common. Each of us is familiar with a close relationship that was threatened by an unfortunate conflict caused by one party’s lapse of judgment and another party’s defensive retaliation. Scripture does not teach us that following Jesus means that Christians will live lives free of conflict. It does show us, however, a way to overcome. Matthew 18 and other New Testament passages provide principles and procedures for seeking genuine reconciliation. The Old Testament furnishes stories of success and failure that bring these principles to life. Today we consider one such story. The feud between Jacob and Esau began at an early age. Even in the womb, these boys jockeyed for position. The struggle was so intense that their mother, Rebekah, thought it was necessary to ask God for an explanation. God informed her that two “nations” were in her womb and that the older would serve the younger (Genesis 25:23). This jockeying for position continued at their birth. Although Esau emerged as the firstborn, Jacob was clutching at his heel even as he left the womb. This prenatal rivalry was later compounded by parental favoritism (Genesis 25:27, 28). As the boys grew older, the tension mounted. On one occasion, Jacob manipulated Esau into trading his birthright for stew (Genesis 25:29–34). On another, Jacob and Rebekah tricked Isaac into conferring his fatherly blessing on Jacob instead of Esau (Genesis 27:1–40). This was the breaking point in the brothers’ relationship. Having been tricked twice, Esau planned to kill Jacob after their father passed away (Genesis 27:41). This prompted Jacob to flee northward. His relocation gave Esau the time and space he needed to cool off (Genesis 27:42–45). But the plan took much more time than Jacob had anticipated. Laban, his father-in-law, tricked him into staying twice as long as he had planned. Then Jacob stuck around for several more years to gain enough wealth to head back home. So after 20 years of self-exile (Genesis 31:38), Jacob finally began his perilous journey home. The first obstacle he faced was Laban. The two of them had a falling out, and it took divine intervention to allow Jacob to leave in peace (Genesis 31:29). Then, upon reaching the border of the promised land, Jacob encountered a second obstacle: an angelic messenger who wrestled with him all night (32:22–32). Before leaving, this wrestling angel blessed Jacob by renaming him Israel, which means “one who struggles with God.” Surviving this heavenly opponent prepared Jacob for his most intimidating human foe: a potentially vengeful Esau.

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Sadly, the world in which we live is home to a great many bitter and angry people. More often than not, their bitterness is against former friends and coworkers and even members of their own families. Some have ill feelings because promotions they felt they deserved were given to others. Families are sometimes at odds with one another because they disagree on how an inheritance should have been distributed. The book of James says, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not" (4:1-2). The account of Jacob and Esau has a familiar ring: two family members still at odds after twenty years. Was reconciliation possible? Or was
there going to be a big family blowup, resulting in disastrous consequences for all involved? As we will see, God was working behind the scenes to provide a happy resolution to the long-standing conflict between these brothers. Such outcomes are still possible today! Our lesson this week shows us the transforming results of a redeeming act. Two long-estranged brothers finally met again, and one showed mercy to the other, putting all the bitterness behind them. It only takes one person to start the healing process in a difficult situation. When relationships are healed, there is such joy for everyone who is involved. Today we live in a world where forgiveness is frequently absent and bitterness and resentment prevail. Our rampant divorce rate is a vivid testimony to that. Imagine a different world where we are willing to relinquish control and forgive the other person. There the results will automatically be positive and healing in nature. Our lesson this week deals with forgiveness.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

The Plan (Gen 33:1-3)

1 Now Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and there, Esau was coming, and with him were four hundred men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maidservants.
2 And he put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph last.
3 Then he crossed over before them and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

Expectant Fear (1-2)

Don't fear man who can only destroy the body, fear God who can destroy the body and soul (Matt 10:28)
28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

If God is for us, what man can be against us (Rom 8:31)
31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Courage in the face of fear because through prayer God can make one bold (Acts 4:28-31)
28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. 29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” 31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Courage in the face of fear because God can change anyone (Acts 9:1-6)
9:1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” 5 “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. 6 “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

Courage in the face of fear because of entrusting oneself to God (1 Peter 2:23)
23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.
Resulting Humility (3)

Humility that considers others better than ourselves (Phil 2:3)
3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Humility that comes from being one of God's chosen people (Col 3:12)
12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Humility that should be shown toward all men (Titus 3:2)
2 to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.

Humility that comes from godly wisdom (James 3:13)
13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

The Reunion (Gen 33:4-8)

4 But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.
5 And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, "Who are these with you?" And he said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant."
6 Then the maidservants came near, they and their children, and bowed down.
7 And Leah also came near with her children, and they bowed down. Afterward Joseph and Rachel came near, and they bowed down.
8 Then Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company which I met?" And he said, "These are to find favor in the sight of my lord."

Love (4)

Love that allows the association with all people (Rom 12:16)
16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Love that bears with one another (Eph 4:2)
2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Love that we should be clothed with (Col 3:12-14)
12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Love that leads to inheriting a blessing (1 Peter 3:8-9)
8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. 9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.
Love that seeks the interest of others over self (Phil 2:3-4)

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Love that shows godly wisdom (James 3:13)

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

Family (5-7)

God sees the family as one flesh (Gen 2:23-24)

23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." 24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

God is to be the ultimate head of each family (1 Cor 11:3)

3 Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

When one member of the family is saved, the entire family should be committed to follow (Acts 16:29-34)

30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.

A committed family is a blessing (Ps 128:3-4)

3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table. 4 Thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD.

The family should praise and be committed to each other (Prov 31:27-28)

27 She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. 28 Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:

The family should respect and be obedient to its head (1 Tim 3:4)

4 He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.

The family should seek and be committed to unity (Ps 133:1)

1 How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!
Approval that leads to resolving differences (Matt 18:15-16)

15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'

Approval of a reconciliation reached (Matt 5:23-24)

23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Approval of a judgment reached within the family (1 Cor 6:1-4)

6:1 If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? 2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! 4 Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church!

Approval that slander has not occurred (James 4:11)

11 Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.

The Acceptance (Gen 33:9-11)

9 But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." 10 And Jacob said, "No, please, if I have now found favor in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me. 11 "Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough." And he urged him, and he took it.

Sufficiency (9)

Sufficiency in every situation (Phil 4:10-13)

11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Sufficiency with food and clothing (1 Tim 6:8-9)

8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.

Sufficiency in finances (Heb 13:5)

5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."
Sufficiency in daily needs (Prov 30:7-9)

"Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: 8 Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. 9 Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.

Graciousness (10)

Gracious in caring for family (Ruth 2:8-12)

8 So Boaz said to Ruth, "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. 9 Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled." 10 At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me — a foreigner?" 11 Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband — how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. 12 May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

Gracious in helping others (1 Sam 20:3-4)

3 But David took an oath and said, "Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said to himself, 'Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved.' Yet as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death." 4 Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you."

Gracious in giving (Prov 18:16)

16 A gift opens the way for the giver and ushers him into the presence of the great.

Gracious in giving of oneself (2 Cor 8:1-6)

8:1 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

Agreement (11)

Agreement by sharing possessions (Acts 4:32-35)

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. 34 There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Agreement by materially blessing through contributions (Rom 15:25-27)

26 For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.
Agreement by supplying of needs (2 Cor 9:12-13)

12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. 13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

Agreement by continually being consistent in help (Heb 6:10)

10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Christians can learn valuable lessons from the account of Jacob and Esau. We may find ourselves in the shoes of one or the other at different points, sometimes the offender and sometimes the offended. Our culture encourages us to respond with extremes. At one extreme is inflicting payback. At the other extreme is a kind of quietism, meaning “just try to forget about it and move on with life.” Our Savior, however, does not give us either of those options. He calls us to seek reconciliation actively with those who have offended us (see Matthew 5:23, 24; 18:15; compare 2 Corinthians 5:18–21; Galatians 6:1, 2; Colossians 3:13; and James 5:16). Those of us who share the blame for being estranged from another person must humble ourselves like Jacob. Those of us who have held grudges against someone who has wronged us need to embrace the offending party, like Esau, as we accept genuine confession, forgiving truly as Christ Jesus has forgiven us.

Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Jacob had learned many things during the time he served Laban, working to get his wife Rachel. He had experienced God as well and seemed to have reached a new spiritual level. When faced with meeting his brother, Esau, however, he was filled with fear and showed much weakness. One might wonder how he could have had such a lack of faith at this time, but the flesh is always weak and can rise up at any time. Jacob had dealt treacherously with his brother, Esau. It had been around twenty years since they had seen each other, and at that time Jacob knew that Esau hated him. Now Jacob did not know how Esau would take meeting him again. Once again, instead of trusting God to work out the situation, Jacob resorted to fleshly means. We see that God had changed Esau. Esau was no longer the angry, bitter brother who had been betrayed. Esau was happy to see his brother and was ready to move forward with his life. Esau had been changed from one who was seeking revenge to one who was seeking reconciliation. Jacob was also showing some changes. We see him showing a spirit of humility and generosity toward Esau. This was a sharp contrast to the shrewd dealings with Esau in which Jacob stole the birthright and the blessing of his father. Yet even in showing his humility and generosity, Jacob went too far. Again he tried to use his own resources instead of trusting God. Jacob sent many gifts to win the favor of Esau, and when they met, he put family members between Esau and Joseph and Rachel. God had brought about the change in Esau. This was the result of God fighting for Jacob. Jacob, however, was still not able to simply trust. He just had to use his own resources to try to solve the problem. It is hard at times to simply trust God, especially when we know someone out there could hurt us. Still, it is better to trust God and watch Him work than it is to worry and try to appease the person as Jacob did. No doubt we all have weaknesses that tend to become apparent when we face stressful situations. Jacob reacted with fear when he was not sure how his brother would feel about him. We may resort to fleeing, lying, hiding, and many other negative actions to try to deal with an unpleasant situation that arises in our lives. But just as in Jacob's case, we should trust God to work in that situation. Romans 8:28 says that "all things work together for good" for believers. God has a plan for our lives, and He is working out that plan during our lifetime. When we react with fear and try to accomplish things in our own strength, we make it impossible for God to work miracles in our lives. Jacob did learn to totally trust God. We will learn that as well as we walk by faith and not in our own strength.
Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Even after we have wrestled with God over a situation (Gen. 39:9-12, 24-32), we sometimes fall back on our own makeshift precautions when the time for faith comes (33:1-2)
2. Always be in a hurry to be reconciled to your brother (Gen. 33:3-4; Matt. 5:23-26)
3. Give God the glory for whatever you have (Gen. 33:5-7; Jas. 1:17)
4. A wise man recognizes when he has more than enough and behaves accordingly (Gen. 33:8-9)
5. Accepting a gift is often harder than giving one. Learn to receive graciously (vs. 10-11)

Heart of the Lesson from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Jacob had fled from the presence of Esau after receiving the blessing that belonged to him. Several years later, he wanted to make peace with Esau. Jacob sent a message to his brother, hoping for forgiveness (Gen. 32:3-5). It takes time for some people to forgive. There are others who are never willing to forgive those who have offended them. God is a forgiving God. But if we want His forgiveness, we must forgive others. We should consider the consequences of wrongdoing, which can have long-lasting effects.

Encounter with an enemy (Gen. 33:1-4)

Jacob saw Esau approaching him along with four hundred men. Jacob and Esau had been apart from each other for many years. Jacob took the birthright that had belonged to Esau. Their mother, Rebekah, warned Jacob to leave home because Esau was plotting to kill him. The Lord was with Jacob as He had promised. It is wonderful that God's mercy endures forever. God blessed Esau with a forgiving heart. Forgiveness must occur before reconciliation can occur. Jesus taught His disciples, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matt. 6:14). Jacob's encounter with Esau was amazingly warm and pleasant. Both of them were very emotional. There are four indications of Esau's forgiveness: (1) Esau ran to Jacob. (2) He embraced Jacob. (3) He kissed him. (4) He cried. The bitterness that Esau once had no longer existed. No one wins with bitterness. Bitterness can hurt the person who feels it and the person it is felt against.

Respect for an enemy (Gen. 33:5-7)

Esau inquired about Jacob's children. The Lord had promised that Jacob's descendants would be as the sand of the sea (32:12). This promise had also been made to Abraham and Isaac. It began to be fulfilled with Jacob. He was blessed with eleven sons while he was in Laban's house. Jacob, whose name was changed to "Israel," had children by Rachel, Leah, and their handmaids. The women and their children graciously bowed down in respect to Esau. This action was customarily done before a king.

Gifts for an enemy (Gen. 33:8-10)

Esau noticed the herds of animals sent by Jacob. Jacob's gifts prepared for Esau included two hundred female goats, twenty male goats, two hundred ewes, twenty rams, thirty female camels with their young, forty cows, ten bulls, twenty female donkeys, and ten male donkeys (32:14-15).

Peace with an enemy (Gen. 33:11)

Initially, Esau refused to accept Jacob's gifts, for he had enough of his own possessions. Esau had been blessed and was very prosperous. But Jacob insisted that Esau receive his gifts. He was grateful to God for Esau's graciousness to him. Giving and receiving gifts shows one's willingness to make peace. Since Esau accepted Jacob's gifts, it is safe to assume that Esau was willing to make peace with Jacob. To Jacob, seeing Esau's face was like seeing the face of God. Jacob had wrestled with God. He saw the face of God. Jacob called the place where he had seen the face of God "Peniel" (Gen. 32:30). People cannot change people, but God can change hearts. The Lord can cause your enemy to be at peace with you.