

Grace will lead me home!

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[0 : 0 0] Now we come to our Bible reading, and this evening we're reading from Genesis chapter 33, which is on page 73 of your church Bibles, if you grabbed one on the way in.

Willie Phillip, our senior minister, is continuing his series in the book of Genesis, as we follow along with this great story of Jacob the patriarch. So, Genesis 33, reading the whole chapter.

And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants.

And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. And when Esau lifted up his eyes and saw the women and children, he said, Who are these with you?

[1 : 2 1] Jacob said, The children whom God has graciously given your servant. Then the servants drew near, they and their children, and bowed down. Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down.

And last, Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. Esau said, What do you mean by all this company that I met? Jacob answered, To find favor in the sight of my Lord.

But Esau said, I have enough, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself. Jacob said, No, please. If I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand.

For I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me. Please accept my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.

Thus he urged him, and he took it. Then Esau said, Let us journey on our way, and I will go ahead of you. But Jacob said to him, My Lord knows that the children are frail, and that the nursing flocks and herds are a care to me.

[2 : 3 8] If they are driven hard for one day, all the flocks will die. Let my Lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, at the pace of the livestock that are ahead of me, and at the pace of the children, until I come to my Lord and see her.

So Esau said, Let me leave you with some of the people who are with me. But he said, What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my Lord.

So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house, and made booths for his livestock. Therefore, the name of the place is called Succoth.

And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan Aram, and he camped before the city. And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for a hundred pieces of money the piece of land on which he had pitched his tent.

There he erected an altar and called it El Elohi, Israel. Amen. The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

[3 : 56] Well, do turn with me to Genesis chapter 33. And as you're doing that, by the way, let me remind those of you who are going in the bus to the induction next Saturday, that it leaves from here, I think, at four o'clock, because the induction starts at six.

So you can only get on the bus, I think, if you've booked on the bus. If you haven't and you still want to get on, speak to Robert or Linda Ballingall, and maybe there'll be a place for you, I'm not sure. I wonder what the good people of morning saw you going to make of the Ouija bus arriving to enter up there peaceful Saturday afternoon.

But anyway, we're going in force. Good. Genesis 33. The road home to the Father's house will never, never be the broad path of ease.

Jesus warned us that, didn't he? The way is hard that leads to life. The Apostle Paul, do you remember, sought to encourage and strengthen the churches that he had brought to birth by saying this to them, through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God.

But the wonderful assurance of the gospel is that we can trust God no matter what trials, no matter what tribulations we may face. His grace will lead us home.

[5 : 27] And that is the message that Genesis 33 underlines for us, I think, with very great clarity. It's really the climax of Jacob's personal story.

He returns to the land of promise. He puts all wrongs right. He gains a stake in the land of Canaan. And he sees God's promises made to him some 20 years before at Bethel, that we read of in chapter 28, sees them more than fulfilled.

And yet it's not an end to his struggles and to his battles. Maybe that's at least part of the reason for that strange appearance that we read about last week, that wrestling with God, coming to visit him by the brook Jabbok.

John Calvin says, Jacob was admonished at his very entrance to the promised land that he was not to expect a tranquil life for himself there. And it can never be so, can it?

Because the enmity that there is between the seed of promise and the seed of the serpent began right in Genesis 3. But it doesn't end, does it, to the very end of the Bible, Revelation chapter 20.

[6 : 39] And the unfolding story in the book of Genesis of the people of God shows us that they are continually threatened, both from without and actually also from within, even the family of faith.

And as you read through, you see that history chimes down the generations. Even the structure of the story of Jacob shows that. We gave out a little summary of that a few weeks ago.

I think there are some at the door if you haven't got one to pick it up. But it shows us threats from without, threats from within, recurring through the generations. And these same threats are the ones that will dog the people of God always.

On the one hand, God's people face the threat of annihilation, outright enemy attack. And we saw that several times. But on the other hand, there's the more subtle threat of assimilation.

Assimilation into the culture around, defilement, distraction from their distinctive calling to be the people of God, a people apart, a people holy to the Lord. Now, God protected Isaac, you remember, from assaults from pagan kings, the Philistine kings.

[7 : 52] But Isaac was right to fear that assimilation. And he feared it particularly as coming through intermarriage of his sons with Canaanite women, whom Esau, you remember, had embraced very happily, but much to the sorrow of Isaac and his wife.

And you see, God's people today still face those same twin dangers. Some parts of the world today, some of them known to us, very often where the church is growing greatly, believers are facing great violence.

The church is being assaulted. Churches are being attacked, burnt down. But in our society, where we live in the Western world, the far greater threat in recent years, at least, has been one of assimilation.

The church losing its distinctive witness. The church losing everything that distinguishes it from the world. Becoming friends with the world. A culture that is increasingly against and opposed and hostile to what the Bible stands for.

And yet, so often, the church in our land is just going along with that, becoming indistinguishable from the progressive culture around about us. Well, you see, it's that very threat, the threat of assimilation, that helps to explain this story in front of us tonight.

[9 : 08] And especially what Jacob does from verse 12 onwards, which is often very misunderstood by people. What we're going to see here is the outworking, really, on earth of the heavenly encounter that he had with the Lord in chapter 32.

Jacob knows that God has promised good to him, despite his own sins, despite his family dysfunction, despite all the human fallibility in his life and his family's.

And this chapter shows Jacob laying hold of God's grace and therefore wrestling on in faith, trusting God's grace to the very end of this tough journey back, back to the land of promise.

I think if he had known it, Jacob would have been singing John Newton's hymn as he crossed the Jabbok, as he crossed this Jordan, as he calls it back in chapter 32, verse 10, crossing it to face the approaching Esau with his hundreds of men through many dangers and toils and snares.

I've already come. His grace has brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home. And I think that was the attitude of Jacob's heart here.

[10 : 23] Moses wrote all of this, obviously, for his people, his Israelites, on their journey back to the promised land, to Canaan. He wanted to teach them to sing that same song of faith in God, of trust in God, knowing that their God is the same God of Jacob.

Verse 20 here, El Elohi Israel. El, God Almighty, the God of Israel. That's what Moses wanted his people to know. And the Holy Spirit, of course, has preserved these things in our Bibles for us, because he wants us to know these things.

He wants to give us courage and hope as we today run the race that's marked out for us. So here is a story that tells us that whatever obstacles we meet on this relentless road of tribulation, whatever obstacles we may meet, God's grace will lead his people home.

So let's think of what it teaches us. It's a story about a gracious reconciliation, but also a godly realism that sees a grateful return.

Verses 1 to 11 first describe for us a gracious reconciliation, all in answer to Jacob's covenant prayer that we saw last time. And verse 1, of course, brings Jacob immediately back down to earth.

[11 : 43] He had that extraordinary experience with the angel of God. But that was no escape from reality, was it? Because here's Esau coming with 400 armed men. And, you know, it can be tempting, can't it, after a great exalted spiritual experience.

And what could be more exalted than wrestling with God himself? To think that perhaps we're somehow now going to live on a different plane.

What could be more extraordinary than to experience God in that way? And sometimes Christians think that, don't we? We think, well, we've had a marvelous experience of God.

Everything's going to be completely different from now on. But that's not the way it is in the Bible. Certainly not here. And it's not the way for us either, is it? Monday morning follows straight on after the high of a Sunday evening, as we're all gathered here tonight.

And none of Jacob's immediate problems have disappeared from his life, have we? Even after that wonderful blessing of God upon him. And nor will your problems or mine suddenly disappear from our life, no matter what marvelous spiritual experiences of the Lord we might have, and what blessings we might receive.

[12 : 58] So the question here for Jacob, you see, is, will his encounter with God translate into real trust, real faith in practice, in the cold light of day, when an army's approaching?

Actually, that's the question that faces all of us every Sunday night. How is it going to be in the cold light of day tomorrow morning, when the alarm goes, and you're off to face everything that you'll face tomorrow? Well, here, the answer to that question for Jacob is yes.

And verses 1 to 11 show that Jacob realizes that this encounter with Esau is the earthly counterpart of his vision with God. And his attitude of genuine penitence and faith in God is seen here in a very tangible way, in his genuinely repentant attitude towards Esau, in his desire to seek restitution for his past wrongs.

You see, what this is showing us is that real change, real repentance is always visible. It's always tangible. That's how you know it's real.

Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. That's what John the Baptist said, wasn't it? To those pious frauds of the Pharisees who used all the evangelical language, but were rotten.

[14 : 17] How different, a little further on in the gospel, is Zacchaeus, who we're told restored fourfold, four times everything that he had defrauded from people.

That's tangible repentance, isn't it? You can put that in your pocket. And Jesus' verdict of Zacchaeus was clear. Today salvation has come to this house. It's so obvious the man has changed.

And verses 1 to 7 here, you see, describe exactly that, a genuine approach, seeking honorable restitution of wrongs. Interestingly, there's no mention any longer of Jacob fearing the approach of these men.

He feared, back in 32, verse 7, I suspect his pulse probably was racing. Yours would be. I'm sure mine would be. And he didn't throw caution to the wind. Look at verse 2. He divided the company, as he said he was planning to do previously.

He put his dearest ones, notice, Rachel and Joseph, furthest from harm's way, right at the back. And of course, some were very quick to criticize Jacob for that.

[15 : 20] Favoritism. Well, maybe. But I suppose someone had to be at the back, didn't they? And it's hardly surprising he did it this way. Joseph obviously was the youngest of his children.

And we know anyway, don't we, that this isn't a perfect family. We know Jacob is not perfect. We know that his favoritism, which was a family trait, going back to the previous generation, it was certainly unhelpful.

Certainly sowed seeds of resentment that we will see, actually, bearing bitter fruit in the next chapter. And much later on, of course, in the story of Joseph. Yes, we know that's not a perfect family.

So yes, Jacob is Israel. He's a new man. But he's also still the same Jacob, isn't he? Until his dying day. Just like every other justified sinner.

We're all going to go to the grave, aren't we? Warts and all. Jacob is simul justus et peccator. He's at the same time justified and a sinner, to use the famous phrase of Martin Luther, the reformer.

[16 : 24] And that's a salutary thing, isn't it, for all of us to come to terms with. That our conversion to the Lord Jesus, however wonderful it is, and it is a wonderful experience of God's grace, it's not going to wash away completely our sinful nature in this life.

The flesh. That's what Paul was talking about in Ephesians and Edward was preaching about this morning. That's why until that great day of resurrection, when at last we will receive a new, sinless body, when we're clothed with righteousness, until then, it's going to be a battle, isn't it?

Until that very day, we're going to be just like Paul, crying out, O wretched man that I am. So yes, Jacob is not flawless. And yet, here's the thing, the wonder of God's grace to his own is, well, as John Calvin puts it so beautifully, many faults and corruptions steal in upon us, but God deals kindly with us and does not impute faults of this kind to us.

Aren't you glad that God is much kinder at looking at our faults than most others are? So let's not be too hard on Jacob.

Look at verse 3. He is leading his people here, isn't he? He's out front. He's showing real courage. And also, he's showing genuine humility, genuine penitence.

[17 : 51] He's buying low himself before Esau seven times. And then later on in verse 6, he causes all his family likewise to bow before them. And that's another evidence, isn't it, of a genuine work of grace in this man's life.

He's changed. And you see, when a man like Jacob knows that he has God's true blessing, well, he's willing to sacrifice all his pride.

That he's willing to sacrifice all his possessions in order to have here what matters most, restored relationships with those with whom those relationships are broken down because of wrongs and hurts in the past.

Isn't that a precious thing? And verse 4, it records the wonderful response that he gets to his plea. Esau ran to meet him, and he fell on him, not to kill him as he'd been worrying, but to kiss him and to weep with him.

It's an embrace, isn't it, of genuine warmth. And it is, I think, a truly gracious acceptance on Esau's part. I can't read verse 4 here without thinking about Luke chapter 15, and the father's welcome of the prodigal son, running out to meet him and falling on his neck and weeping.

[19 : 08] I wonder if Jesus had this picture in his mind when he told that story. But at any rate, it's a testimony, isn't it, to God's wonderful grace, answering the prayer that he had made in the previous chapter to God.

Save me from Esau, is what he prayed. And yet God had given him far more than just saving him. God gave him exceedingly abundantly more than he could have imagined was possible, don't you think?

But that's our God. Read Ephesians 3, verse 20. And that's a reminder to us, isn't it, that God holds every human heart in his hands.

God has the power to change hearts, to change attitudes, even in people who seem to be outright enemies of his people, people who may fear very greatly. And sometimes we need that reminder, don't we, to encourage our prayers and to alleviate our fears.

So the brothers here, verse 5 onwards, catch up on lost years. And Jacob introduces his family in answer to Esau's question. And he affirms that all these flocks that he'd met on his way are indeed a gift from Jacob to Esau.

[20 : 17] And he presses them on him, despite Esau's protests. And notice, by the way, notice how tactful, how sensitive Jacob's words are to Esau. He's clear and he's very plain, isn't he, in testifying to Esau where all this family, where all this wealth has come from.

These are the children, verse 5, God has graciously given me. And verse 11, this is the wealth God has graciously given me.

Do you see? And interestingly also, he doesn't use what would have been the more normal term, saying, oh, God has blessed me with all of these things. It's quite tactful, isn't he? He's avoiding that word of blessing.

That would have been a very contentious issue, hadn't it, all those years before. He does use it once, in verse 11, if you notice, where he calls the gifts that he's giving to Esau, my blessing. And I think he's saying to Esau, Esau, here I want to restore the very things, the possessions, that you think I stole from you.

I want to put things right between us. You can have it all. You see, when the gospel really touches somebody's wallet, when the gospel really touches a man's ego, that's when you know it's taken root deep in his heart, isn't it?

[21 : 38] It's bearing fruit in keeping with real repentance. And so it was here, bearing fruit in this gracious reconciliation, which was the work of God.

In fact, both men really acknowledge that. Verse 10, you see, Jacob says, in seeing Esau's face, it's like seeing God's face. What he's saying is, he's face to face with a wonder of God's providence at work in answer to his prayers.

And it's instructive, I think, isn't it, to see how differently God works in delivering his people from enemies. In the previous couple of chapters, we saw that God brought reconciliation between Jacob and Laban by force.

He humbled Laban. He showed Laban he had absolutely no option but to seek a pact with Jacob. But you see how different it is here. He brings reconciliation with Esau by humbling Jacob.

and allowing the fruit of that humbling grace in his life to soften the heart of his hostile brother. You see? And when God works in a former way, well, he's reminding us, isn't he, of his majestic power.

[22 : 51] He can do anything. And when he does it that latter way, he's also showing us his great power, but he's showing us an even more mighty power that makes itself perfect in weakness.

And we don't demean ourselves, do we, of that kind of humility? Especially when we have been the one who's in the wrong. When God humbles us and through that affects a reconciliation, that's a powerful thing.

The Christian should never be afraid to be stripped of the rags of his self-esteem for underneath are the garments of Christ, says William Still.

And that's so, isn't it? And I think here Jacob is prefiguring in a way the true Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ, who humbled himself to bring about reconciliation with enemies.

Not because of his own sin, of course, but to take the place of his sinful people, humbling himself to bring reconciliation to people like you and me. And there's surely also an important reminder for the church because the world finds it very, very difficult to understand that kind of power.

[24 : 09] The world finds it impossible to understand grace at work. And John Calvin suggests that the Spirit's reminding us here of how the church looks in the eyes of the world.

You see, just exactly as Jacob's company must have looked in the eyes of all these hundreds of warriors belonging to Esau, a feeble, contemptible, rather humiliated bunch of people.

Here's Jacob, supposedly the blessed of God, but he's groveling on the ground in front of mighty Esau. He's looking very much the inferior party. He's looking like the loser.

He's enfeebled. His people are needing his protection. I'll leave you an escort, he says, because clearly they're unable to protect themselves.

And you see, just as in Jacob's day and just as in John Calvin's day, so it is in our day. Calvin puts it this way, the glory of the church being covered by a sword and veil is often an object of derision in the world.

[25 : 08] But of course, you see, the reality is so very different to those who can see, who have got the eyes of faith, who can see beyond the veil, and who can see what the world will never be able to grasp, the power of Christ made perfect in weakness.

And that brings us, you see, to verses 12 to 17 because despite this very genuine, this real and gracious reconciliation, there can never be a joining of these men and their families.

Reconciliation is one thing, but living back together side by side as one great family, no, that's quite, quite different. And Jacob knows that. And that's why these verses, 12 to 17, spell out Jacob's polite decline of Esau's offer to go along with him and tell us of a permanent disengagement that's unavoidable as they go their separate ways.

And again, Jacob's often criticized here because of what he says, because of what he does. But again, that misunderstands the text. It imports a totally unwarranted moralism into these verses.

What the text portrays for us here in verses 12 to 17 is just a godly realism. A godly realism in acknowledgement of God's clear covenant purpose for Jacob's family.

[26 : 35] In verse 12, Esau is saying, in effect, great, that's wonderful. Let bygones be bygones and let's all get back together. We'll all go back together and I'll lead the way to Seir, where I live, where I've made my home, where I've made my mark.

And by the way, where I've accomplished plenty, all on my own, not with God. Notice Jacob Jacob is the one who refers repeatedly to God, giving him everything he's got.

No mention of God with Esau. I've got enough is all he says. And you see, what this is telling us and what Jacob knows is that at heart Esau hasn't really changed.

That doesn't mean he's not genuinely gracious. It doesn't mean he's not forgiving to Jacob any more than it means that only Christian people are decent people and no other people can behave nobly.

That's ridiculous to say that. Of course that's not true. We know only too well, don't we? That there are good and wonderful people of all religions and of no religion. But that's a very, very different thing from thinking, oh well, they must be believers.

[27 : 42] They must be children of God. No. The Bible's verdict on Esau is very, very clear in Hebrews 12. He was a profane man. What this story has shown us thus far is that he's a man without any care of God and without any care for God's covenants, just not in his mind.

And so what that means is that Jacob and Esau, though natural brothers, are just not spiritually compatible. You just can't be naive about that, can we?

Jacob clearly isn't. That's why he politely declines Esau's offer here. And that's what verses 13 to 15 are describing. It's a polite decline. And ostensibly, well, yes, Jacob gives the reason that, you know, his family and his flocks are too slow and so on.

And that's all true. Esau's a warrior. He's got an army. Yeah, they wouldn't tolerate the feeble pace of all these women and children and animals and so on. But what Jacob's doing is he's just, he's just trying to turn down Esau's offer gently and without offending him.

You go on, he says. We'll, we'll come along sometime later. That's what he's saying in verse 14. Okay, says Esau, no problem. I'll leave you an escort. No, no, no, no, says Jacob. Don't worry. It's not, not needed.

[28 : 56] Let me find favor in the eyes of my Lord. Now, does he just say, no, Esau, it's fine. It's fine. You go on. It's a tactful request to be able to disengage, not to go with Esau.

And I think both these men knew that perfectly well. It's a bit like, we know that, don't we? It's a bit like when somebody asks you to do something you don't want to do, but you don't want to sound ungrateful.

You don't want to offend them. You don't want to seem churlish. So you, you, you find a way of politely turning them down. So maybe you're off on holiday somewhere and on your first day you bump into someone in the same resort that you know, but you don't really want to find there.

And they say, oh, isn't this wonderful? We must have a meal together. Join us tonight for a meal. And you say, oh, oh, that's so kind of you. But, oh, we've got something on tonight.

We haven't, we can't, sorry, very kind of you. Well, what about tomorrow night then? And so you say, oh, no, no, no, not tomorrow. Maybe later. Maybe later in the week. I'm sure we'll bump into each other sometime, won't we?

[30 : 00] By which everybody knows what we're saying is, thanks, but no thanks. And that's what's going on here. There's no deception going on here. When there's deception, the writer's perfectly able to tell us that.

He told us that back in chapter 31, verse 20, where we're told Jacob deceived Laban. We'll see it again in chapter 34, where we're told Jacob's sons acted deceitfully. The writer can tell us when there's deception going on.

He doesn't read the text wouldn't he like that? He just sensed the idiom. Both these men understood that this was a clearly implied decline to join forces again and live together.

And they parted on good terms. And verses 16 and 17 describe what was a permanent disengagement. It was a parting of the ways. And I think they certainly both understood, but if Esau didn't understand, Jacob certainly did.

He knew that he couldn't live at one with Laban, the Aramean, the pagan, but he also knew he couldn't live with Esau, even though Esau was born within the household of faith because he cared nothing for the covenant.

[31 : 11] He cared nothing for the God of the covenant. And so they went their separate ways. Esau away from Canaan.

Jacob back towards the promised land. Esau went back to his life in Seir, outside, outside the promised land because he was far more at home there than among the people of the covenant.

and so as Bruce Walkie puts it, except for the brief mention of burying his father in chapter 35, the man who despised his birthright steps off the pages of salvation history.

The visionless man has no part in the eternal kingdom of God. And so you see, Jacob is simply showing godly realism. He's right, of course, to seek reconciliation with his brother, but he's right also not to be sentimental, not to try and pretend that because they're reconciled, well, they can all be together and be at one spiritually.

Just because Esau turns out to be a much more decent bloke than he feared doesn't make him a sharer in the gospel with him. And the reality is that their lives are going in polar opposite directions.

[32 : 31] And so they can't possibly be yoked together, can they? And the Bible teaches us that as well as being soft-hearted as Christians towards others, we've also got to be hard-headed, especially when matters of the kingdom of God are at stake.

Jesus says, yes, you have to be as innocent as doves in the world, but also, at the same time, as wise, as shrewd as serpents. And so you can be faithfully shrewd and prudent as Jacob was here.

It's not scheming malevolence that he exhibits in not going along with Esau. It is shrewd maturity that's come from his real faith and from his commitment to obedience to the call of God.

And he faced a real danger in a wrong partnership, a diversion that would have taken him right out again of the promised land before he'd even got back into it. But he resisted it, and he resisted rightly.

Now Moses is writing these things for his Israelite generation, and he constantly likewise warned the Israelites, didn't he, not to get entangled with the pagan Canaanites, not to get into partnerships with the world that would lead them out of their land, that would lead them away from the God of Israel in faithfulness to him.

[33 : 54] And that's still a constant threat, isn't it, to believers, as it's been all through the ages. We know that today. It happens all the time. Sometimes it's exactly like this.

It's a relationship from the past that resurfaces and can so easily derail our faith. Maybe it's an old friend, somebody in your life you've not seen for years and years and years, not since a long time before you became a Christian.

They come back into your life. Oh, it's wonderful to see you again. Let's go out for a drink. Let's take up where we left off. But you see, you discover, don't you, that you've changed.

You're different. You don't speak the same language anymore, not at all, just like Jacob and Esau. One of them's full of talk about God and all he's done and the other one's just nothing of the kind.

And there's a very great temptation, isn't there, to fall back into those old ways. It could be that you've come from another country, another culture here to Glasgow, perhaps to study or to work.

[34 : 56] Maybe where your people are Buddhists or Hindus or Muslims or atheists, whatever it is, but you go back to your household and your own family and they don't understand at all your faith.

They don't understand your God. Very great pressure, isn't there, to forget all of that and just come back and be enveloped in the bosom of the family once again, back to the old ways.

It happens very often in the summertime where the young people go off to a camp perhaps and they've been thrilled with the message of the gospel. They've come to Christ for the first time or maybe they just made a renewed commitment to the Lord Jesus.

Then they, of course, come back to school or college and your friends are going to be a great pull, aren't they? Oh, forget all that stuff. Come on, come back with us, join in with us. That stuff's not important.

You see, so very many times that choice will come before us in our lives, won't it? And the choice is, it's got to be Canaan or it's your kin.

[35 : 55] It's the kingdom of God or it's friendship with the world. Do you remember what Jesus said? Hard words. Unless you hate mother and father, wife, children, brothers and sisters, yes, even your own life, you can't be my disciple.

You can't be my disciple. Of course, he doesn't mean hate in terms of being malicious. Of course not. But just in the terms that Jacob had to take seriously here, being realistic that you cannot be joined at the deepest level with those who will drag you away from the kingdom of God.

God. It's just godly realism, isn't it? Paul said the same thing many times. You can't be unequally yoked with those who don't share your faith and your love for the Lord.

You can't be. And sometimes those painful choices just cannot be avoided. To decline and to disengage from certain relationships is what God demands sometimes on the road to heaven.

That may be a personal relationship. It may be a business relationship. A career. Maybe a hobby. Sometimes it's a vice, but sometimes it's even a virtue.

[37 : 22] And yet it's one that would distract you from the call of God on your life as a follower of Jesus, as a disciple living before all things for Him. Nothing wrong with being a fisherman, is there?

But Jesus said to James and John, leave your nets and come and follow me. There's nothing wrong with wealth, is there? When God gives it to you, God had given it to Jacob. But there was one rich young man for whom a refusal to leave all of that caused him to be written out of the story of the kingdom of God.

So verse 16 here, Esau went on his way, but Jacob declined, disengaged. And verse 17 tells us that he turned west, not south, and he journeyed instead to Succoth, which is on the road to Canaan.

He stayed on that road. And so at last, verses 18 to 20 tell us of a grateful return, according to God's covenant promise. Verse 18, Jacob came safely, or the footnote says peacefully, to Shechem.

I think it might be better translated, Jacob came to Salem, the city of Shechem. Salem being the name of the city of this Hittite ruler, Shechem. But either way, it's a clear play on that word Salem, peace.

[38 : 47] Because back in Bethel, 20 years ago, God had promised to bring Jacob back to the land in peace. He promised to watch over him all the way, to bring him all the way back.

And Jacob had vowed, do you remember, that if God brought him again to his father's house in peace, then the Lord will be my God. And my life will be in your service.

And here he is, back in peace in the land of Canaan, at Shechem. Where, do you remember, Abraham first came when he came into the land in Genesis chapter 12. And where the Lord appeared wonderfully to him.

And now you see also in verse 19, Jacob stakes his claim on this land in faith, just as his grandfather Abraham had done. He buys a portion of land for money, just as Abraham had done.

We don't know the value of the coins, but I think what it means is a very sizable amount. And yet again, Jacob's willing to part with mere money. Earthly treasurer is as of nothing.

[39 : 49] If he can invest in God's covenant inheritance of faith, the promise. It's what Jesus called laying up treasures in heaven. Do you remember? Where moth and rust can't destroy, where treasure won't be stolen.

Because where your treasure is, he says, there your heart will be also. And this tells us, doesn't it, that Jacob's heart was in the land of promise. He was so grateful to be back there.

Money, any amount of money meant absolutely nothing to him. And it's wonderful, isn't it, when we see Christians like that, whose gratitude to God overflows, so that they just love, love to invest, not in themselves, but in the eternal kingdom, and in the people of the kingdom, because that's where their treasure really is.

And you see, verse 20, it's not just a private thing, is it? Jacob erects an altar as a public witness, just as Abraham had done with his altar at Shechem when he journeyed into the land.

And here he fulfills the vow that he made at Bethel. It's true, he hasn't yet reached his journey's end, he's still got to get back to Bethel and his father's house, but he has come again to his homeland in peace, as promised.

[41 : 05] And so he proclaims publicly, not just to all his own company, but to the people of Shechem, everybody around him in the pagan world, that God has done what he promised me, that my God, the great God, El, God Almighty, is the God of Israel, my God.

Not just the God of my father, but my God. It's like when a young person grows up in a Christian home and finally they say that too, don't they?

Yes, God is my God, not just my parents, God, but mine, mine. The Lord, the God of Abraham and Isaac, is now his God and he proved true to his word.

God had done everything, everything that he promised Jacob all those years ago and he had blessed him abundantly and Jacob's heart was full of thankfulness. That's why he's doing this.

Full of thankfulness to him who had walked beside, who had flooded his weaknesses with strength and caused his fears to fly, whose every promise was enough for every step that he had taken, sustaining him with arms of love and crowning him with grace, just as we sang a little earlier.

[42 : 16] Despite all the mistakes, despite all the mess-ups, despite all the sin, despite all the backward steps, Jacob came to the place of peace in the promised land, in the kingdom of God.

Not that his strife is over yet. In fact, the irony is that this place, Selahim, peace, is going to turn out to be a place of very bitter strife in the very next chapter.

And nor is Jacob's sin conquered yet. Far from it. Again, he's still a flawed man and his own sin from the past, but also the future and the consequences of that are still going to bring an awful lot of heartbreak to his earthly life.

Now, a tranquil life, as John Calvin said, did not lie ahead of him. You might long for that. We all long for that, don't we? Especially when we've come through a great spiritual battle.

Oh, a time of peace. Now, there was much trouble still to come, but on that day, he knew. He knew that God's grace had brought him safely thus far.

[43 : 25] And he rejoiced in it and he proclaimed it publicly to everyone. And that's why Moses wrote this, you see, he wanted his Israelite hearers to see that and rejoice too.

And he wants us to see that and rejoice and have faith that our God, the God whose grace has triumphed in Jacob's life and will always triumph in all his people's life, despite endless amounts of folly and frailty and sin and shame, which is all too present in Jacob, just as it's all too present in your life and mine, that he will always bring to completion what he has begun to do for his people and in his people and through his people.

Aren't you glad that God wants you to know that? I'm certainly glad he wants me to know that. None of these great patriarchs we read about in Scripture, none of them were anything other than flawed men.

Every one of them swerved at times from the way of godliness. But God's Spirit held them so that whatever their weaknesses, they were kept on that road to salvation.

And so you see, says the Lord Jesus Christ, the great shepherd, no one will ever snatch any of my sheep out of my Father's hand.

[44 : 52] not until I have led them safely home. So friends, whatever unknowns lie in the future for any of us personally in the life of faith, for us as a congregation, as a company of Israelites, as we are on the road to glory, the glory of God's kingdom.

Whatever lies in the future and whatever might lie buried in our past, we can say what Jacob says in verse 20, that God, this God, is our God whose grace has brought us safe thus far.

Then according to his unbreakable covenant promise, his grace will lead us home. His grace will lead you home, my brother and my sister.

Because it truly is amazing grace indeed. Let's pray. Amazing grace. The Lord has promised good to us and his word our hope does secure.

He will our shield and our portion be as long as life endures. How we thank you, Lord, for the amazing grace that is ours just as it was Jacob's through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[46 : 13] Amen.