

43. Grace will lead me Home! (2007)

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[0 : 00] Last week, you'll remember if you were here, we had that extraordinary chapter when Jacob, in preparing to meet his apparently hostile brother Esau, is encountered in the dark by another very apparently hostile man who wrestles with him.

But it turns out, of course, this is God himself in the presence of the angel of the Lord, wrestling with Jacob and ultimately not harming him, but blessing him.

So then we read in chapter 33 of Genesis verse 1, Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and 400 men with him.

So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants. They 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.

[1 : 11] And when Esau lifted up his eyes and saw the women and children, he said, Who are these with you? Jacob said, The children whom God has graciously given your servant.

And the servants drew near, they and their children, and bowed down. Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down. At last, Joseph and Rachel drew near and they bowed down. Esau said, What do you mean by all this company that I met? That's all the flocks, remember, that he'd sent on in advance as a present. Jacob answered, I mean 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 find 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.

[2 : 14] And because I have enough. And thus he urged him. And he took it. Then Esau said, Let us journey on our way. Together, he meant. I'll 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. If they're driven hard for one day, all the flocks will die.

Let my Lord pass on ahead of his servant. And I'll 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 in Seir.

So Esau said, Let me leave you 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.

[3 : 13] Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth. And Jacob came safely or peacefully in peace 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 pitched his tent.

And there he erected an altar. And called it El Elohi Israel. Which means God. The God of Israel. Amen. And may God bless to us this his word. Would you turn with me to Genesis chapter 33 page 27.

If you have one of our visitors Bibles. Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

[4 : 25] That was the message we're told of encouragement. And strengthening. That the apostle Paul took back to all the churches that he had founded.

During those marvelous revival days of his first ministry journey. You can read about it in Acts chapter 13 and 14. Through many tribulations.

We must enter the kingdom of heaven. The road home to the father's house has never been the broad path of ease. The gate is narrow.

And the way is hard that leads to life. Said the Lord Jesus in Matthew 7. And so it has been from the very beginning of the story of faith. And so friends it will be to the end.

But the wonderful assurance of the biblical gospel. Is that it tells us again and again that grace will lead us home. And so we can trust God utterly.

[5 : 27] No matter what the tribulations and trials. And that's surely what this chapter of Genesis underlines for us. With such clarity. We reach in many ways the climax of the story of Jacob.

As he returns to the land of promise. As old wrongs are put right. As he gains a stake. A foothold in the land of Canaan. And as he sees God's promise that was made to him at Bethel.

More than fulfilled. And yet of course it's not an end to the struggles and battles. Perhaps that at least in part explains that strange appearance of God.

To wrestle with him by the book Jabbok. As we saw last week. That as John Calvin puts it. Jacob was admonished at his very entrance to the promised land. That he was not to expect a tranquil life for himself there.

Well it could never be so. Because the whole story of Abraham at his seed from the very beginning. Was one of struggle. Of God's promise facing hostility.

[6 : 34] Constantly from the world. From the flesh. And from the devil. It's the story isn't it? Of the seed of the woman. The seed of promise. At war. With the seed of the serpent.

From when the story begins. Right back in Genesis chapter 3. And it won't end. Until Revelation chapter 20. At the very end of the Bible. And so.

Constantly. This unfolding story in Genesis. Has shown us. God's covenant people of promise threatened. Threatened both from without. And within the family of faith.

And history chimes down the generations. Even the structure. The account of Jacob. From chapter 25 to 35. In Genesis. Flags that up. In Isaac's time.

There was a great threat from without. Remember. When Rebecca was captured. In a foreign palace. Back in chapter 26. And then immediately. There was a great threat from within. In chapter 27.

[7 : 32] Where Esau threatens Jacob. The promised seed. And here again. We have an exact mirror image of this. A threat. From within the family. With Esau. Now approaching with his army.

And then in the very next chapter. Once again. A great threat from without. As Dinah. Jacob's daughter. Is held. And defiled. In a foreign palace. The same.

Twin threats. Dog. God's people. Always. On the one hand. They face. Annihilation. By outright enemy attack.

And on the other hand. They constantly face the threat of assimilation. Assimilation into the culture round about. Defiling them. And distracting them from their distinctive calling.

As a people. A called. A part. Holy to the Lord their God. Now Isaac was a protected by God. From that outright assault of the Philistines.

[8 : 27] But rightly. But rightly. He feared the assimilation into the people of the land. Through particularly intermarriage with Canaanite women. Which his son Esau to his great sorrow had embraced too readily.

And God's distinctive people. God's church throughout the ages. Will always. Always face both of these dangers and tribulations. Let's think about the church today.

Many parts of the world where the church is growing most. There is a very real threat of physical violence and destruction. If you doubt me. Just read. One month of the Barnabas Fund update.

And you'll see exactly what I mean. There are very real threats to the people of God. But in the West. Where we live. It's not exactly that threat.

At least not yet. But there is just as real a danger of assimilation. Of the church losing its distinctive witness. Through wrongful partnerships.

[9 : 26] Wrongful alliances with the culture round about. Which is increasingly pagan. Increasingly hostile. And opposed to everything that the church believes and stands for. And there is a real danger for the church.

That soon by assimilation. There will be very little difference. Between the Christian church. And the pagan culture all around. Nothing has changed. Has it? In three or four thousand years.

And that's what helps explain this story. And I think especially. When we come to verse 12 and following. Verses which I think are often very misunderstood.

Even by good and godly commentators and preachers. Here's a chapter which shows us. I believe Jacob acting in faith. And clinging determinedly to God's sure promise.

Despite everything. In order to cleave to the blessing that God had promised him. It's what we read here in this story. In his encounter with Esau.

[10:25] That shows us really. That this is the earthly outworking. Of the heavenly encounter with God. That he had in the previous chapter. Jacob knows. That the Lord has promised good to him.

And he knows. That it's God's word. That has secured all his hope. Despite all the sin. In Jacob's life. Despite all the dysfunction. In his family of faith.

Despite all the human folly. And fallibility. God has promised. I will build my church. And this story shows us.

Jacob laying hold of God's grace. And soldiering on. In faith. Trusting that grace. To the very end of his tough journey. Back to the promised land.

Through many dangers. Toils and snares. I have already come. Tis grace. Has led me safe thus far. And grace. Will lead me home.

[11:24] I think if he had known. John Newton's great hymn. I am sure. That's what Jacob. Would have been singing. As he crossed the brook. Jacob. That morning. And faced Esau coming. And in a very real sense.

Friends. That's why. Moses wrote down. These stories. For his people. For the Israelites. On their journey. To Canaan. To the promised land. He wrote these things. To teach his people.

Also. To sing that same song. Because their God. Is the same God. El Elohe Israel. God. The God Almighty. Is the God of Israel.

And friends. So can we. Also. Sing that same song. As we run. The race that's marked out for us. And if you're feeling fearful.

You're feeling sometimes overwhelmed. With the sheer. Relentlessness. Of the struggle. Of the Christian life. Then this chapter's for you. We do feel that.

[12:23] Don't we? Often. Maybe some of us are feeling that. Very particular. At the moment. Why is this struggle. Never ending? Well. Take courage.

Here is a story. That tells us. That whatever obstacles. We meet. On the road of tribulation. God's grace. Will. Lead his people home. Let's look at it then.

It's a story about. Gracious reconciliation. And about godly realism. And. About a grateful return. Look at verses 1 to 11. Which describe for us.

Don't they? A gracious reconciliation. Surely an answer. To Jacob's covenant prayer. Verse 1. Brings Jacob. Immediately. Down to earth.

From his heavenly experience. His extraordinary experience. That he had. Of the angel of God. Certainly does not bring. For Jacob. Any escape. From reality. Does it? Here is Esau.

[13:18] Coming. With 400 armed men. Sometimes Christians. Want to. Escape. Escape. Into some. Spiritual experience.

To experience. God more deeply. As if somehow. That will translate us. Away. From the humdrum. Of ordinary life. And into a higher plane. As it were. But the Bible.

Never speaks like that. No. In the Bible. Monday morning. Always follows on. Immediately. From that Sunday night. High. And so it is here.

Jacob. Has his immediate problems. Right in front of him. And they have not. Disappeared. And nor will yours. Or mine. No matter what. Great experiences.

God might bring to us. In our life. We still live. Right here. On planet earth. Earth. So the question is. Will Jacob's encounter with God. Marvelous. As it was.

[14:11] Will it translate. Into real practice. In the cold light of day. That's the question. That we all need to ask ourselves. Isn't it? Every Sunday. As we think of Monday morning coming.

Well the answer here. Is a resounding yes. Verses 1 to 11. Show us. That Jacob's. Realism. In his encounter. With Esau.

Is the earthly. Counterpart. If you like. Of his vision of God. And his attitude. Of genuine. Penitence. And faith in God. Is seen.

In a tangible way here. In his genuinely. Repentant attitude. To his brother Esau. He is seeking. To bring restitution. For past wrongs. A real repentance.

Is something. That is always visible. It's always tangible. That's how you know. That it's real. In somebody's life. Bear fruit. In keeping.

[15:08] With repentance. That was John the Baptist's message. Wasn't it? To those pious frauds. Among the Pharisees. Let me see it. In your life. He said. It wasn't there. But how different.

Jesus words. To Zacchaeus. Do you remember? Who after following Jesus. Said I'm going to restore. Four fold. Four times. To everybody. What I've defrauded him. And Jesus' verdict was. There's a genuine. Man of faith. Today's salvation. Has come to this house. He says. Well that's exactly. What we're seeing here. Verses one to seven. Describe a genuine.

Approach. Jacob is seeking. Honorable restitution. Of wrongs. Interestingly. You'll see here. In these verses. There's no mention anymore. Of Jacob being afraid.

Is there? As he was. Back in chapter 32. Verse seven. Trembling then. I bet his pulse was racing though. Wouldn't yours be? 400 men. And Esau. Coming on at you like that.

[16:08] He doesn't throw caution to the wind. Does he? Verse two. He divided his company. As he planned previously. Putting. As you'll see. His dearest ones.

Rachel and Joseph. Furthest out of harm's way. At the end. Some people criticize Jacob here. For that. For favoritism. Well maybe. But I guess somebody had to be at the back.

Didn't they? It's hardly surprising he did it this way. Especially when. Joseph was the youngest. But we know. Don't we? That this was not a perfect family. And Jacob is not a perfect man. And yes.

There is absolutely no doubt. That Jacob's favoritism. Is a problem. It's a family trait. Remember. It began with Isaac. We know. That it sowed the seeds.

Of bitter resentment. That bears fruit. Later on. As we'll see in the story next week. In chapter 34. And again. Very famously. In the story of Joseph. Later on. So yes.

[17:04] Of course. Though Jacob is now Israel. A new man. He is still Jacob. Until his very dying day. Just like every other justified sinner.

He is. Simul justus et peccator. To use Luther's famous phrase. At the same time justified. And yet a sinner. And that's what every one of us is.

If we're a Christian. It's a salutary thing. Isn't it? For all of us to realize. That conversion to Christ. And even great and wonderful experiences. Of God's grace in your life.

They will not wash away. Our sinful human nature. The flesh. As Paul calls it. In the New Testament. We'll be grappling with that.

Every single day of our lives. Until. The great day of resurrection. When at last. We will receive. A resurrection body. A body of righteousness.

[18:03] Now until then. Just like Jacob. Just like the apostle Paul. We too. Will be at the same time justified. And yet sinners. And we'll be crying out with Paul. A wretched man that I am.

So yes. Of course. Jacob is not flawless. Yet the wonder. Of God's grace. To his own people. As John Calvin. Puts it so beautifully. Many faults.

And corruptions. Steal in upon us. He says. But God deals. Kindly with us. And does not impute. Faults of this kind. To us. And Jacob is.

Leading his people. You see verse 3. Out in front. He's showing real courage here. And he shows genuine humility. And penitence. He's bowing low. Before he saw.

He's having all his whole family. Bow down. Before him. And that's another evidence. Isn't it. Of a genuine work of grace. When a man knows.

[19:02] That he has God's blessing. In his life. Well he's willing. Isn't he. To sacrifice. All of his pride. Indeed. All of his possessions. Everything. In order to save.

That which matters most. A right relationship. With God. And therefore. A right relationship. And restored relationships. With brothers and sisters. That they've wronged.

And verse 4. Records for us. The wonderful response. To his plea. Esau. Ran to meet him. And he fell upon his neck. Not to kill him. But to kiss him.

To weep with him. And embrace. Of genuine warmth. And it is. A truly gracious acceptance. On Esau's part. I don't think you can read verse 4 here.

Can you. If you know the New Testament. Without thinking. Of Luke chapter 15. And the story of the prodigal son. It's so suggestive. Isn't it. Surely the Lord Jesus. Had this very passage in mind.

[20:01] When he described. The father running to meet. And embracing the prodigal son. And it's a testimony. Isn't it. To the wonderful answer. Of God. To Jacob's prayer.

Jacob prayed. Save me. From my brother Esau. This was far. Far more than that. It was. Exceedingly. Abundantly. More than Jacob. Could ever have asked. Or imagined. That Esau. Would receive him. In this way. With such grace. And that's our God. Though isn't it. Read Ephesians 3.

Verse 21. And it's a reminder. Isn't it. To us. That God. Has. Every single human heart. In the palm of his hand.

That God has power. To change human hearts. And attitudes. Even those. That seem to be. Outright enemies. To his people. Sometimes we need that reminder.

[20 : 56] Don't we. That encouragement. To our own prayers. Well. The brothers. As we read. Catch up on all these. Lost years. Verse 5. Jacob introduces.

His family. In answer to Esau's question. And. He affirms. That this great company. Of animals. And flocks. That he had met. Are indeed. A present.

A gift. For Esau. That he presses upon Esau. Despite Esau's. Protests. Notice. By the way. How tactful. How careful.

And sensitive. Jacob's words are here. He's very clear. Isn't he. In testifying to Esau. That all. All that he has been blessed with. Comes from God. These are the children.

Verse 5. That God has graciously given me. Verse 11. This is the wealth. That God. Has graciously. Given me. But he doesn't use the normal term. For that.

[21 : 50] That he uses elsewhere. He doesn't say. God has blessed me. He doesn't want to draw attention. To that very. Contentious issue. Of the blessing. That had caused all the problems.

When Jacob had stolen it. From Esau. He doesn't mention that. Except. Do you see. In verse 11. Where he calls the gift. That he's bringing to Esau. My blessing. As if to say.

Here Esau. I want to restore to you. Everything that I stole from you. The blessing. That should have been yours. And I really want to put things right.

Between us. Well. When the gospel touches somebody's wallet. You know. That it has changed their heart. Just as when the gospel touches somebody's ego.

You know. That it's taken root. It's bearing fruit in them. And so it was here. It's bearing fruit. In a gracious reconciliation. Of these two brothers. Which was a work of God.

[22 : 44] Involved in both men. As Jacob. Acknowledges. Verse 10. You see. He says. Seeing. Seeing Esau. Was like seeing God's face. In other words.

He was saying. I'm face to face here. With a wonder. That can only come from God. God's marvelous providence at work. Bringing this reconciliation. To be. It's instructive.

Isn't it? To see how God works. In such different ways. To deliver his people. From enemies. And their. Enemy situations. Back. A few chapters ago. We saw that he brought.

A reconciliation of sorts. With Laban. By force. God. Intimidated Laban. Showed him. That he had absolutely. No option. But to sue for peace.

With Jacob. And yet here. He brings. Reconciliation with Esau. Quite differently. Not by humbling Esau. But by humbling Jacob. And he brings that peace.

[23 : 41] As the fruit. Of humbling grace. In Jacob. That then softens. The heart of his brother. I mean. God works in that. Form a way. As he did with Laban. It reminds us.

Doesn't it? That God has mighty power. To strike down. All his enemies. And yet. When he works in this other way. He also reminds us. Doesn't he? Of the even more mighty power.

Made perfect in weakness. We don't demean ourselves. As Christians. By that kind of humility. Especially. When we have been. The ones who are in the wrong.

And need to make amends. William still put it this way. The Christian should never be afraid. To be stripped of the rags. Of his self-esteem. For underneath.

Are the garments of Christ. And isn't that so? Surely Jacob here. Does prefigure. The true Israel of God. The Lord Jesus Christ.

[24 : 37] Who humbled himself readily. To bring reconciliation. With his enemies. Not for his own sin. But taking. The place.

Of his sinful people. There's surely also. An important reminder here. For the church of Christ. Isn't there? That the world. Simply cannot understand.

That kind of thing. The world can't understand. That kind of God. Calvin suggests to us. That the Holy Spirit. Is reminding us. Here of how the church. Looks to the eyes.

Of the watching world. Just exactly. As Jacob's company. Must have looked here. To Esau's watching warriors. A very feeble. And rather contemptible. Conquered bunch of people. Here's Jacob. The blessed one of God. The one. Promised. To carry. The seed of salvation. But he is groveling. With all his people. In front of mighty Esau.

[25 : 32] The worldly man. Jacob looked very much. The inferior. The inferior. Didn't he? He looked very much. The loser. The enfeebled one. Needing the protection. Of Esau's men. Verse 15.

Is about that. I'll leave these men. To protect you. Because you look so unable. To protect yourselves. Well that's how the church. Looks to the world today. Isn't it? Nothing's changed. From Jacob's day. Or Calvin's day. The glory of the church. Being covered. With a sordid veil. Is an object of derision. In the world. He says. And yet of course.

The reality. Is so very different. To those who see. With the eyes of faith. To those who can see. Beyond that veil. To see things that. The eyes of this world. Will never see.

And that brings us. You see. To verses 12 to 17. Because despite. A gracious. And yes. A genuine reconciliation. The truth is. That there can never be.

[26 : 30] A joining. Of these men. And their families. Reconciliation. Is one thing. But living. Side by side. As one. Well that's quite another. And Jacob knew that. And that's why.

These verses speak. Of Jacob's. Polite decline. Of Esau's. Offer to go along with him. And of his engineering. Of a permanent. Disengagement. It was unavoidable.

They had to go. Their separate ways. Again. Jacob's often. Criticized here. For what he says. And for what he does. But I think that. Misunderstands the text.

I think it imports. A whole lot of. Unwarranted moralism. Into this story. What the text. Portrays for us. In verses 12 to 17. I believe. Is a godly realism. A godly realism.

In acknowledgement. Of God's covenant. Purpose. Esau says in verse 12. Great. Let's. Let's. Let's all get back together.

[27 : 29] Jacob. I'll lead the way. We'll go to the land of Seir. Where I've made my home. And indeed. Where I've made my mark. And where I have plenty. By the way. Without any blessings.

From God required. Notice how. Jacob. All the way through. Those preceding verses. Ascribes. All of his prosperity.

All of his blessing. To God. Several times. But Esau. Never mentions God. I have enough. Is all he says. I've done it myself. You see. Esau hasn't changed.

In heart. That doesn't mean. Of course. He isn't genuinely gracious. And forgiving to Jacob. Any more than we would. Believe that only Christian people. Could be decent people.

And forgive somebody. And so on. Or behave nobly. Of course that's not true. We know only too well. That the world is full. Of good and wonderful people. Of all religions. And of no religion. Of course.

[28 : 25] But that's a very different thing. From saying. That those people. Are believers. And children of God. The Bible's verdict. On Esau. Is very very clear.

He was a profane man. We're told. He was a man. Who had no thought of God. No care for his covenant. In his mind at all. And so.

Jacob and Esau. Just were not. Spiritually compatible. It's as simple as that. And you simply. Can't be naive. About that. Jacob was. Absolutely clear. And he wasn't naive.

And that's why. He politely declines. Esau's offer. To go with him. And that's what verses 12 to 15. Are telling us. It's a polite decline. Ostensibly.

Yes. Jacob gives the reason. As being the needs. Of the children. And the animals. And flocks. And that's true. Esau's a warrior. With armed men. Wanting to go galloping off. He would never tolerate.

[29 : 19] The feeble domestic pace. Of the Israelites. Of course. What Jacob is just doing here. Is trying. To turn Esau down. Without offending him.

You go on. He says. In verse 14. We'll come along. Later on. No problem. Says Esau. I'll leave you an escort. To come with you. No. No. No. No.

No. No. No. Not at all. Says Jacob. There's no need. Just let me find favor. In the eyes of my Lord. In other words. Not really. It's not really. Just. You go on. You go on. It's all right.

It's just a tactful request. By Jacob. To be allowed. To disengage. And not to go. With Esau. I'm pretty sure. Both men. You absolutely.

Fine. Well. What was being said. It's a bit like. You know. When someone asks you. To do something. You don't want to do. And you have to sort of. Politely turn them down. You don't want

to sound. Ungrateful.

[30 : 12] You don't want to sound. Churlish. You know. The sort of thing. Maybe you've gone off. On holiday. And you're walking along. In a lovely resort. Delighted that. You're far away.

From every part of your normal life. And then you bump into. The very last person. That you want to bump into. On holiday. Oh hello. They say. Fancy meeting you here. Oh isn't this great. Oh let's get together.

For dinner tonight. And you say. Oh that's so kind. Thank you so much. But. We can't do tonight. Maybe another time. Oh what about tomorrow night then.

Well. We've got something on tomorrow. Later in the week perhaps. I'm sure we'll bump into each other. Later in the week. Bye bye bye. Well that's what's going on here.

It's as simple as that. It's not that Jacob's deceiving Esau here. The writer is perfectly capable of telling us. When that's happening. In chapter 32 verse 20.

[31 : 06] He said Jacob deceived Laban. In chapter 34. We'll see next time. Jacob's sons deceive Shechem. Now we mustn't read the text so woodenly here.

We just need to sense the idiom of what's going on. Both of these men clearly understood what was implied in this exchange. And verse 16 and 17 show us them parting on very good terms. But it does describe a permanent disengagement. A parting of the ways. And if both didn't understand.

Although I think they did. Both didn't understand. Then certainly Jacob did. He knew that he could not live at one with Esau. He couldn't live at one with Laban.

The complete pagan Aramean. Nor could he live at one with Esau. Who was born within the household of faith. Of covenant faith. And yet cared nothing for the covenant. Or of the God of the covenant.

[32 : 08] And so they go their separate ways. Jacob. Towards the land of promise. And Esau. Away. From the covenant. Away from Canaan.

A way back to outside the promised land. Where he was frankly far, far more at home. 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 covenant history. The visionless man has no part in the eternal kingdom of God.

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. And to try and pretend that just because they're reconciled like that. They're therefore suddenly going to be at one spiritually. Just because Esau turns out to be a better bloke than he thought.

[33 : 10] The reality is that their lives are going in polar opposite directions. In spiritual terms. And that means they can't possibly be yoked together.

Now the Bible teaches us as Christians that we must be hard-headed as well as soft-hearted. When the matters of the kingdom are at stake. Innocent as doves said Jesus.

Yes of course. But also wise. Shrewd as serpents. And you can be faithfully shrewd and prudent. As Jacob was here.

This is not Jacob's scheming malevolence here. It's his shrewd maturity. Born of real faith and born of obedience to God's call.

He faced a very real danger of wrong partnership. Of diversion. That would take him out of the promised land. Even before he'd set foot back in it. At God's command.

[34 : 11] But he resisted it. And he resisted it rightly. Just as Moses. Constantly warned the Israelites. Not to get entangled. With the pagan Canaanites of the land.

Not to get into partnerships. That would lead them out. Out of God's covenant purposes. And away from the God of Israel. Well it's still a threat isn't it?

A constant threat. To believers and to Christian churches today. Relationships that perhaps resurface from the past. And can so easily come and derail someone's faith.

An old friend. Perhaps from your former life. That you haven't seen for a long long time. Since before you came to faith. Oh it's great to see you again they say. Let's go and pick up where we left off.

But you've changed. And you're different. And you speak a completely different language now. To them. Just like Jacob and Esau.

[35 : 12] One is full of talk about God. The other is not the least bit interested. A great great temptation isn't it? To fall back into the old ways.

In that situation. Or maybe you're somebody who's come from abroad. To Glasgow. And when you came here you were a Buddhist. Or you were a Muslim. Or you were an atheist. Or an animist. And the time is coming for you to go back to your homeland. And to your family. And to your old friends. And to everybody else. Who don't understand your faith. And who don't understand your God. Or maybe you're just going back to school. After being at camp during the summer. Perhaps made a renewed commitment to Christ. And a determination to witness and to follow him. Your friends will be a great pool won't they? Hey forget all that stuff. Come and join in with us.

[36 : 09] That stuff's not important. That's rubbish. Come with us. And often friends in life. God puts that choice before us. Doesn't he? When it's got to be Canaan.

Or Kin. Remember Jesus. Unless you hate. Mother. Father. Wife. Children. Brothers. Sisters. Yes. Even your own life. You cannot be my disciple. Doesn't mean hate of course. In terms of being malicious.

Of course not. But just exactly in terms of what Jacob must do here. Being realistic. That you can't be joined. At the very deepest level of your life.

With someone who will drag you away from the kingdom of God. Can't be. That's just godly realism isn't it? Paul says exactly the same thing to the Corinthians. You can't be unequally yoked together.

[37 : 10] With those who don't share your faith. What commonality does light and darkness have? None. Sometimes painful choices.

Can't be avoided. To decline. Politely. To disengage. Permanently perhaps. From certain relationships.

Relationships. Maybe what God demands of some of us. On the road. To his kingdom. Maybe. A personal relationship. Maybe a business relationship.

Maybe a hobby. Or a vice. Maybe even a great virtue. But something that would distract you. From the call of God. Upon your life. The call of the kingdom.

Nothing wrong is there. Being a fisherman. A person. But Jesus said to James and John. Leave your nets. And come and follow me. There's nothing wrong is there. With wealth. If God gives it to you.

[38 : 12] But for one rich young man. That Jesus met. It was the thing. That he refused to leave. And therefore could not. Follow Jesus. Into his kingdom. Him. Well verse 16.

Esau. Went on his way. But Jacob. Declined. And disengaged. And he didn't turn south. Out of the land. But turned westwards.

Journeying to Succoth. On the road. To Canaan. And so at last. In verses 18 to 20. We're told of a grateful return. A grateful return.

According to God's covenant. Promise. Verse 18. And Jacob came. Safely or peacefully. To Shechem. Or perhaps. We should read it. He came to Salem.

The city of Shechem. Salem being the name of the city. Of the Hivite ruler. Shechem. But either way. There's a clear play here. On the word. Peace. Salem.

[39 : 12] Because. Back at Bethel. You remember. 20 years ago. God had promised. That he would bring Jacob. Back to the promised land. In peace. And that he would be with him.

Every step of the way. And Jacob had vowed. Hadn't he. That if the Lord brought him back. To his father's house. In peace. Then the Lord. Will be my God.

And my life. Will be his. And so here he is. Back. In the land of Canaan. According to promise. At Shechem. Where do you remember. Abraham. First came.

Back in Genesis chapter 12. When the Lord appeared to him. And now verse 19. Jacob stakes his claim. On this land. In faith.

Just as Abraham had done. Buying a portion of the land. For money. Whatever the value of the coins. Here. A hundred. Pieces of money. Does seem to be a sizable amount. Doesn't it?

[40 : 08] But Jacob's willing. To part. With yet more. Of his worldly wealth. More of his earthly treasure. To invest. In God's covenant. Inheritance. Of faith.

He's doing what Jesus called. Laying up treasures in heaven. Where neither moth. Nor rust. Can destroy. Because where your treasure is. He says. There your heart will be also.

Well Jacob's heart. Clearly. Was in the promised land. Wasn't it? He's so grateful. To be back there. That money means absolutely. Nothing to him. If he can have a stake.

Of permanence. In the kingdom of God. It's wonderful. Isn't it? When you see believers. Like that. Whose gratitude. Overflows.

To God. So that they love. Nothing more. Than investing. In God's eternal kingdom. Because that's where their heart is. And verse 20. It wasn't just a private thing.

[41 : 05] Either. Was it? Jacob. Jacob erects an altar. We're told. A public witness. Just as. Abraham had first built his altar.

At Shechem. All those years ago. When he journeyed into the land. And he fulfills. The vow. That he made at Bethel. It's true. Yes. He hasn't reached his journey's end yet. He hasn't.

Got to his father's house. Or got back to Bethel. But he has come. To his homeland. In peace.

Jesus. And so he proclaims. Publicly. To all his camp. And indeed.

To all the surrounding. Pagan world. That God. El. The only God. The mighty God. Was. His God. Not just the God.

Of his father anymore. Not just the fear of Isaac. But the God of Israel. My God. Just as a young Christian. Growing up. In a Christian family.

[42 : 00] Comes to a point. Where they realize. This is not just. My family's faith. This is not just. My parents God. Jesus Christ. The Lord. Is my savior. The land.

And the Lord. The God of Abraham. And Isaac. Was now his God. And he had proved. True to his word. He had done. Everything. That the Lord. Had promised him.

All those years ago. At Bethel. And he had done it. Super abundantly. More and more. Than he could ever have imagined. Surely. Jacob's heart.

Was full of thankfulness. To him. Who walks beside. Who floods. His weaknesses. With strength. And causes. Fears to fly. Whose every promise. Was enough.

For every step. He takes. Sustaining him. In arms of love. And crowning him. With grace. Despite. All the mistakes. All the mess ups.

[42 : 59] All the sin. All the backward steps. Jacob came. To the place of peace. In the promised land. Not. That his strife.

Was over yet. No. The irony is. That Salem. The city of peace. Is going to be. The place of one of the bitterest strifes. In Jacob's life. In the next chapter. Nor that.

Jacob's sin. Is completely covered yet. Far from it. He's still a flawed man. His own sin. And the. And the consequences. Of his own sin. Will cause many heartbreaks.

In the chapters. That are to come. No. A tranquil life. Did not lie ahead of him. In the promised land. Much as he might long for that. But on that day.

Nevertheless. He knew. That God's grace. Had brought him safe. Thus far. And he knew it. And he rejoiced in it.

[43 : 56] And he proclaimed it. To the whole world. And Moses. Wanted. His. Israelite readers. To see that. And to rejoice also. And God wants us. To see that.

And to rejoice also. And to have faith. That our God. Is a God. Whose grace. Has triumphed. And does triumph. And will triumph.

Despite. Any amount of folly. And. Fallibility. And sin. And shame. That are all too real. And present. In your life. And in mine. And that this God.

Will bring to completion. That which has begun. In us. Just as he did. For Jacob. None of these great patriarchs.

That we've been studying. None of them. Were anything other than. Flawed men. Every one of them. Swerved at times. From the way of godliness. We know that. The Bible doesn't hide it.

[44 : 55] But in a way. Isn't that what makes it. So wonderful for us. Because God's spirit. Held them. Tight. So whatever their weaknesses were.

They were held. On the road. To salvation. To salvation. And so says the Lord Jesus Christ. The great shepherd.

None. Will ever. Snatch. Any of my sheep. Out of my father's hand. Until I've led them safely home. So friends. Whatever unknowns. Whatever unknowns. Lie in the future. For any of us personally. In our. Pilgrimage of faith. Or indeed for us.

As a fellowship. As a company of Israelites. On the road. To the glory of God's kingdom. As a congregation. Facing unknowns. And difficult days. Whatever lies.

[45 : 50] Whatever lies. In the future. Whatever. Indeed lies buried. In our past. If we can say with Jacob.

That this God. That this God. Is our God. Whose grace. Has brought us safe. Thus far. Then. According to his. Unbreakable covenant promise. We can also be certain. That his grace. Will. Lead us home.

Let's pray. Heavenly father. How we thank you. That you are a God of grace. Who covers our sins. And our failures. With a blanket. Of your righteousness. How we thank you. That you are. A covenant God of promise.

[46 : 45] Whom we can trust. And so may we. With Jacob. And all your people. Down the ages. Sing the song of your grace. And trust you.

To lead us home. For the glory of Jesus Christ. Our Savior and Lord. Amen.