



By Pastor Lynn Howe

**Title: The Fear of Man**

**Text: Genesis 33:1-20**

**Theme: The mercy of God**

**Type: Exposition**

**Thought: How do you handle the fear of man?**

Introduction: Our Christian life is very exciting because God is at work bringing change into our lives. Change is a fearful thing for most of us. God wants to change each one of us. Today he wants every believer to be conformed to Jesus Christ, from the flesh by the Spirit to Christlikeness. In our text last week and this week God is working to conform Jacob into the man of God He wants him to be. God changed his name and is in the process of changing his life. The Scripture is accurate in its portrayal of human character. Today sadly he is known as a “backslider” as he prepared to meet Esau. The fear of man controlled his life and actions. He had so quickly forgotten the great victories at Peniel, a strong faith to a weak and wavering faith.

ROM 8:29-30 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

One of the great hindrances to conformity is -

PRO 29:25 The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.

The importance of doing Right -

PRO 16:7 When a man's ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace

with him.

Remember God's Power -

PRO 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.

It would have been wonderful had Jacob lived up to his new name and new position with God, but he did not. The chapter begins with “Jacob” the old name, not “Israel” the new name, and we see him “lifting up his eyes”-walking by sight, not by faith. See what Jacob lost because he did not claim his spiritual privileges:

Jacob the Backslider (33-34)

#### I. Meeting and Scheme 1-16

See Jacob scheming again, bargaining with the enemy.

Did God not assure him of His power?

Had God not promised to see him through?

#### 1 Fear - 1

“Now Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and there, Esau was coming, and with him were four hundred men.”

#### 1 Front - 2-3

“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.”

His limp - He bowed before Esau instead of walking (limping) and faced him man-to-man. It is always tragic when a “prince with God” cringes before a man of the world! Better to limp by faith than to bow in self-trust.

Jacob hastily divided his family into 3 groups (cf. 31:7) and went ahead of them to meet his brother. The division and relative location of his family in relationship to the perceived danger gives tremendous insight into whom Jacob favored.

∅ Fearfully and deferentially, Jacob approached his brother as an inferior would a highly honored patron, while gladly and eagerly, Esau ran to greet his brother without restraint of emotion.

∅ “They wept” because, after 21 years of troubling separation, old memories were wiped away and murderous threats belonged to the distant past; hearts had been changed, brothers reconciled! C/f v. 10.

∅ “bowed himself to the ground seven times” - “Bowing seven times has been documented as a reflection of sincere regret and submission as early as fourteenth century B.C. in Egypt. Unexpected forgiveness and reconciliation, especially when it occurs amidst volatile family squabbles or feuds, is touching and joyful.”

The Apologetics Study Bible

1 Family - 4-8

“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?" So 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."

Family introductions (vv. 5-7)

an explanation of the 550 animals gift (vv. 8-10; cf. 32:13-21)

properly acknowledged the gracious provision of the Lord upon his life (vv. 5,11).

The battle for generosity was won by Jacob when Esau, who initially refused to take anything from his brother, finally agreed to do so (v. 11).

1 Face - 9-11

"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.

"your face ... the face of God" Jacob acknowledged how God had so obviously changed Esau, as indicated by his facial expression which was not one of sullen hate but of brotherly love divinely wrought and restored.

11 "Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough." So he urged him, and he took it.

Jacob pressed Esau to accept the gift of 550 animals (cf. 32:13-15). When Esau hesitated to accept the livestock, Jacob insisted. He said, Accept this "my" gift the same word he used in 32:13. Then Jacob added, Accept the "my" present. The word "present" comes from "to bless". By using these words Jacob showed that he was deliberately wanting to share his blessing with Esau, trying to soften his earlier actions.

Jacob's explanation, that seeing Esau's face was like seeing the face of God, showed he knew this deliverance from harm by Esau was of God.

At Peniel Jacob had seen the face of God and was delivered (32:30). Having lived through that, he then survived Esau. Thus Esau's favorable reaction was God's gracious dealing.

## I Follow - 12-16

“Then Esau said, "Let us take our journey; let us go, and I will go before you." 13 But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are weak, and the flocks and herds which are nursing are with me. And if the men should drive them hard one day, all the flock will die.

14 "Please let my lord go on ahead before his servant. I will lead on slowly at a pace which the livestock that go before me, and the children, are able to endure, until I come to my lord in Seir."

15 And Esau said, "Now let me leave with 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."

Let me find favor. Jacob did not want to have Esau's people loaned to him for fear something might happen to again fracture their relationship.

16 So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir.

to Seir ... With Esau's planned escort courteously dismissed, they parted company. Jacob's expressed intention to meet again in Seir (see note on 32:3), for whatever reason, did not materialize. Instead, Jacob halted his journey first at Succoth, then at Shechem (v. 18).

## II. Meeting and Scorn 17

“And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, built himself a house, and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

to Succoth ... Succoth is E of the Jordan River, 20 mi. E of Shechem, which is 65 mi. N of Jerusalem, located between Mts. Ebal and Gerizim.

Jacob built a house and settled down in Succoth.

#### 1 Focus - 17

What happened? Jacob lied to Esau about the flocks and traveled in the opposite direction or we have not been given all the details that transacted.

The two never did meet until they buried their father (35:29).

No doubt, at that meeting, Esau asked Jacob what had happened to him after they parted.

Jacob cleverly avoided traveling with Esau. He led Esau to think of his young children and young animals, and that he would meet with Esau at Seir. But Jacob headed in the opposite direction-north to Succoth, east of the Jordan river and north of the Jabbok River, instead of south to Seir! He may have been wise to avoid Edom, but he did not need to deceive his brother again.

#### III. Meeting and Safety 18-19

“Then Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram; and he pitched his tent before the city. 19 And he bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money.”

#### 1 Freedom - 18-19

Shechem a Canaanite community: “The Canaanites were doomed because of their religion.

This religion was a human attempt to ensure survival in a land that had no rain for half a year, every year.

The Canaanites observed that rain fell from the sky and watered the earth so that things grew.

They compared human sexuality to what happened between the earth and the sky.

They believed that mother earth and father sky were gods who could be induced to copulate in the realm of nature if only their human worshipers would do the same.

Thus sex of every kind was encouraged as worship.

One particularly heinous aspect of Canaanite religion was the sacrifice of infants born as the suit of ritual prostitution.

“came safely” Ca. 1908 b.c. A reference to the fulfillment of Jacob's vow made at Bethel when, upon departure from Canaan, he looked to God for a safe return. Upon arrival in Canaan, he would tithe of his possessions (28:20-22). Presumably Jacob fulfilled his pledge at Shechem or later at Bethel (35:1).

“bought the parcel of land” This purchase became only the second piece of real estate legally belonging to Abraham's line in the Promised Land (cf. 23:17,18; 25:9,10). However, the land was not Abraham's and his descendants simply because they bought it, but rather because God owned it all (Lev. 25:23) and gave it to them for their exclusive domain (see 12:1-3).

His vision - He moved again and pitched his tent toward the city of Shechem, not unlike Lot (13:12). He lost the vision of God's city (Heb. 11:13-16).

These verses form a sort of epilogue to Jacob's sojourn outside the land. He returned in peace and camped near Shechem, directly west of the Jabbok River and about 20 miles from the Jordan in Canaan. This is where Abram first camped when he arrived in Canaan (12:6). Shechem was between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim.

IV. Meeting and Sacrifice - 20

“Then he erected an altar there and called it El Elohe Israel.”

## 1 Fellowship - 20

“erected an altar” In the place where Abraham had first built an altar (12:6,7), Jacob similarly marked the spot with a new name, incorporating his own new name (32:28), “God, the God of Israel,” declaring that he worshiped the “Mighty One.” “Israel” perhaps foreshadowed its use for the nation with which it rapidly became associated, even when it consisted of not much more than Jacob's extended household (34:7).

Jacob, like Abram, purchased a portion of the land and there, like Abram, Jacob set up an altar (12:7) and named it El Elohe Israel (“El is the God of Israel”). In this way he acknowledged that the Lord had led him all the way back to the land.

His arrival back in the land and his establishing of the altar are the culmination of Jacob's “Laban experience.” In this chapter Jacob named two more places (cf. Bethel, 28:19; Galeed, 31:47; Mahanaim, 32:2; Peniel, 32:30). Succoth (“shelters”) was named because of the sheds he built for his livestock (33:17), and the name of the altar commemorated the significance of God's relationship to Israel, Jacob's new name. God had prospered and protected him as He had promised.

### Conclusion:

Jacob's long-expected meeting with Esau was a marvelous event. God so turned Esau's heart that he was eager to be reconciled with his brother. Earlier Esau had cared nothing for his birthright (25:32-34), and he cared little for old grudges now. Jacob, relieved because of Esau's lack of hostility, had to admit once again that more was due to God's intervention than he had realized. Still called Jacob because he is acting like the old Jacob and not Israel.

Thus miracles were worked in Jacob and Esau. In Jacob, God brought about a spirit of humility and generosity. Esau was changed from seeking revenge to desiring reconciliation. These changes were proof that God had delivered Jacob in answer to his prayer (32:11).

The following chapters shift the focus onto Jacob's children.

Lessons:

- 1 Testing is a reality in our life of faith.
- 1 God is working in the life of the believer to conform them.
- 1 God changes the heart of men.
- 1 Every good and perfect gift comes from God.
- 1 Submission, humility lead to forgiveness and family peace.
- 1 Spiritual tests come after great blessing from God.
- 1 Walking in the flesh leads to poor judgment and trouble.

Meeting the Fear of Man

Genesis 33:1-20

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son,” ROM 8:29

“The fear of man brings a snare,  
But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.” PRO 29:25

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1 Fear - 1

1 Front - 2-3

1 Family - 4-8

1 Face - 9-11

1 Follow - 12-16

## II. Meeting and Scorn 17

1 Focus - 17

## III. Meeting and Safety 18-19

1 Freedom - 18-19

## IV. Meeting and Sacrifice - 20

1 Fellowship - 20

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