

February 2-Genesis 33

Genesis 33 gives us a great example of how to impact those around us with the love of God. Yesterday, we talked about the situation Jacob found himself in as he approached his brother Esau. Jacob had treated Esau very poorly, cheating him out of his rightful blessing, and now Jacob anticipates the long awaited revenge Esau is almost assuredly after. Revenge and anger come naturally to all of us. It is the way of the world to seek out our own best interest and fight for our name and well being. However, for the believer, the opportunity to “do good to those who hate you” (Luke 6:27) is a chance to make a lasting impression on those around us.

The Bible says that as Jacob approaches, he “went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.” (v. 3) Jacob went above and beyond to show humility and deference to his older brother. He undoubtedly expected an irate Esau to await him as he arose on the seventh time, making what happened next an absolute shock. “But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.” (v. 4) Esau did the unexpected! He had found it in his heart to forgive his brother and in the process turned a meeting that had the potential to be very heated and possibly violent into a sweet time of reconciliation with a long lost family member.

Let this text remind us today that when we seek revenge we simply live as the rest of the world, however when we forgive we model a faith that is out of this world! When we choose to forgive we point people to a higher calling and purpose than self-preservation. One of the beauties of Genesis 33 is that we see the impact forgiveness can have on other people. In verse 10 Jacob tells Esau “For I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me.” Jacob compares seeing Esau to seeing God Himself! This is one of the simplest ways I know to show other people Christ in your life. When you forgive (even though you have a “right” to hold a grudge) people get a glimpse of what God did for us when He forgave our sins even though He had every right to allow us to stay in our sinful rebellion.

People immediately sense that those who are able to forgive are different, and when they see that your life is not weighed down by grudges and hate, they will intuitively want to know what it is that you have that they don't. In Matthew 6:12 Jesus calls our attention to our need to forgive those around us when He instructs the disciples to ask God in prayer to “forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” You see, we have been forgiven to forgive! As people wrong us, may we remember that we wronged God exponentially more. He has chosen to forgive us and therefore we can choose to forgive others. To be sure, forgiveness takes uncommon strength. It is easier to hold a grudge than it is to forgive but through the Gospel we have the power to show mercy to those who deserve judgment. In Christ's death we have a picture of our great God pursuing and loving us when we are unlovable. God, in His grace chose to model for us what it looks like to forgive your enemy when He forgave us, thereby allowing us to become one of His children. Finally, let us remember that choosing not to forgive is choosing to bring harm on ourselves. It has been said that refusing to forgive is like drinking poison while waiting for the other person to die. Harboring hate and resentment is refusing to let go of that which is harming you day by day. In this sense, forgiveness is not just about the well-being of the offending party, it is also about you! If you make this decision, if you decide to forgive those whom you have a “right” to be mad at, God will use your life in an incredible way to show our lost world His power and love and you can truly be free in the process! Remember that God is not asking us to do what He refuses to practice Himself. Instead, He sent His son to die for us “while we were yet sinners” (Romans 5:11). We were enemies of His, refusing to acknowledge Him or submit to His authority (Romans 1) and yet in His great love Christ died for our forgiveness anyway, even praying for God to forgive the very ones who were still spitting in His face and mocking Him (Luke 23:34). Let us then follow the example of Jesus and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). Jacob saw “the face of God” in Esau's forgiveness, my prayer for you is that others can see “the face of God” in your willingness to forgive as well.