

## Genesis (2011) 32A

- One of the most dangerous things God can do for us in the course of our daily walk of faith is to reveal some detail of his plan for our lives
  - If God dares to tell us about where He wants us to go or what He plans to do with us in our future, He is taking a big risk
    - The reason why it's such a risk is because a little knowledge is a dangerous thing for Christians
    - So often, we take that revelation and begin to run ahead of God thinking we have all we need to create our own plan
    - In effect, we leave God behind

A middle-aged woman had a heart attack and was taken to the hospital. While on the operating table she had a near death experience. Seeing God she asked, "Is my time up?" God said, "No you have another 43 years, 2 months and 8 days to live."

Upon hearing this, the woman decided to stay in the hospital and have a face lift, liposuction and a tummy tuck. She even had someone change her hair color. Since she had so much more time to live, she figured she might as well make the most of it.

She was released from the hospital but while crossing the street on her way home, she was hit by a bus and died.

Arriving in Heaven and standing before God, she demanded, "I thought you said I had another 43 years?! Why didn't you pull me out of the path of the bus?"

God replied, "I didn't recognize you."

- When we run ahead of God, we take God out of the driver's seat and place Him in the passenger's seat of our life
  - We start trying to drive and expect God to just help us navigate
  - We set our own course and ask God to bless it
  - Rather than allow God to set the course and then we join in His work
- This is where Jacob is at this point in his life

- God set him outside the land for 20 years so that Jacob could experience God at work in his life
  - Jacob has seen the Lord and recognized His power and provision
  - Last week we saw Jacob giving Laban that passionate speech in which he declared that God has been at work protecting Jacob
    - Jacob has recognized that God is in his car, so to speak
    - And Jacob knows God is helping navigate the journey of Jacob's life
- But Jacob hasn't taken the next step of spiritual maturity to recognize that God is not just riding shotgun in Jacob's journey
  - God is driving the car, and Jacob needs to follow the Lord's lead
  - And when Jacob tries to go his own way, through deception or trickery or scheming, then he is fighting against God rather than working with God
- Chapter 32 exists in the record of Genesis precisely to show us how the Lord finally gets Jacob's attention on this point and shows him to follow

**Gen. 32:1** Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him.

**Gen. 32:2** Jacob said when he saw them, "This is God's camp." So he named that place Mahanaim.

- Jacob is headed westward into Canaan from Gilead, and as he travels, God gives Jacob a vision of angels escorting him into the Promised Land
  - In seeing the angels Jacob declares that this location is God's camp
    - The word he uses to name the place means two camps in Hebrew
    - Meaning that God's camp has joined his camp
  - Why does God bring Jacob this vision now?
    - You may remember that God gave Jacob a vision of angels as he left the Promised Land
    - And now He provides Jacob a second vision of angels just as Jacob prepares to re-enter the land
    - The message would seem to be similar in both cases

- Jacob left the land to uncertain circumstances and in fear of what the future held, so God reassured Jacob in the vision
  - Now Jacob re-enters the land under uncertain circumstances as well
  - He isn't sure what he will find, especially concerning his brother who may still harbor violent intentions against Jacob
- So God wants Jacob to know that God has everything under control and He will ensure Jacob's safe passage
    - But how does Jacob interpret the vision?
    - Jacob declares that God's camp was joining Jacob's camp
    - The sense of his statement is that God was sending reinforcements
      - The word for camp in Hebrew is *machaneh*, which literally means army
      - God's army is reinforcing Jacob's army of men
  - We see Jacob's backward perspective clearly evident in the next things he does

**Gen. 32:3** Then Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

**Gen. 32:4** He also commanded them saying, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: 'Thus says your servant Jacob, "I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now;

**Gen. 32:5** I have oxen and donkeys and flocks and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.'"

**Gen. 32:6** The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."

**Gen. 32:7** Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies;

**Gen. 32:8** for he said, "If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape."

- Before Jacob crosses the Jordan and enters Canaan, he thinks it prudent to notify his long lost brother of his return
  - This makes sense

- Jacob doesn't want to return to the land unannounced potentially leading Esau to assume it was a sneak attack
- But the plan Jacob sets into motion reveals more of his thinking
- Jacob instructs his servants to head southward toward Edom, the place Esau has chosen to dwell
  - The messengers are to inform Esau of Jacob's return
  - But notice the language they are told to use
    - They are to refer to Jacob as Esau's servant
    - They are to mention that Jacob is quite wealthy and has many possessions
  - Clearly, the tone of these statements is intended to appease Esau
    - Should Esau still harbor resentment and hatred toward his brother, perhaps he would be willing to make peace for a price
- We can clearly see Jacob's thinking here
  - He needs to prepare his own way to enter the land
  - He must defend himself or else he won't be safe
  - Despite seeing the angels, Jacob is still trying to drive the car
- So God begins to work to get his attention
  - The messengers then return to Jacob to report that Esau is coming north to meet Jacob
    - And by the way, Esau is bringing 400 men with him
    - Naturally, Jacob assumes the worst
      - Esau is coming with a strong force to conquer and kill Jacob
      - This will be payback for the deceit Jacob perpetrated on Esau 20 years earlier
  - In response, Jacob does something that proves he has a glass-half-empty mentality

- He decides to divide his force
      - Dividing one's force weakens your ability to withstand attack
      - It makes defeat all the more likely
    - And Jacob even says that his purpose in the division is to ensure someone survives Esau's attack
      - Jacob is already assuming that he will lose this battle
      - Therefore, he wants to leave some of his family hidden away and safe so that after the defeat, there will be some of the family remaining
  - Jacob is terrified and he lacks any hope of surviving Esau's attack
    - Didn't God bring a vision of angels to give Jacob confidence?
      - And yet here's Jacob scared and trying to plan and scheme his way out of his situation
        - This is Jacob: a man of faith, but weak faith
        - A man who acknowledges God in his life and recognizes God's work to bless him
        - Yet with each new challenge Jacob reverts to trusting in himself and assuming God will come along for the ride
      - But finally – and perhaps for the first time – Jacob sees no solution at hand
        - He is facing death, he believes, and he can't figure out a way to avoid it
        - The best he has is a plan to save half of his family
    - So what does a man of faith do when all his options are exhausted and he has no ideas and no escape from his circumstances? What is the last option of every man of God? He prays

**[Gen. 32:9](#)** Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,' **[Gen. 32:10](#)** I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies.

[Gen. 32:11](#) “Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me and the mothers with the children.

[Gen. 32:12](#) “For You said, ‘I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.’”

- Jacob turns his face toward God and cries out, deliver me!
  - Jacob makes his sincere confession of repentance
    - He says I am unworthy of God’s kindness (true statement)
    - And reminds God of His promises
    - And then makes his appeal: deliver me from Esau
  - Jacob schemed and planned and bargained to get Esau’s favor, and now that these efforts have failed, he turns to God and asks God to handle it
    - Couldn’t he have skipped the first part and gone directly to the prayer?
    - Jacob’s approach is standard practice for so many of us
      - Prayer is the last thing we do
      - It’s the response of last resort
      - It represents us getting out of the driver’s seat and asking God to slide over and take the wheel
  - Are we really so prideful and foolish so as to think that we ever had control of the wheel in the first place?
    - God was always driving and is always driving
    - Our lives are in His hands at all times
    - And it’s only our own self-deception that leads us to think that we are in control
- Why has God allowed Jacob to know that Esau was approaching with his 400 men?
  - It would seem there is only one reason: to bring Jacob to this crisis, this crisis of faith
    - With no other choice, Jacob must turn to God and cry out for God’s grace and mercy

- God's goodness was never in doubt, nor was God's faithfulness to His promises ever in doubt
  - After all, God sent His angels to Jacob as reassurance that Jacob would enter the land successfully
  - More over, consider that Esau is already living outside the land of Canaan
    - The very fact that Esau didn't remain in the land but chose to settle outside Canaan is clear sign of God's goodness at work
    - After Jacob fled, we might expect that Esau would have tried to occupy the land to deny Jacob the chance to receive his inheritance
    - Instead, Esau decided to leave for Edom and settle outside the land, leaving it available for Jacob
  - Clearly, God is more than capable of fulfilling the promises to Jacob
- Nevertheless, Jacob thinks his success lies with his own efforts, and God's army was merely a reinforcement
  - He got the relationship backward
- So what does a man of faith do after having prayed for God to intervene and resolve his situation? Well, if you're Jacob, you go back to scheming...

**[Gen. 32:13](#)** So he spent the night there. Then he selected from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau:

**[Gen. 32:14](#)** two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams,

**[Gen. 32:15](#)** thirty milking camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys.

**[Gen. 32:16](#)** He delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass on before me, and put a space between drives."

**[Gen. 32:17](#)** He commanded the one in front, saying, "When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, saying, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and to whom do these animals in front of you belong?'

**[Gen. 32:18](#)** then you shall say, 'These belong to your servant Jacob; it is a present sent to my lord Esau. And behold, he also is behind us.'"

**[Gen. 32:19](#)** Then he commanded also the second and the third, and all those who followed the drives, saying, "After this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him;

[Gen. 32:20](#) and you shall say, 'Behold, your servant Jacob also is behind us.'" For he said, "I will appease him with the present that goes before me. Then afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me."

[Gen. 32:21](#) So the present passed on before him, while he himself spent that night in the camp.

- After making his appeal to the Lord, Jacob sleeps on it, and when he awakes, he has a new plan to save his skin
  - He takes a large quantity of his best animals (500), and then instructs his servants to create a receiving line stretching to the horizon
    - This is a lavish gift, representing about 2-3 years of work at least
    - It also shows how prosperous Jacob has become that he can let so much go so easily
  - The animals are grouped into like kinds and separated by some distance from one another in a line stretching away from Jacob in the direction of Esau
    - This created five groups, and each group represented a gift to Esau
      - Jacob hoped that with each gift, Esau's anger would subside that much more
  - And Jacob gave each servant the same instructions to deliver to Esau
    - Once again, they are to use the phrase "your servant Jacob" sent us
    - And these animals are a present for Esau
      - The word for present in Hebrew is *minchah*, which means offering or tribute
    - Later in v.20 Jacob tells the servants to say to Esau that these gifts are intended to appease him
      - The word for appease in Hebrew is *kaphar*, which literally means propitiation or atonement
- Jacob is putting these animals before Esau to make amends or to atone for his past sins against Esau

- With his back against a wall, Jacob experiences the weight of a repentant heart and seeks to make amends for his deceits
  - And these animals are sent to Esau to appease or atone for his sin against Esau
  - Jacob does have reason to feel guilty, but he's seeking to solve his problem in the wrong way
- Jacob's language and actions are an attempt to communicate to Esau that Jacob was willing to give the birthright back to Esau
  - First, he is willing to send Esau a large piece of his wealth
  - Secondly, he is willing to be called Esau's servant
    - Remember, the birthright inheritance always included the patriarchal leadership role in the family
    - Everyone else in the family was considered the servant of the patriarch
    - So for Jacob to tell Esau that he would be Esau's servant was tantamount to saying you can be the patriarch over me
  - Jacob's only hope is to stay alive at this point, and he's willing to sacrifice everything else he has to achieve that goal
- There is to be a place for repentance in Jacob's life, just as there is to be for every believer
  - The problem for Jacob is that he is repenting of the wrong thing and he is repenting to the wrong person
- First, Jacob is sorry for the wrong thing
  - He upset Esau and took away Esau's birthright, but Jacob has nothing to repent for
  - Esau sold his birthright to Jacob
  - Esau wasn't a victim and had no claim to the birthright in the first place
  - If Esau was going to be upset about the birthright, he should have been upset at himself or at God

- Jacob's misdirected repentance is an example of seeking friendship with the world
  - Jacob was more interested in worldly friendship and harmony than with standing in God's promises

**2Cor. 6:14** Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

**2Cor. 6:15** Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

**2Cor. 7:1** Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

- Paul says because we have God's promises, we cleanse ourselves of the world and live in fear of God
- Jacob was living in fear of the world rather than in fear of God
  - We are certainly commanded to be at peace with all men so far as it depends on us, but we are not to seek harmony at all costs
  - On the contrary, some discord and conflict is inevitable, since our faith makes us enemies with the world

**James 4:4** You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship **with the world** is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of **the world** makes himself an enemy of God.

- What Jacob should be repentant for is his dependance upon himself rather than trusting on God
  - The chief sin he's committing over and over again is prideful self-reliance
  - If he's going to be sorry about something, it shouldn't be for hurting Esau's feelings, but for putting God in the backseat
- Secondly, Jacob is directing his repentance toward Esau, when he should be directing his sorrow to the Lord himself
  - He's working hard to fix the wrong relationship
    - So often this happens in the lives of Christians

- Sometimes we're suffering hardship and trials, especially in our relationships, and we work desperately hard to repair these wounds
- It's always healthy to seek reconciliation and to make amends for hurts we cause, there is another relationship that must be repaired first
  - Our relationships with others can be a reflection of our relationship with the Lord
    - Jacob is at odds with his brother because he schemed against him
    - But that scheming was itself a product of Jacob's unwillingness to depend on God, to take matters into his own hands
  - Likewise, if we have friendships, marriages or other family relationships that are strained, consider whether they may be a reflection of our own weaknesses in following the Lord
    - Let's bring our repentant hearts to the Lord first even as we seek to reconcile with our brothers
- Jacob is still trying to drive the car of his life, and with the little knowledge God has given Jacob about Esau's arrival, Jacob is ready to drive off a cliff
  - God has appointed Jacob to inherit the blessings and the promises of the covenant, so Jacob can't change that plan
    - Jacob is ready to give back his birthright to survive an encounter with Esau
    - What happened to that prayer Jacob lifted up to God?
    - It's barely been 24 hours since the prayer, and already Jacob has given up all hope and is making foolish decisions
  - Since God isn't going to allow Jacob to forfeit his birthright, He is ready to intervene in a dramatic way to set Jacob straight