

- Radical surgery in Jacob's life

Jacob turns to God in prayer

- He considers what God has done in days gone by

- He considers God's instructions and God's promises

- He confesses his unworthiness

- He puts his request to God

- He ends his prayer clinging to the promises of God about his future

He does what he can to turn aside the anger of Esau - gifts

- An illustration of propitiation

Jacob has been made to face the painful truth about himself ^{□1}. He now is driven to a point of desperation where God performs some radical surgery in his life ^{□2}.

It begins when Jacob, greatly afraid of what is to happen when he meets with Esau, turns to God in prayer. He is afraid for his life, and yet he was reaching the point where he did not want to make use of deceit and trickery any more. What can he do? He can pray! **He considers what God has done in days gone by.** God has a good reputation with Jacob. Jacob knows how God greatly blessed Abraham and Isaac. Despite all of their weaknesses, he knows that God has been *'the God of... Abraham, the God of... Isaac'* ^{□1}. If we have eyes to see, we see how gracious God has been to our predecessors. We are no better than them, but then they were no better than us. Many of the great heroes of the past were as weak as we are. If God helped them, God can help us. It affects the way Jacob prays. *'God of Abraham . . . God of Isaac...'*, he says.

He considers God's instructions and God's promises. *'O Lord who said to me "Return to your country and to your family, and I will do you good."'* It was God who had told him to return to Canaan. Jacob feels he can hand his distressing situation over to God. God is responsible for it; He can be trusted to handle it.

He confesses his unworthiness. This is a new note in the story of Jacob. Hitherto he has deceived everyone and never has admitted to having much need in his life. But now things are different. *'I am not worthy of the least of your mercies...'*, he says ^{□1}. He is looking back over his life. Years ago he was a lonely refugee, fleeing from the wrath of Esau his brother. Now he has two large companies of people. He has become a respectable family man and has acquired considerable wealth. It is all due to God and His mercy. Jacob uses this as an argument in prayer. If God has been so good to him in days gone by, will God not be good to him now?

He puts his request to God. *'Deliver me . . . from the hand of my brother...'* ^{□1}.

He ends his prayer clinging to the promises of God about his future. God had told him he would become as many as the grains of sand on the seashore. How can he become as the sand on the seashore if Esau wipes out his wives and children? ^{□1}.

After he has prayed he does what he can to turn aside the anger of Esau. He sends gifts ahead ^{□1}. His servants are to say to Esau *'He is behind us.'* The servants must make it quite clear that Jacob is on his way to meet Esau face-to-face. There is to be no sneaking around Esau as there had been as evasive avoidance of Laban. Jacob is determined to face Esau in an open and straightforward way. He sends the propitiating sacrifice ahead and then he hopes to meet Esau face-to-face.

One can hardly pass by a passage like this without noticing how it illustrates what it means to pray by means of the blood of Jesus. It is only an illustration, and not a perfect one. The Bible says that Jesus is the 'propitiation' for our sins, and the word 'propitiation' means a

^{□1} 31:1–55
^{□2} 32:1–32

^{□1} 32:9

^{□1} 32:10

^{□1} 32:11

^{□1} 32:11

^{□1} 32:13–20

sacrifice that turns aside wrath. Our passage beautifully illustrates the idea. Esau was angry with Jacob. Jacob sends an expensive and costly gift ahead hoping to turn aside Esau's wrath. *'I may appease him with the present... afterwards I shall see his face'* ¹.

¹ 33:20

• *God's wrath and Esau's are not the same nor is the source of the gift –*

Of course the illustration is not perfect. Esau's wrath is bad temper and resentment. God's wrath is a matter of justice and righteousness. It is a determination to wipe sin out of existence. Jacob's gift is one of his own providing, but the blood of Jesus Christ is provided by God. But the essential idea of propitiation is illustrated for us here. God is angry with sin. We are not acceptable to Him as we are. There is only one way in which the anger of God against our sin can be turned away. We must send ahead of us the blood of Jesus Christ. God accepts the gift and then, through the blood of His Son, accepts us and we see and meet Him face- to-face. In Jacob's case it is reconciliation with his brother that he wants.

• *But the essential idea of turning away anger applies*

• *Jacob takes the first step towards reconciliation*

He has the courage to approach Esau looking for reconciliation. The idea has come from Jacob. Esau has not sent any friendly overtures to Jacob. It is the other way around. When there is disharmony and conflict, who should take the first step? We should! Our brother may not be interested in having reconciliation with us, but we are interested in having reconciliation with him. We are the ones who are to take the first step.

• *Extreme measures to bring about reconciliation*

He takes extreme measures to persuade Esau to be friendly. He sends multitudes of animals. They arrive at Esau's camp one at a time, *'each drove by itself'* ¹. First there are goats, then sheep, then camels, then cows, and then asses. With each of the five groups there are males to make sure that the size of Esau's flocks will increase. Five times Esau will hear the servants say *'They are a present ... he is behind us.'* Jacob is taking extreme measures to bring about reconciliation.

¹ 32:16

• *Wrestles with God in prayer*

There is one more thing: he must wrestle with God and get God to answer his prayer. He cannot live on deceit and trickery any more. It is God or nothing; it is now or never. He is determined to get God's blessing on his life or perish in the attempt!



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