

A Study in Genesis: Esau Shows Grace

Scripture Focus: Genesis 33:1-17

In the story from Genesis 32:1-12, we know Jacob has taken some pretty extreme measures as he anticipates the inevitable encounter with his brother Esau. Jacob is not thinking this will be a sentimental reunion, particularly when word reaches him that Esau is traveling with 400 men. (32:6-7; 33:1-2) To encourage a better reception with Esau, Jacob sends gifts! (32:13-21) To prepare for Esau's anger and retribution, Jacob twice divides his entourage of servants and helpers.

Notice, Jacob returns to his brother bowing in humility. But Esau, rather than angrily confronting or humiliating Jacob, runs to meet him and embraces Jacob, kissing him and weeping. (Does this remind you of a story found in the New Testament?)

- To what extent might you be surprised by Esau's response to seeing his brother Jacob? What, if anything, do you think might have been behind this very positive response?
- Why do you think Jacob is so intent on gifting Esau? (33:8, 10-11) And why do you think Esau is so hesitant to accept? (33:9)

Notice that Jacob, the obvious beneficiary of God's unexplained grace many times over, looks into the face of the brother he dreaded and feared and avoided – and Jacob recognizes that same grace God has shown him. “To see your face is like seeing the face of God – since you have received me with such favor.” (v. 10)

- Recall a time when someone was particularly gracious to you (showing you unmerited favor). How might that grace, coming from another, brought to mind the grace of God shown toward you?
- Think of tangible acts of grace we could show others that would then encourage their belief in a gracious and loving God. What do those gracious acts look like? Describe a few.

What do you make of how this encounter wraps up? Esau wants to continue the reunion, “Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you.” (v. 12) Jacob declines and states the reason being that he needs to journey more slowly for the sake of his children and the animals that are nursing. (v. 13) Hum....?

Let us pray that others see the love and grace of God in our faces and in all that we do. It may begin with confessing what obstructs others from seeing the love of Christ in us.