

The Cloud of Witnesses

Jacob

Lesson 1: Jacob – His Birth & Birthright

Reading

Genesis 25:19-35.

Sort out your priorities

Jacob entered this world not gasping for air but grasping his brother's heel! He had arrived, and he was determined to make the best of it and grab it with all his might, regardless of who was standing in his way. Ironically, it was Esau who was favoured by his father, Isaac. Rebekah, however, loved Jacob.

Maybe because he knew his father loved him more, Esau grew up to love what his father loved – the outdoor lifestyle. Maybe he felt he didn't need to earn his father's approval and so he became complacent. He enjoyed each day and it was all he was interested in. The future and his destiny were not worth fighting for. They would come to him as of right and he would happily drift into his future without thought or design.

In contrast, Jacob realised that the most important thing in life was denied him – the privilege and blessing of the first-born son. Now that was worth fighting for! He therefore purposed in his mind that nothing was going to stand in the way of his acquiring it and Esau unwittingly and nonchalantly walked into his trap.

The sad testimony is that Esau gave up the divine privileges and promises for nothing more than a bowl of stew. He relegated the sacred to nothing more than common. Just as we often do today – he sought instant gratification rather than waiting for the greatest privilege he could have had.

People do that with sex today. However, God has written a warning for us all - Don't let the immediate rob you of your future rewards! It's a lesson we must ALL learn – sooner or later.

Jacob would say to us today...

You must learn to put God first. The things of this earth are only temporary. Go for what is eternal!

Prayer

Father, thank You so much for every blessing You continually shower upon me! Please help me to get my priorities lined up with Yours so that my will is subjected to Your will for my life. I really do want Your will for my life. Amen.

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Lesson 1 continued: Jacob – His Birth & Birthright

Additional readings

Matthew 6:19-34; 1 Kings 3:3-15; John 11:17-44.

Questions

Why did God allow Jacob to gain the first-born's (Esau's) birthright?

Why must we ensure we put the things of this world into the correct perspective?

What are your priorities? (They are the things you DO!!)

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Lesson 2: Jacob – His Blessing

Reading

Genesis 27.

Identify your values

As we read the blessing that Isaac bestowed upon Jacob, we can appreciate why Rebekah and Jacob were so determined to secure it for Jacob. It was about as universal a blessing as you could ever want or wish for! Worth more than any Lotto prize draw could ever give! It is of little wonder how devastated Esau became when he realised that not only was the blessing given to Jacob but all that was left for him was effectively a curse.

That's difficult for us in the Western world to comprehend. If we had been Isaac, we would have just repeated the blessing for Esau and moved on! But Isaac couldn't. In Hebrew thought, words not only had power – so whatever was said would happen – but they were also like arrows – once said they could not be withdrawn or sent again. NO. As Isaac cried, *"I have made him lord over you... sustained him with grain and new wine. So WHAT CAN I POSSIBLY DO FOR YOU, my son?"*

Esau extracted something from Isaac but it does indeed read like a curse!

God loves us so much that, as Paul reminds us, He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus our Lord. BUT it is for us to appropriate it. It is for us to make it ours.

As Joshua said to the Israelites – How long will you wait before you begin to take possession of the land the Lord, the God of your fathers, has GIVEN you?

All the promises of God are ours in Christ – so why do we wait to 'possess' them?

What do you want God to do for you?

What are the things that really matter to you?

Jacob would say to us today...

You need to work out what you really want out of life? Will you settle for the mediocre or go for gold?

Prayer

Father, it's so easy to get squashed into this world's mould and world-view. Please help me sort through my values so I live by Your standards and not this world's standards. Please don't let me settle for less. Amen.

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Lesson 2 continued: Jacob – His Blessing

Additional readings

Philippians 3:1-14; Ephesians 1:3-23; Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

Questions

Why do we need to identify our values?

What do you really want out of life?

What are your values, a) personally b) in your family c) at work d) in ministry?

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Lesson 3: Jacob – His Wives

Reading

Genesis 29:1-30.

Your potential spouse is worth both waiting for and working for!

How would you like to have been Jacob? You set your heart on a beautiful young woman, talk to the family and agree to 'work' for them for her for 7 years and when the time is up, you get 'stuck' with the sister – the elder sister at that!!

That aside, how beautiful Rachel must have been! Not many people today would have a courtship that long, let alone an engagement! What sort of guy was Jacob, to be able to contain himself that long and to respect Rachel's character for so long? And how many girls would wait that long for their guy, either?

But isn't 'true love' worth it? What does the Bible say Jacob thought of those 7 years? *"They seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her!"* Hello, this isn't a quote from some modern romantic novel or 'chick-flick' from Hollywood – this is what a 'real man' said! You might even equate him with a good Kiwi bloke!! And guess what? He even went on to work another 7 years for her!

Relationships have to be 'worked' at to last and mature. We so often want the easy approach and don't want to make strong commitments. Because we don't know how they may turn out or if a better offer may just come up. And how do I know they are the ONLY ONE or the right one for me anyway?

If love is an emotion we won't, but if love is a choice we will!

Jacob CHOSE Rachel. He made his choice and stuck with it. Can I encourage you today? If you make a choice – stick with it through thick and thin because in the end, neither of you will regret it. Why? Because God is a Covenant-keeping God and He honours those who honour Him. It's worth it just for that!

Jacob would say to us today...

I loved Rachel so much I would do it all over again for her. When you choose your wife, don't stop giving her all you've got.

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Lesson 3 continued: Jacob – His Wives

Prayer

Father, help me remember that our marriage was made in Heaven! Help me to show the love I ought to my spouse. Help me to 'work' at and for every relationship I have with my loved ones. Rekindle my love whenever it begins to grow cool, I pray. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Additional readings

Ephesians 5:22-33; Ruth 3-4; Proverbs 31:10-31.

Questions

How did Jacob show his love to Rachel?

How did Jacob show his love to Leah?

How do you show your love to your spouse (or to others)?

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Lesson 4: Jacob – Encounters Laban

Reading

Genesis 31:22-55.

All good relationships require trust, love, forgiveness and working at!

Jacob became extremely rich whilst working for Laban. First of all, he gained two wives and their maidservants, then he acquired vast flocks, herds, camels, donkeys and servants. As time went by, the inevitable happened - Jacob's servants started arguing with Laban's servants and jealousy and envy ensued. And Jacob, rather than seeking to 'deal with the issue', decided to secretly leave the area and return to his homeland without even saying "Good-bye".

However, 'issues' rarely disappear or 'go away', do they? I think it could be because God doesn't like deceit or 'unfinished' business. Rather, He is into reconciliation and wholeness, peace and love.

Laban chased after and caught up with Jacob and 'laid into him' on the pretence of Jacob having stolen something from him. (Actually, Rachel did, but that's another story!)

The outcome was that Laban thoroughly searched the whole of Jacob's 'caravan' and came up empty. Once Jacob's innocence was re-established, both Laban and Jacob entered into a Covenant. Basically, Jacob agreed not to take any other wives and both of them agreed to a 'pact of peace'. Interestingly enough, they invoked God into the agreement, making it an everlasting covenant of peace.

Reconciliation, forgiveness and trust were restored, sacrifices made and peace established. What a magnificent outcome! That's just what God wants in each of our lives. He longs for an open and vibrant relationship between Himself and us. That is why He sent Jesus to die for us. To restore us to that place of peace and intimacy.

On the Cross, however, Jesus not only made a way to restore the upright relationship with God, He also made a way to restore our relationships with one another – the horizontal relationships.

Yes, God wants us totally reconciled to Him AND to one another. It can only happen by way of the Cross. It can and does only happen that way - we just need to recognise how much we have been forgiven. Then we can 'give' back some of that forgiveness to others. It's the only way to peace!

Jacob would say to us today...

Families can be the hardest folk to love and maintain good relationships with but it is worth putting in the hard yards to remain in peace and live with respect for one another. Don't 'leave' under a cloud!

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Lesson 4 continued: Jacob – Encounters Laban

Prayer

Father, please help me to show the love I ought to all the members of my family and to the local 'Family of God' to which You have introduced me and of which I am a part. Help me to constantly seek their good and to make sure our lines of communication are clear, respectful, open and fully operational. Amen.

Additional readings

Psalm 133; Romans 12:3-21; 1 Corinthians 13.

Questions

Why are the relationships with our families the hardest and most vulnerable?

What are the ways we can nurture them?

What are the ways we can 'harm' them?

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Lesson 5: Jacob – Encounters God

Reading

Genesis 32:22-32.

A relationship with God requires devotion and passion

What was Jacob doing wrestling with God? Why did Peter walk on water? Why did David dance before the Lord when he brought the Ark to Zion? Why did Mary pour that expensive perfume over Jesus' feet? Because they all loved God and displayed their devotion in the only way they knew how at the time.

Of course, we remember that Jacob was the one who entered the scene grasping hold of Esau's heel and so we would expect him to act that way. David was a worshipper so we can expect him to be a bit of an extremist. Peter was impulsive so he didn't really think through the ramifications of his extravagance! And Mary was a woman!!!!

What did Jesus say to the woman at Sychar's well? Now is the time when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth because they are the ones He is seeking. Not - those who 'go through the motions', those who focus on the ritual, those who are purely 'mechanical' or following a religion but - those who are in a 'love' relationship with God.

Those who have 'found' something worth living for. Those who follow Someone who is worth dying for. Those who have appropriated the love of God to such a degree that nothing will get in the way of their total submission to Him. Those who can 'see' that they have a purpose on this earth, which is worth moving heaven and earth to achieve.

Just as miracles follow obedience, so inexpressible joy follows irrepressible devotion!

Jacob was never the same after his encounter with God. Neither are we!

Jacob gained a new name – "Israel" and a 'limp' to go with it. The Name gave him status and approval; the limp gave him humility and dependence on God!

Have you got both, too?

Jacob would say to us today...

Don't 'play' at Christianity. Be passionate about your relationship with God or you'll miss the greatest privilege in the journey of life.

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Lesson 5 continued: Jacob – Encounters God

Prayer

Father, please make me like Jacob, passionate in my relationship with You. Help me to never forget what it cost You to secure my forgiveness and salvation. Help me also remember that our relationship is not just for on earth but for eternity and that I need to develop it here so I enjoy it even more in Heaven. Amen.

Additional readings

Psalm 42:1-11; Revelation 3:-14-22; Mark 14:1-9.

Questions

Why do we need to be passionate in our relationship with God?

How do you reveal your passion for God?

What would it take to make you more passionate in your relationship with God?

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Lesson 6: Jacob – Encounters Esau

Reading

Genesis 33.

You have to face your fears or they will haunt you forever!

I wonder if Paul was thinking of Jacob and Esau when he wrote - *Don't let the sun go down on your wrath! Ephesians 4:26*

Jacob had run away from Esau, and his murderous intentions, to Laban. Jacob had caused the offence. He had stolen Esau's blessing and gone running. He had neither apologised nor sought forgiveness. Maybe he thought that he had forfeited that right, having plotted and 'obtained' the only blessing there was. Whatever the reason, he had denied himself the only antidote to guilt and the only source of peace.

Was that guilt the driving force behind his hard work? Was that fear the reason he decided to excel in his labours? To try and appease a sense of unworthiness and achieve some sense of security and significance?

He had 'buried' the past and the skeleton was lying upright in a cupboard ready to 'fall out' as soon as the door was opened. Sooner or later it was going to raise its ugly head! Ironically, the more successful Jacob became the sooner he would have to deal with the past catching up on him. News travels fast – 'good news' goes even faster and further. Inevitably, Esau was bound to hear about his brother's growing family and wealth.

To make matters worse, things back 'at home' were approaching a rough patch and it was time for Jacob to leave Laban and return to his own homeland – and Esau – even if he was to be just 'a neighbour'! How could he 'face' Esau? Answer – he couldn't before he had a fresh encounter with God! But he could after that. Why? Because he had found grace in the 'eyes' of God and the Lord had replaced fear and guilt with true humility. Yes, with a new name and a permanent limp!

He would face Esau, no longer in his own strength and power, but in the strength and by the grace of God alone. He had surrendered his sword for the Hand of God. Yes, he still planned to overwhelm Esau with generosity but he would leave the outcome to God. There would be no fight, no one-upmanship, and no superiority - for the 'battle' was the Lord's.

Who won? God won! Esau went back to Seir and Jacob to the 'promised land'!

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Lesson 6 continued: Jacob – Encounters Esau

Jacob would say to us today...

Most of us have 'skeletons' in the cupboard. Open the cupboard and let them out – because exposing them, facing them and dealing with them will eventually set you free from them! But hand it over to God and let Him do it!

Prayer

Father, I ask that you help me deal with any and all the skeletons You see in my cupboard. Please help me realise that as I expose them to You, You are able and willing to destroy them and set me free. Thank You Lord Jesus. Amen.

Additional readings

John 21:15-22; 1 Samuel 17:12-51; Acts 26:1-32; Ephesians 4:20-32.

Questions

Why are we afraid to face our fears?

What are the potential results of procrastination when we need to deal with an issue confronting us?

What does God need to do in your life to set you completely free from the past, from guilt or from fear?

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Lesson 7: Jacob – Blesses His Sons

Reading

Genesis 49.

You can have a lasting influence on subsequent generations

We need to love and pray for our children in the way Jacob modelled for us!

Jacob was a man and a prophet! He obviously loved all his children, albeit we know he suffered from the same weakness as his parents – in that he had and showed favouritism. (Which should be avoided at all costs by parents!!)

As you look at the various comments and ‘prophecies/blessings’ that Jacob pronounced over each of his children – and indeed – including his grandchildren, Manasseh and Ephraim – try and remember how accurate (or otherwise) they were.

Space doesn’t permit us to look at each one and so I just want to highlight a few. But also notice Jacob had the ‘capacity’ to give more than one blessing!! Reuben was dealt to for his sexual violation and so he also ‘lost’ his birthright. Joseph received a similar blessing to the one Isaac gave Jacob. However, the one I find most interesting is the one given to Judah.

I cannot think of anything Judah had done up to this point to cause Jacob to pronounce the blessing he gave Judah. The only conclusion I can make is that it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. For in it he prophesies the Sceptre to Judah! That symbol of absolute Power and Authority and it ‘rests’ on Him who *“is yet to come and to Whom it belongs.”* Furthermore, He will be ‘the Lion of the Tribe of Judah’. Who will ‘wash’ His garments in ‘wine’ and His robes in the ‘blood’ of grapes. There’s only One to whom all that fits and His Name is - JESUS!

Jacob would say to us today...

Be careful how you ‘bless’ your children. You do it primarily by modelling – by what you DO as much as what you say or pray. Try and ensure the next generation remembers you with joy!

Prayer

Father, please help me realise the dynamic power there is in prayer. That as I pray, You release blessing on those for whom I pray. Please also help me to live in such a way that my family and those with whom I come into contact are blessed. Please make my life one that will be treasured long after I am ‘at home’ with You. Amen.

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Lesson 7 continued: Jacob – Blesses His Sons

Additional readings

Deuteronomy 33; 2 Timothy 2:1-26; Romans 4:16-25; Philippians 4:8-9.

Questions

Hebrew blessings were dynamic and effective – what can we do today, which will have a similar outcome?

What would you like others to copy from your life?

What influences are you having on others, right now?