Rob Byker ***Covenant Family Ties: (4) Seeing the Face of God***

Rehoboth CRC **Genesis 32:9-12, Gen 32:30-21, Genesis 33:1-11**

August 23, 2015 **A.M.**

 ***Repairing Relationships***

 ***Motivation***

 ***Kingdome Explosion***

This is a video clip of the demolition of the Kingdome on March 26, 2000. It went down in 16 seconds. It took four years, cost 67 million to build it in the 1970’s, but it came down in just 16 seconds. Relationships can be like that. Can’t they? It takes years of effort to build a good friendship, but just one hour can bring it all down quickly. Then the question comes, “How do you build it back up? How do you repair it?”

 That’s Jacob’s concern. He desires to repair his relationship with his brother Esau, especially as he’s just received scary news: his brother is coming to meet him at the border of the land with an army of 400 armed men. If it comes to a fight, he and his family will die. Jacob must repair the relationship. But how?

 ***Wise Practices Which Repair Relationships***

I think it’s worth looking at the steps Jacob takes in repairing his relationship with Esau, but I don’t want to suggest that these steps are a magic formula that automatically repairs relationships. There is nothing automatic about relationships. There are no magic formulas. But there are wise practices that often succeed. Jacob shows us some of them.

***1) It’s Always Wise to Pray***

In chapter 32:9-12 Jacob prays one of the longer prayers in Genesis. It’s the first time we see Jacob praying and it’s a good one. Dallas Willard defines Christian prayer as “talking to God about what we are doing together.” Prayer is a kingdom conversation. And Jacob prays according to a kingdom framework. He reminds God of God’s commands: “You told me to come back here Lord” and He reminds God of his promises to prosper and protect his family Jacob describes the threat that has come against Him as a threat which has come against God’s kingdom. He says, “If I die with my children then your kingdom plan to form a people who will put your ways on display then that kingdom plan will disintegrate too.

Jacob also prays humbly Jacob knows God made the promises to him when he was a despicable liar and when he owned nothing but his staff. God is not obligated to give Jacob anything more. That’s why Jacob says, “I’m unworthy of all your kindness and faithfulness.” But God should give more for the sake of his own good, kingdom plan.

You can pray in a similar way about the broken relationship you are suffering. Appeal to God’s promises. Appeal to his character. For example, Jesus teaches us in Matthew 5:8, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.” This verse clearly pictures the Heavenly Father as the champion peacemaker. We most clearly resemble God when we engage in the work of peacemaking and reconciliation. We can pray, “Champion Peace-maker, help us walk in your ways of peace. Teach us how to defuse angry situations. Show us ways to pacify and appease those we have hurt.” Jacob shows us that prayer is a key ingredient in repairing relationships.

***It’s Always Wise to Apologize Appropriately***

 Jacob hurt Esau by tricking him out of the first born blessing. Now that blessing had a spiritual side and a material side. On the spiritual side, the covenant seed, the future Messiah would come from the family line of the who possessed the first born blessing. That’s the heart of the blessing. On the material side, the possessor of the first born blessing would inherit the majority share of Isaac’s wealth. Jacob never inherited that wealth in Genesis 27 because Isaac’s expected death did not occur. In fact, Isaac is still alive at this point in the story. But Isaac’s wealth was promised to Jacob.

 Now if you look at Esau’s character in these stories it’s clear that Esau cares for very little for spiritual blessing but cares a great deal for material wealth. So Jacob apologizes by giving gifts. Jacob reasons this way, “Esau thinks I stole potential wealth, so I’m going to make things right by lavishing gifts on him and put wealth into his pockets.” And you’ll notice the size of the gift in verse 14, Jacob gives Esau over 500 animals. That’s a huge gift even for today’s rancher. Some scholars speculate that the reference to Jacob dividing into two camps suggests that this gift represents half of his wealth.

In his book ***The Five Love Languages of Apology,*** Gary Thomas says that some people will not believe our apology unless we do something concrete and tangible to make amends for it. He shares an example of how Steve snuck into Ben’s office computer and sent out a prank e-mail to their six person work group inviting them to come to Ben’s house for New Years Eve. The prank really upset Ben. It felt like sabotage. Steve apologized but the apology didn’t take. Ben was still angry. Then Steve offered to send out correction e-mail to the work group, explaining his prank and his hope of putting things right. That act of correction succeeded in repairing the friendship.

In a similar way, Jacob sinned against Esau, by snagging Esau’s wealth, so Jacob apologizes to Esau giving Esau wealth. He says in verse 20, “I will pacify him with these gifts.” Jacob seems to know how the gifts will impact Esau. Esau is an impulsive, in the moment guy, easily moved by what he sees. Esau is the type who’ll begin the day saying, “Jacob, I’ll murder him, I’ll string him up and feed his carcass to the dogs” o look 200 female goats and 20 males, for me, from Jacob…. that’s cool! Jacob, I’ll smash him in the face. O, wow, 200 female sheep and 20 males, that’s cool. Jacob, I’ll give him a piece of my mind. What’s that? 30 female camels, 40 cows and ten bulls all from Jacob, that’s cool, you know Jacob’s not that bad of a guy. Wait, more! Fantastic! 20 female donkeys and 10 male donkeys. Wow! We need to have a party. I think I’d like to invite Jacob.

Jacob’s gift giving teaches us the importance of matching our repair with our original wrong. If we’ve broken a prized object, we shouldn’t just say, “Sorry,” we should try to fix the object. If we missed an appointment with a friend who prizes quality time, we should try to fix it by giving quality time. If we hurt someone with thoughtless words, our apology should be very thoughtful, expressing exactly how wrong our words were and expressing how much we appreciate the one we offended.

***It’s Always Wise to Honor the One You’ve Offended***

This is really just an extension of the last point. In our passage we also see Jacob bowing not once, but seven times before Esau. Seven is the number of perfection and these bows mean, “I, Jacob surrender to you Isaac. I will take second place. You are the superior. I am the inferior….and everyone in society can see it.” Each bow would have felt especially painful for a man who had been struck lame the night before.

And notice throughout the episode Jacob always refers to Esau as my lord and he refers to himself as “your servant”. He purposefully tries to honor the offended Esau. He treats him with deep respect and consideration. If you are trying to restore a relationship you broke, think of how your sin might have humiliated them in the eyes of other people and then show them honor before the same people.

 It’s possible Jacob had become something of a folk hero. Society didn’t like Jacob, but they probably admired him, in the way society often admires tricksters. Think of Frank Abagnale, the con man whose story was told in the movie, ***Catch ME If You Can.*** He’s been celebrated for impersonating pilots, and doctors and lawyers. After serving jail time, Frank enjoyed greater popularity, a huge following. Why is that? Maybe we inwardly admire cons and wish we had the skill it takes to dupe a bunch of rubes.

But society admires scammers, it sometimes smirks at those who’ve been scammed. if you get scammed, you feel like a chump in societies eyes! Remember Esau cry in chapter 27 after Jacob’s con, “Isn’t he rightly named Jacob? This is the second time he has taken advantage of me: first he took my birthright, and now he has taken my blessing!”

 Jacob rightly understood that if he wanted peace with Esau, he’d have to pay a tribute of public honor, to restore Esau’s face in society. Calling Esau, “my lord” bowing seven times, that really helped. And it was costly. Now his face was covered with dust and humiliation.

But someone says, “Wow! I can see how such costly sacrifices might repair the relationship, but I don’t think I could bow like that, or sacrifice like that. Where did Jacob find the power to do so?

***Motivation***

He found it in the face of God. As Phil mentioned, the center of Genesis 32 is Jacob’s wrestling match with the Lord. All his life, even going back to the womb, Jacob had been wrestling with Esau. HE felt like Esau was the main event of his life. If he could prevail over Esau he’d be a winner for sure. But in his wrestling match with the Lord, Jacob learned his mistake. Esau wasn’t the most important figure of his life, the Lord was. We see this in the moment Jacob’s hip goes out. He’s been fighting the angel all night but the angel has been holding back, when the angel decides to flex his muscles all he needs to do is touch, the text says he just grazes Jacob’s hip, the lightest touch and Jacob’s hip goes dead. And at that moment, Jacob stops wrestling and he starts clinging. The angel says, “Let me go it’s daybreak. You see my face under the light of day, you’ll die.” Jacob says, “So be it, I’m not going to let you go until you bless me.” I thought I needed to prevail over my brother to have blessing in life, but what I really need is your blessing. If I have your blessing, mighty stranger, then I have more treasure than the richest man. The Lord blesses him.

 Radical peace—making, radical generosity, radical love is born out of an understanding that I possess tremendous resources in God. Jacob saw this. He said, “I can afford to lose to Esau, because I have the blessing of God.” I can afford to cripple myself financially, so long as I continue to experience the Lord’s spiritual generosity. That’s what I really need. I need His blessing, the shining face of God upon my life.

 But there is one other motivation to repair relationships we glimpse in this story. Did you notice how Esau ran up to hug Jacob and kiss him? For the people of Israel, that’s one of that’s one of the most dramatic moments in the Bible. And they learn from Jacob himself, that the face of running Esau looks an awful lot like the face of their forgiving God. One day Jesus tells the story of a prodigal son who fell into sinful ways and left home to live in a far country. His life falls apart and he decides to come home to see if he can be a slave in his father’s house. When his father sees him, Jesus says, “he runs up to him, he hugs and he kisses and throws a big barbecue to celebrate his return. After all, he was lost and now he is found, he was dead and now he is alive.

 Where do you find motivation to repair relationships? You find in the face of your forgiving God, a God who runs to you, hugs you, kisses you and invites you to his banqueting table, his banner over you is love. But he didn’t just say, “Remember the fatted calf I sacrificed for you”, He says, “Remember my precious Son who spilled his blood for you.” Friends, we’ve received a big forgiveness, and that’s motivation enough can to engage in a big acts of peacemaking. Amen.