

Brent Alderman
P.O. Box 2060, Annapolis, MD 21404
240.818.3053
brent.alderman@capitolcom.org

WORRYING FOR NOTHING - LESSONS FROM JACOB (Genesis 32:1-33:5)

Mark Twain once said, "I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened." I think we can identify with that experience. How many times do we dread the outcome that just doesn't occur? How many times have we, or a family member, had to wait for medical test results to come back which filled our days and hours with fear only to find out there was nothing to be concerned about in the first place? This happens multiple times to us in many categories of our lives. Worry simply wastes our time and energy since we cannot know what the future holds. It was a particular characteristic in the life of Jacob.

You may remember that in our last study, Jacob had fled home for his life after angering his older brother, Esau, by trading for his birthright then deceiving him out of the blessing of their father, Isaac. He met God in a deeply impactful encounter at a place called Bethel, then journeyed to the home area of his mother, Rebekah. There he fell in love with a young woman, Rachel, who was the daughter of his uncle, Laban. Jacob worked for seven years for the hand of Rachel only to be betrayed by Laban, who had him marry Rachel's sister, Leah, instead. Jacob worked another seven years to be able to finally marry Rachel. Jacob and his two wives (and their maids) had thirteen children (twelve boys and one girl) before he decided to go back to Canaan, the land where he had grown up.

A GRACIOUS REMINDER

Genesis 32:1, 2 - Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" So he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

How kind God was to give this reminder to Jacob that He would still be with him. When Jacob confidently said that he recognized God's presence with him, he named the place "Mahanaim" or "two". He had had two

significant encounters with God (here and at Bethel), two visits from heavenly beings and two deeply spiritual experiences that were unforgettable. God knew what Jacob needed to be reassured and He graciously spoke to him.

God does the same for us. Whatever our worry might be (and many times it is financial) we receive the same reassurance through His Word if we are following and believing in Him.

Hebrews 13:5 - Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

A MIXED RESPONSE

Genesis 32:3-7a - And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.'"

*And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him." Then **Jacob was greatly afraid** and distressed.*

On this trip home, with all his family and possessions, Jacob knew he would encounter Esau. Even though it had been twenty years since they had last had contact, Jacob held the possibility in his mind that Esau was still carrying a grudge and wanted to see him dead. When he sent messengers ahead to meet Esau and let him know he was coming, Jacob now heard that Esau had a pretty menacing entourage.

Jacob, who was already convinced Esau wanted to kill him, began to fear seeing his twin brother again. But, to his credit, Jacob had the presence of mind to seek God and he prayed, showing the mixed response he had about the whole situation.

*Genesis 32:11, 12 - **Please deliver me from the hand of my brother**, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. But you said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'*"

What a great example to us today, that even in times of distress and worry, God is never more than a prayer away and hears those who truly seek Him and His help.

AN ELABORATE REVIEW

Another thing Jacob devised was a parade comprised of 550 animals in separate groupings (droves) as a present to Esau. Imagine this sight described as hundreds of male and female goats, cows, sheep, camels and donkeys made their way past Esau. Jacob's instructions to his employees were simply that

*Genesis 32:20, 21 - you shall say, 'Moreover, your servant Jacob is behind us.' For he thought, "**I may appease him** with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterward I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me." So the present passed on ahead of him.*

Maybe Jacob was still acting out of a lack of faith in God. Maybe he was just feeling guilty for how he had treated Esau twenty years earlier. Maybe he thought this would be the only way to keep from being killed. At any rate, the gift was arranged and sent ahead to hopefully appease Esau as Jacob was still clearly worried about what might happen.

Isn't that exactly how we can react? Our unjustified worry can take over our common sense, causing us to concoct plans that we hope change the course of the future. But worry never changes anything.

A WARM REUNION

After all his fear, after all the sleeplessness and pacing, after all his scheming to put a positive plan in place, the time came for Jacob to finally reunite with Esau. It was time for him to find out if all the worry had been worth it.

*Genesis 33:1, 3-5 - And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants. He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. **But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him** and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. And when Esau lifted up his eyes and saw the women and children, he said, "Who are these with you?" Jacob said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant."*

All that worry for nothing. Esau was glad to see him and wanted to restore their relationship. All of the past hurt had been forgiven and the twin brothers were together again. Even though they soon separated, the restoration was real and in a few years they came together to bury their father, Isaac.

How often would we avoid unnecessary pain if we could simply trust God, who knows the future? Jesus knew this truth and spoke directly to our tendency to respond with worry. His words are the most comfort no matter what we may be dealing with.

*Matthew 6:27-34 - And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? **Therefore do not be anxious**, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. **But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness**, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

BIBLE STUDY

Staff (Outside of Session)

Thursdays, 12:00 p.m.

Room 415 James Senate Office Building