

# GENESIS 33

## HUMBLE PIE; THE THOUGHT IS BITTER BUT THE TASTE IS SWEET

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One of the most decisive moments in our lives is when we admit our need. That admission is what it took to turn Tracey Bailey around. Bailey writes in *Guideposts* that in 1993 he stood in the White House Rose Garden in the presence of the president of the United States to receive the National Teacher of the Year Award. He had come a long way. Some fifteen years earlier he had stood as a teenager in the presence of a county judge in an Indiana courtroom to be sentenced to jail. Bailey had gone on a drunken rampage with his friends, vandalizing a high school, had been caught and found guilty. Nevertheless Bailey stood before the judge with his head held high, the words of his high school wrestling coach ringing in his ears: "Don't you ever hang your head. Don't admit defeat. The minute you do, it's over."

The judge looked at the proud teenager and stunned the courtroom with Bailey's sentence: five years in the Indiana youth center, a prison one step below the state penitentiary.

Tracey Bailey went to jail with his head still held high, but it took only a few months for reality to set in. One day as he sat in solitary confinement with nothing more than a metal cot, a sink, and a toilet, he realized what a mistake he had made. He began to weep. More important, he began to pray to God. "God, I need help," he said. "I am defeated without you."

That was a turning point for Tracey Bailey. He joined a prison Bible study and began taking college correspondence courses. After fourteen months in jail he was released on probation, and after further college studies he became a science teacher in Florida. With these words he summarizes the lesson he had learned in life: "I bowed my head and tasted victory."

Have you ever had to eat crow, as the old saying goes? I have. In fact, at times it has become a standard part of my diet. I have had to eat more crow than I care to recount. Dining on crow isn't usually done on a whim: quite the contrary. Crow is usually eaten and digested after a prolonged space of brooding and mulling over things. I usually eat crow after I have relived certain events in my mind over and over and over again. After I have replayed events and words in my mind for a sleepless night or two, I usually get a revelation. Most of the time the revelation is that I was wrong, or at least that I acted wrongly, even if I was right in principle. Like the prophet Daniel, the truth is bitter in my belly. It is at this point that I also realize that I am going to have to do something

about this bitterness. I don't have to go far for a cure though. The prescription has always been the same. The cure for the bitterness and the brooding is humility and apology.

This runs contrary to our human/ Adamic nature. We don't like having to say we are sorry or that we were wrong. We tend to spend the majority of our time attempting to justify our actions. However, after my pride has been swallowed, along with the crow, the relief is almost immediate. Relationships get better. Situations and circumstances get resolved or at least begin to be resolved, and a peace comes that allows me to begin to enjoy life again. The dread is gone and I can get back to the task at hand.

I imagine that this dread of upcoming events was something like what Jesus experienced in the garden before going to the cross. He even asked if there was another way, but then realized that it had to happen the way it did for the benefit of everyone. The entering of Jesus into our world as a man is referred to as the “**Great Humiliation.**” There can be no greater example of humility than God becoming man and taking our sins and our punishment when he had not sinned Himself.

Today, in Genesis 33, Jacob will reunite with the brother that he had wronged. The event that he had been dreading for some time had come upon him. Today we will see how things turned out for the two estranged brothers.

**Gen 33:1** Now Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and there, Esau was coming, and with him were four hundred men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maidservants.

**Gen 33:2** And he put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph last.

**Gen 33:3** Then he crossed over before them and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

**Gen 33:4** But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

**Gen 33:5** And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, "Who *are* these with you?" So he said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant."

**Gen 33:6** Then the maidservants came near, they and their children, and bowed down.

**Gen 33:7** And Leah also came near with her children, and they bowed down. Afterward Joseph and Rachel came near, and they bowed down.

We have to remember that it was only the night before that Jacob wrestled with God. That may be a foggy memory for us since we studied it last week, but the events we have here in chapter 33 come bright and early the morning following Jacob's great encounter with God. As we will see, this encounter changed Jacob's life and the way he is able to handle his next encounter, namely that of his big brother and his 400 armed men.

We can see in verse 1 that as he saw Esau coming, Jacob divided his family up by order of importance to him. This is noteworthy, because it shows us that while Jacob's life had changed, and he was no longer as fearful as he once was, he still played favorites.

We are saved instantaneously, but we are still a work in progress. Jacob is a prime example of that.

Jacob placed the female servants and his children they bore in front, followed by Leah and her children with Rachel and Joseph, the only child mentioned by name in the rear. This shows us that there is still some trepidation or uneasiness in Jacob concerning this reunion. I don't want to get on him too harshly, after all he isn't sure how Esau is going to act and he is concerned about the welfare of his family. You have to give him props there.

But I believe that we can all see that though there is concern, there is no longer the panic that once defined his life. There is a big difference.

Jacob then goes on before or ahead of his family and as he does so he bows himself in obeisance to Esau 7 times. This is a healthy dose of crow, or humble pie. He is letting Esau know that he comes in peace. His offerings of livestock weren't a gaudy show of wealth. They were gifts meant to show that he came as a servant.

At any rate Esau comes up and the two embrace. This had to be a relief. The first words from Esau were of love and peace. This is what everyone wants in the end.

Upon Esau's enquiry Jacob then introduces his family and they all bowed as they were introduced. Esau then asks what all the droves of livestock were about.

**Gen 33:8** Then Esau said, "What *do you mean by* all this company which I met?" And he said, "*These are* to find favor in the sight of my lord."

**Gen 33:9** But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself."

**Gen 33:10** And Jacob said, "No, please, if I have now found favor in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me.

**Gen 33:11** Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough." So he urged him, and he took *it*.

Remember that Jacob had stolen Esau's birthright. He couldn't give that back, but he could make restitution with his wealth.

We have to understand this also. God blesses us in many ways. Some have been blessed financially, others in other ways. Jacob used his God-

given wealth to make restitution to someone that he had wronged. While it had been prophesied that the elder would serve the younger, the way Jacob had acquired the blessing was wrong.

The point is that Jacob could not with a clear conscience continue to go about as a representative of God knowing that there was bitterness between his brother and himself. We have to work on that same principle. Jesus said that even if we go to our place of worship and give an offering, if we are fighting with someone that we should leave the offering and reconcile before we return to worship. Bitterness and unforgiveness will eat you up from the inside out.

The forgiveness doesn't excuse the past deed. It allows us to go on with our lives and not harbor grudges that inevitably affect our relationship with God and others. Just look at how much God has forgiven us. He hasn't asked us to do anything that He hasn't already done.

The Bible tells us not to let the Sun go down on our anger. That means **don't go to bed angry. We should reconcile as quickly as possible.**

The two brothers then dicker over whether or not Esau will take the gift of livestock. Eventually he does and the debt is considered paid.

At this point they talk about heading south toward home.

**Gen 33:12** Then Esau said, "Let us take our journey; let us go, and I will go before you."

**Gen 33:13** But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children *are* weak, and the flocks and herds which are nursing *are* with me. And if the men should drive them hard one day, all the flock will die.

**Gen 33:14** Please let my lord go on ahead before his servant. I will lead on slowly at a pace which the livestock that go before me, and the children, are able to endure, until I come to my lord in Seir."

**Gen 33:15** And Esau said, "Now let me leave with you *some* of the people who *are* with me." But he said, "What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord."

**Gen 33:16** So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir.

Esau was ready to head back home. He was traveling with 400-armed men while Jacob was traveling with livestock, women and young children. He used this as an excuse not to return home with Esau. This may mean that he still didn't trust Esau wholeheartedly. It might have indeed been the truth. However, Esau went on ahead and Jacob followed at a slower pace. I think he was still feeling out the situation. Once again that would be prudent. He also turned down Esau's offer of an armed escort. I also believe that Jacob's encounter with God the night before left him with some discernment. That is, he senses that it isn't in his best interest to accompany his brother. Esau is still a very carnal man.

Our encounter with God should leave us leery of fellowship with those that don't hold the same values as we do. Sometimes that means that certain relationships we have maintained in the past have to be modified if not severed.

Living with Esau could easily bring Jacob's family into a situation like that of Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah.

I believe this why Jacob doesn't go all the way to Seir.

**Gen 33:17** And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, built himself a house, and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

**Gen 33:18** Then Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which *is* in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram; and he pitched his tent before the city.

**Gen 33:19** And he bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money.

**Gen 33:20** Then he erected an altar there and called it El Elohe Israel.

So Jacob journeyed to the West about 20 miles instead of going south for another 100 miles following his brother. There he set up a more permanent camp, naming the place Succoth, meaning booths, cottage or stables.

He then went to the city of Shechem and bought a parcel of land where he erected an altar to God.

Abraham built an altar in Shechem years before. Perhaps Jacob rebuilt it, I don't know.

He named the altar El Elohe Israel, meaning God, the God of Israel.

This is a statement of faith coming on the heels of God delivering Jacob from a dreaded event that had to take place. I think it is fitting that we proclaim our faith, testify if you will when we have been delivered from something that we have been dreading.

We should also seek to reconcile with those with which we are currently at odds.

Humility and apology are the cure. They are bitter when we think about them, but they bring about peace and are then sweet after they go down.

In Guideposts, Ronald Pinkerton describes a near accident he had while hang gliding. He had launched his hang glider and been forcefully lifted 4,200 feet into the air. As he was descending, he was suddenly hit by a powerful new blast of air that sent his hang glider plummeting toward the ground.

*I was falling at an alarming rate. Trapped in an airborne riptide, I was going to crash! Then I saw him – a red – tailed hawk. He was six feet off my wingtip, fighting the same gust I was...*

*I looked down: 300 feet from the ground and still falling. The trees below seemed like menacing spikes.*

*I looked at the hawk again. Suddenly he banked and flew straight downwind. Downwind! If the right air is anywhere, it's upwind! The hawk was committing suicide.*

*Two hundred feet. From nowhere the thought entered my mind: Follow the Hawk. It went against everything I knew about flying. But now all my knowledge was useless. I was at the mercy of the wind. I followed the hawk. One hundred feet. Suddenly the hawk gained altitude. For a split second I seemed to be suspended motionless in space. Then a warm surge of air started pushing the glider upward. I was stunned. Nothing I knew as a pilot could explain this phenomenon. But it was true: I was rising.*

On occasion we all have similar “downdrafts” in our lives, reversals in our fortunes, humiliating experiences. We want to lift ourselves up, but God’s Word, like that red-tailed hawk, tells us to do just the opposite. God’s Word tells us to dive – to humble ourselves, God will send a thermal wind that will lift us up.