

From the Hands of Esau

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon explores Jacob's journey of confronting his past and the transformative power of humility and spiritual preparation in overcoming challenges.

Duration: 27:51

Scripture: Genesis 32:1-2, Genesis 32:6-7, Genesis 33:1-2, John 5:24, Galatians 6:7

Topics: "Esau"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Jacob and his encounter with his brother Esau after many years of separation. Jacob, feeling guilty about his past actions, feared that Esau and his four hundred armed men were out to harm him. He prayed to God for deliverance and was taken to the river Jabok where he was broken and had his hip dislocated. The preacher emphasizes the importance of spiritual preparation and facing one's past before moving forward. Ultimately, Jacob and Esau reconcile and embrace each other, highlighting the power of forgiveness and the outcome being decided before the actual event.

Transcript

Now, in the book of Genesis, the 32nd chapter, Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host, and he called the name of the place Mahanaim. And Jacob sent messengers before him, to Esau his brother, unto the land of Seir, country of Edom.

And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau. Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now, and I have oxen, and asses, and flocks, and men's servants, and women's servants, and I have sent to tell my lord that I might find grace in thy sight. And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee four hundred men with him.

And Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed, and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and the herds, and the camels, into two bands, and said, If Esau come to the one company and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape. And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which settest unto me, return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee. I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant, for with my staff I have passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.

Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him lest he will come and smite me and the mother with the children. Now in 33rd, Jacob lifted up his eyes. There intervened here Jacob's experience at Jabba, where God transformed him and changed his name from Jacob to Israel.

And then Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah and unto Rachel and unto the two handmaids. And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph handermost.

And he passed over before them and bowed himself to the ground seven times, till he came near to his brother. And Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. Now I've been reading this story again for the sake of refreshing my mind about what happened here.

And I find there was a great deal of deception and dishonesty and lying and intrigue and treachery. All of it is woven in here. Everybody was guilty but old stupid Isaac.

He wasn't in it, but Rebecca was, his wife. And Esau was a better man than Jacob. But this is the story of how a man who wasn't very good by nature, got delivered from the hand of a man who wasn't any good by grace.

And he got delivered from Esau, his brother, and out of the hand of Esau in a way that he never dreamed possible. Now you know the story of how Jacob had committed a great wrong against his brother Esau. First he had wiggled around so as to catch Esau when he was hungry, and he knew that Esau lived for his stomach.

So he waited till Esau was hungry, and then he brewed up a mess of good soup that smelled up the place and made any man hungry. And when Esau arrived hungry, Jacob held it tantalizingly before him and said, sell me your birthright and it's yours. Well Esau would have sold anything at that moment, so he said it's yours.

So he thus got the birthright that belonged to Esau. And Isaac, by that sort of an automatic blessing that he had, blessed Jacob, not knowing it was Jacob. And when he blessed him it was irreversible, he couldn't get it back.

So Esau wept and said, have you no blessing for me? And he said, I have a tattered remnant of a blessing which I'll give you, but the main blessing belongs to your brother Jacob. And Jacob, of course, I mean Esau now, because of what Jacob had done, was angry. And he said, according to the customs of our people, I've got to wait around until my father dies, Isaac, and when he dies I'm going to have to put on certain garments and mourn him for a while.

And it wouldn't be becoming of me at the time of my mourning to kill my brother, but he said that will only last a few months, and when the time of mourning for my father is over I'm going to kill my brother. And Rebekah was sneaking around somewhere, she always had her ear to the tent door, and she was sneaking about some place and she heard it. So she said to Jacob, her favorite, she said, now you've got to get out of here because your life isn't worth that, your brother's angry with you and he's going to kill you and I know him and he's got a hard jaw and he's a rough man of the forest and he'll kill you, so you go into my people.

And she lied to her husband about why she wanted him to go, and she started him off and Jacob went. And you know that story, I'm sure, it was a long one. And then 20 long years passed by and now Jacob is about to come back into the land again.

He's never seen his brother since. And he's got to meet his brother and he knows he has to meet him the next day and he knows he's meeting him with 400 armed men. And Jacob, of course, because he had a bad conscience about the whole deal, he just concluded that those 400 armed men were out to get him.

I don't know why it would take 400, but he had them. And he said, now these 400 armed men, I'm dead. So he got on his knees and he prayed, oh God, deliver me, deliver me out of the hand of my brother, out of the hand of Esau.

He had it coming, he had it coming, no question about it. So the Lord took him to the river Jabbok and broke him and put his hip out a joint and humbled him and made him confess his wickedness and blessed him. And by blessing Jacob he conquered Esau.

Now that's the story and I won't develop it for the time that I have. Now, first of all, Jacob had to cross the river Jabbok. And I'd like to say to you that whether he would or not, he had to cross it because Esau was out there after him and his family was out there.

When I read that, I thought about you and me and yours and mine and ours, and I thought that we have to wait across the river Jabbok and meet our yesterday, whether we like it or not. We got it to do. Now I know that when the Lord saves us, we come not into judgment, but have passed from death unto life.

I know also that there is a law of sowing and reaping right down here in this world, and it's only by the grace of God that we ever escape our yesterdays. We must wait across that river Jabbok to meet our yesterday. And a sworn foe was waiting out there on the plain to fight against Jacob, and he's waiting out there to fight against you and me.

And every sane person will consider and look for a way. Now, this man Jacob didn't know it, but God knew it, that the way God conquers our enemies to conquer us. So there was a spiritual preparation, and he made it, and it was vital.

Because if God hadn't got to Jacob and humbled him, humbled him completely, then Jacob could never have presented the meek and lowly aspect that he did to his brother. If he'd gone out there with his chin out and his knuckles white, he would have been a dead man in short order, because he had it coming. And all history would have said, I'm on Esau's side here, because Esau only did what was right to do.

He was a Bedouin, and he believed in justice, and he'd waited twenty years to get even, and I'm on Esau's side. And God knew that, and Jacob knew it, and Esau knew it. And I don't know whether he'd ever told his wives, but if so, they knew it, and they were on their brother-in-law's side, rather on Jacob's side.

And Jacob was in a jam here, and it said he feared greatly, as he had certainly a right to do. Now, God knew it was necessary to prepare a man spiritually if he was going to get out of the hand of Esau, and so God forced Jacob to get ready. And I say to you, my friend, that for all your tomorrows, whether they are of your making or not.

Now, not all of your tomorrows will be of your own making. Not all of your tomorrows will be your yesterdays projected forward, but there will be some of your yesterdays in your tomorrows, you may be

sure of that. And when you meet your tomorrows, whatever they may be, why, you've got to be prepared.

Nowadays we say we prepare by a liberal education, and I suppose that's important enough, but I can't see what a B.A. or an M.A. or even a P.H.D. would have done to get Jacob out of the hand of Esau. So that wasn't what he needed. Somebody else said we need a technical education, but I can't see what a technical education would have done for the man Jacob.

He was in a tight spot. He had his family there. He knew that if he ran away, they held his family as hostage.

I remember dry old Lord Francis Bacon, who never cracked a joke in his life, said a funny thing. He said, He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune. And nobody knows it any better than the man who's caught like this.

He's got wife and child, and he isn't afraid, but he's afraid for his children's sake. Communists take advantage of that today, and gangsters take advantage of it, and warn a man, if you want your little girl to get to school safely every morning, you do so-and-so. He's given hostages to fortune, so technical education wouldn't have helped him here.

Then somebody says economic security, but this man Jacob was economically secure. Do you notice what he had? He said, now when they asked him, What is all this? He said, All that is mine. All those camels and all the rest, they belong to me.

God's given them to me. So one thing Jacob had to learn here, and I hope you will learn it with me this morning, is that you've got to cross over that river and meet your yesterday. And the second is that spiritual preparation is vital for the meeting of it.

And the third is that the outcome was decided before the event. No battle is ever won on the day that it is fought. I preached a whole sermon on that, and so I'll only mention it here.

It's here, it's a part of this, woven into the warp and woof of this story, that no battle is won the day it is fought. They say in England that the British win their battles on the playing field to Eton. I suppose they mean by that that they bring up their young people, the ones that go to Eton, and they bring them up so well and make such leaders out of them that they prepare them for their battles when they're boys in their teens and early twenties.

And then when the time comes, the responsibility of a war is on them. They can win because they prepared ahead of time. I know that's true.

No battle's ever won the day it's fought. Always they're won before they're fought. And no battle's ever lost the day it's fought.

Saul died on Gilboa, but he lost at Endor when he went to see the witch and called up Samuel. And Samuel came up and told him he'd be dead before tomorrow morning. When Judas fell, but Judas didn't fall the night of the betrayal.

Judas was the type of man that would have stood up to it. But Judas had been fleecing the little treasury and robbing and taking money out of the little bag. Poor disciples, they hadn't very much.

A few pennies here and a few pennies there, and they kept it in a little leather bag. And they made Judas the treasurer, and they picked the wrong man. I don't know why churches don't do better, but they just did like a lot of churches, they got the wrong man for treasurer.

I don't think we have the wrong man here, but they do it sometimes, and they got the wrong man. So Judas kept reaching in and taking out bits, and so he broke himself down and down and down, and lost character and strength and ability to say no to temptation. And when the hour came that he would sell out his lord for 30 pieces of dirty silver, he sold it.

But it wasn't the night he made the bargain with the Jews that he fell. It was back down the three years that he'd been stealing money out of the public treasury. Another thing that Jacob learned here to get out of the hand of Esau, he had to learn this, that all life is at its roots spiritual.

And so the solution to all our problems is spiritual. All real dangers are spiritual dangers, and actually there aren't any other kind. Jesus said once, don't fear him who's able to kill your body, but fear him that's able to cast your body and your soul into hell.

Your problem, he said, your danger is spiritual danger, not a physical danger. And your visible enemies are rarely your real enemies. The man that comes at you with a gun, he is not your real enemy, though his intention may be to kill you.

But your real enemy is that in you which makes you vulnerable to him. And so while Esau was Jacob's enemy because of what Jacob had done, nevertheless Esau was not Jacob's real enemy. Jacob was Jacob's enemy, and the crookedness in Jacob's heart, it was that that was against Jacob.

And when God straightened that out, Esau wasn't his enemy anymore. And so all our real dangers are spiritual, and if you'll get your inward life fixed up, your outward enemies will be helpless. When the devil came around to Jesus, Christ said of him, he hath nothing in me.

I say again and repeat that the devil can only get in you if he has something in there that belongs to him. But if he doesn't have anything in there that belongs to him, he can only go around the outside and growl. He can't get in.

All problems have their spiritual solution, remember that. If we get adjusted to the will of God, we win, and if we don't get adjusted to the will of God, we lose, and it's as simple as that. Then I think that Jacob learned here what he couldn't have learned anywhere else, that a God-conquered man is unconquerable.

That is, Jacob was a sorry figure in those early years, you know, scheming and calculating and bargaining and lying and fleeing and deceiving and cheating and being cheated and painting cattle ring-streaked and speckled and bargaining and dickering with his father-in-law and fighting in his own strength. And then God came along and broke the strength of Jacob and made him into Israel because he'd prevailed. And when God conquered him, he after that lived and died a prince in Israel.

So God conquers our foes by conquering us. Now this is the hard one for us to take. We don't like it.

But if you could just remember that, that God always conquers your enemy by conquering you. God never fights on the side of a man who has his fists clenched. And so if you're going out there and knock the block off of that fellow, God will just let you knock it off if you can, but the probability or even a possibility at any rate that your block will suffer a little in the process.

So the Lord isn't out there fighting on the side of the man who's out to knock another man's block off. But if you'll humble yourself, you notice, I think it's amusing. I don't think there's humor in the Bible, contrary to the book somebody shouldn't have written just lately and did.

But I don't think there's humor in the Bible, but I think for us it's funny to hear this bold man Jacob saying, go and tell my Lord Esau, go and tell my Lord. You may make a Lord out of him. Go tell my Lord Esau.

Tell him that his servant is on his way. Ah, there was a day when Jacob wouldn't have talked like that. There was the day when he demanded his rights, and now he was bowing and scraping and saying, go tell my Lord Esau.

Well, I say that God conquered the man's enemies by conquering the man, and it's always that way, and we don't like it that way. We don't like it. We like God to come on our side.

Oh God, come and make me victorious. Always the wrong prayer to make. Come and be thou victorious.

And when he conquers you, then your enemies are automatically dead. I have said and repeat that when the Lord came to me a good many years ago and gave me Exodus 23 for my life, I think it's almost become my life chapter, when he gave me that and told me that he would make my enemies turn their backs on me. I have believed from that hour to this that the only part of my enemy that I have any right to seize the back of his neck.

My enemy can't bother me as long as I keep myself under the hand of God. When I render up my sword, then I'm victorious, and once as long as I hold it, then I'm lost. That is when I'm fighting in my own strength.

Fire can't burn over twice over the same place, and neither can the conquest of God burn twice over the same place. When he moves in on your soul and humbles you beneath him, then after that he'll see to it nobody else can do it. And then the last point is that Jacob learned when he got out of the hand of Esau that humility wins where force can never win.

Now if Jacob, I say, had carried a weapon, Jacob and Esau would have had it out there on the plain, and their horrified children and wives would have stood around and watched them while they doiled it out there on the plain. And Jacob, being crippled, would probably have lost out, because Esau was a man of the plain. Jacob, you know, was always more or less a man of the tent.

He stayed around and helped Mama. And Esau went out and hunted, and that's why Isaac and Rebekah weren't together on their family. But humility always wins where force can't win.

He won by surrendering first to God and then to Esau. And Jacob appears very well in a humble dress. He appears better in humble dress than he did in the bold dress of other days.

Do not imagine that it's a sign of weakness to be humble. It's a sign of strength, and it's a sign of weakness when we become arrogant and proud. It's not degrading to us to take the lowly place, not at all.

I remember the Welsh preacher, that a man came to him and said he was having trouble in his home. And my friend the Welsh preacher said, Well, I don't know your home, and I don't know you, and I don't know your wife, and I only know one side of your story. But I do know one thing, that when there's trouble in the home, almost always humility will take care of it.

One side or the other will take care of it. It's pretty hard to have a fight all by yourself. And so if there's only one side fighting, the fight will sort of die out from want of fuel.

I have a little grandson, Tommy, a year or a year and a half or two. I don't know, they grow up so fast. Maybe two by this time.

And he's so good-natured and loving and friendly that he wakes up at night and has a little chat with himself. Tells himself jokes and laughs uproariously. And our son writes and says he wakes up as eerie, he said.

You wake up in the night and you hear Tommy and you wonder if somebody's in talking with him. He's not, he's talking to himself. He's not abnormal, he's okay.

But he's just a happy boy having a conversation all by himself. Now that's an unusual thing. I don't mean he's unusually bright, though it could be too, but he's just unusual in that he's carrying on a conversation with only one fellow present.

And I suppose that it would be unusual, it'd have to be unusual for a fight to take place with only one person fighting. So he said, I don't know you near your wife, but I know that in the trouble in the home, humility usually cures it. So remember that, Paul.

And the next time this trouble takes a holy place, now I know it isn't easy. I well know that it isn't easy. But I also know that it does, it is God's way.

Humility wins when force can't possibly win. And again, we're over against that, is that pride and stubbornness and self-will always weaken our moral strength and alienate us from men and put us in a position where God can't help us. Well, to sum up, we're compelled to cross our jabbok.

Some of them, some of those crossings will be of our own making, we might as well admit it. I've gone over a few times and faced up to some fellas that I wouldn't like to face up to, but I had to. You'll have to, we all have to.

Some of those crossings won't be of our own making, but we'll be carrying the cross for Christ. And the terrible part about it all is that our loved ones are in danger along with us. You know, the best protection your family can have is a humble father.

That's the best protection. God won't let a man destroy a humble household. He won't let an enemy come in and destroy a house where the head of the house is humble before God.

God puts an umbrella over such homes. I don't say that he might not allow sickness to come. I do not say that he might not in his sovereign wisdom even take some of them home.

But I do say that there'll be no injury done. You see, there's a difference between being hurt and being injured. There's a difference between having real harm done to you and really being bruised a bit.

And in the goodwill of God, he lets his children get bruised, but there's never anything finally that can hurt them. You can't hurt a good man, you can't injure finally a good man. Well, we can head off troubles, we can head off the enemies out there.

People ask me, how are you getting along up in Canada? And I tell them, I don't know how I'm getting along, I just know they're the nicest people in the world. And they're treating me as if I was relative of the Prince of Wales, and I don't understand it. One of these days the devil will get through, one of these days.

And when he does, by the grace of God, I want him headed off. It is I want to get to God before he gets to me, that is, before the devil gets to me. So if we go down in complete surrender, we take a shortcut to victory.

And if we stand up and fight for ourselves, we take a shortcut to defeat. Our God loves such doings on our part, he loves to have us humble ourselves. Won't hurt you a bit to say, my Lord Esau.

Won't hurt you a bit to say, tell Esau his servant is on his way, that's you. Won't hurt you a bit to humble yourself and take the lowly place. For look, was there ever a lowlier place than he took, who was Lord of lords and King of kings, and whose feet angels and seraphim and cherubim do continually kneel in the door? And yet was there ever anybody took a lower place? He became a man and that was lowly enough.

He became a poor man and that was still further down. And he became a man and died and that was still further down. And then he died the shameful death of the cross and that was as far down as you can go.

And for this God raised him, set him at his own right hand, made him to be head over all things. And as he was, so are we in this world. So we get out of the hand of Esau by learning that spiritual preparation is vital and the outcome is not decided the day the battle's fought, but it's decided back through the years in our spiritual relation to God.

And that a God-conquered man can't be conquered and that humility wins where force can't possibly win. Now those are simple lessons, almost kindergarten lessons, but oddly enough they're lessons the great big busy church out there never heard and never understood. You and I have it here.

May God enable us to get hold of it and let it get hold of us. Amen.

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