

I. The Scene

- A. He hasn't slept in two nights. He's older now, but he's heading back to where the disaster started. He's on the road home to meet the brother he robbed twenty years ago. He robbed his brother of everything, not just money, but his future too.
- B. And the message just came up the line. His brother is coming to meet him. And his brother was a thug, always bigger, always stronger, and he never showed up alone.
- C. The report also said his brother was armed.
 - 1. It's too late to run. It's too late to hide. Unless something happens, it's over.
- D. His mind races for solutions. He tries praying... but he gives up on that fast. He's not going to pray away his brother's fury.
- E. He decides his only way out is money. Lots and lots of money.
- F. He decides his only way out is leverage. He will try to buy his tomorrow with the spoils of his yesterday.
- G. It's a long shot, but it's all he's got.
- H. He calls in his guys, loads them with bags of cash, and sends them out to find his brother. The amount of money is staggering. Even he is blown away by how much fortune he has amassed. So be it. He'll pay any price to soften the blows sure to come.
- I. "Maybe I can buy him off. Maybe when he sees the money, he'll let me live.
- J. "Maybe forgive me? Maybe even accept me?"
- K. Impossible, he knows.
- L. He tries to sleep but he can't. He's waiting for dawn's showdown to come.
- M. When the sun comes up, he does the only thing he can do. He walks out to meet his fate.

II. Welcome

- A. This is not a story from yesterday's urban warfare. It's one of the oldest stories in the world. But it reads like a soap opera.
- B. Because many of us today have someone we wronged, someone we owe, someone whose forgiveness we are trying to earn before we dare look them in the eye.
- C. And for many people—maybe for most people—that includes God. We've wronged him. We owe him.
- D. In our story, the frightened man's name is Jacob.
- E. The brother he owes, the one coming for him, is Esau. Twenty years ago, Jacob stole his brother's birthright, and then he stole the blessing that went with it. Jacob conspired. He schemed. He lied. He pulled off an epic heist.
- F. And then he ran. Jacob built a life in a far country, married, grew rich, raised children. And now he is coming home, and he's haunted by a debt that never got paid.

III. Welcome to Pathway.

- A. We are continuing our Fall series, and we are going to spend our whole time together studying one of the most weird-sounding concepts in the Bible.
- B. Let's get into the Word.
 - 1. *"When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it."* (Leviticus 23:10-11)
 - 2. *"But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."* (1 Corinthians 15:20)

IV. The Series

- A. Leviticus brings us back to the third book in the Bible. This is one of the five books of Moses, together called the Law.
- B. Leviticus especially is the book of the religious laws of God's people. The offerings. The sacrifices. The priesthood. The civil regulations. And the thing we are most interested in, the Festivals.
- C. Leviticus chapter 23 outlines 7+1 annual festivals across the calendar of the Jews.
 - 1. **The Festivals**
 - a) **The Feast of Passover (Leviticus 23:4-5)**
 - b) **The Feast of Unleavened Bread (23:6-8)**
 - c) **The Feast of Firstfruits (23:9-14)**
 - d) **The Feast of Pentecost (23:15-21)**
 - e) **The Feast of Trumpets (23:23-25)**
 - f) **The Day of Atonement (23:26-32)**
 - g) **The Feast of Tabernacles (23:33-44)**
- D. Each festival is detailed. Their rituals are explained in multiple places in the Bible. And together they add up to a cycle of reminders that God's people have special rights and privileges before Him. God's people have an inheritance that nobody else has.
- E. So our series is called: **Birthright**.
- F. Once you know your Birthright and really embrace it, you face a question:
 - 1. **What miracles would happen if you really believed you are who God says you are and you really embraced what God says you have?**
- G. We are taking each festival one by one. Today we come to number three on the list. The Feast of Firstfruits.
- H. My title today is: **UNREJECTED**

V. The Event

- A. And strange enough, this brings us back to an early morning showdown between two estranged brothers.
- B. Sure enough the frightened man sees his brother in the distance... he's impossible to miss because he's brought with him 400 men. Heavily armed men.
- C. This is the man he robbed, the man he cheated out of his birthright and blessing, the man who had every reason to walk up and wring his scrawny neck.

- D. The man he was sure had rejected him forever.
- E. When the brother—his name is Esau—sees Jacob, the conniver, he starts running. But not for the reason you might expect.
- F. In fact, he runs for the reason you would least likely expect.
 - 1. *“But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.”* (Genesis 33:4)
- G. Esau comes running, tears streaming, arms open wide. He throws his strong arms around Jacob's neck, pulls him in, and kisses him. And the two estranged brothers stand in the road holding each other, embracing each other, and they weep.
- H. Twenty years of guilt and shame melting away.
- I. Four hundred warriors looking on. It doesn't matter. Just two long-alienated brothers, without a word, reconciled.
- J. This is a moment for the ages. It's epic. It's a picture of love and grace that no one saw coming.
- K. If that's not amazing enough, it gets even better. Hold that thought, and let's go back to the feast of Firstfruits... and figure out what on earth it has to do with Jacob and Esau.

VI. The Feast of Firstfruits

A. The Bible describes 5 key elements for the Feast of Firstfruits.

1. **THE LAND. This feast could only be kept in the Promised Land. (Leviticus 23:10)**

- a) The law of Moses triggered this feast with the words: When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest...”
- b) In other words, when you get to the Promised Land.
- c) This feast was not for slaves in Egypt. It was for people who were set free, at home, standing in the inheritance God had promised them.
- d) People who had been rejected so long that acceptance sounded too good to be true.
- e) The meaning of firstfruits is specifically meant for believers in Jesus.

2. **THE SHEAF. The firstfruits were literally the first batches of produce that were harvested in the season. (Leviticus 23:10)**

- a) The very first grain you harvested off the field, you brought that before God.
- b) You brought that sheaf of bundled grain to the priest and the priest took it from there.

3. **THE PRIEST. The priest, not the farmer, presented the sheaf. (Leviticus 23:11)**

- a) The Bible says “The priest shall wave the sheaf before the LORD.” The farmer stood back and watched.
- b) The farmer stopped working and the priest started working.

4. **THE WAVE OFFERING. The sheaf was lifted up, not burned, and waved around. (Leviticus 23:11)**

- a) This is what God's people called the Wave Offering.
- b) Unlike the sacrifices that were consumed on the altar, the sheaf of Firstfruits was lifted high before the Lord, presented, accepted, and then given back to be enjoyed.
- c) Yes, there was a lamb sacrifice with the offering of the firstfruits, but the firstfruits itself was given back.
- d) When Moses wrote the law, he didn't give much detail about how the priest was supposed to wave the sheaf.
- e) As the centuries rolled on, the Rabbis taught that the priest was to wave the sheaf forward and backward, up and down, to the four corners of the compass. They were drawing a map of the universe, declaring God's grace rules over every dimension of space.
- f) But as Christians, when we look at that vertical and horizontal motion, we can't help but see another shape. We see the Cross—the absolute intersection of heaven's vertical grace and earth's horizontal rescue.

5. **THE SYMBOLISM. The offering symbolized “acceptance” before the Lord. (Leviticus 23:11)**

- a) *“He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.”* (Leviticus 23:11)
- b) The noun at the heart of this word is רָצוֹן (ra-tson), which comes from the verb רָצָה (ra-tsah), meaning “to be pleased with,” “to delight in,” or “to receive with favor.”
- c) The main symbolism is “acceptance.” The offering of firstfruits represents acceptance with God.
- d) Grammatically, there are two ways to interpret this verse.
 - (1) The first way says that the waving of the firstfruits is HOW you got accepted by God. It's conditional. If you bring your first and best to God, then God will accept you. And if you don't, he won't.
 - (2) The translators of the English Standard Version took this view:
 - (a) *“And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.”* (Leviticus 23:11, ESV)
 - (b) I grew up being taught that the acceptance by God was conditional: you have to give God your first and best all the time or else he won't accept you. His acceptance was conditioned upon MY sacrifice, my giving, my working, always, continual, never ending. This was an exhausting way to live.
 - (3) So I really dug into this verse this week, especially in to the fine points of the Hebrew grammar. We are literally talking about how to interpret one Hebrew letter here, and the question is whether to interpret it:
 - (a) ...so that you may be accepted... OR
 - (b) ...since you have been accepted...
 - (4) The translators of the NKJV and KJV take this view when they simply say, “For your acceptance.”
 - (5) The standard Hebrew Lexicon (under רָ, section 5, part f) notes that the *lamed* can express the cause, ground, or reason for an action. In these cases, it is translated as “on account of,” “because of,” or “in view of.”
 - (6) Using this category, this word can be translated:
 - (a) “...and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD on account of / in view of your acceptance.”

- (7) It's not conditional, you gotta do this or God won't accept you. It's the opposite of conditional... the condition has been met! You get to do this to remind your brain, remind your emotions, remind your psychology that because of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, you have been permanently, unalterably, and eternally accepted by God once, for all, and forever.

(a) Unrejected.

- (8) And the sooner your psychology gets the memo, the better.

6. But it gets better:

a) *"But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."* (1 Corinthians 15:20)

7. When you see the priest waving that barley sheaf in Leviticus 23:11, he is acting out a promise from God. He is waving it to the North, South, East, and West, declaring that God is redeeming His whole wide world.

8. He is waving it Up and Down, declaring his matchless grace over all of heaven and earth.

9. And when Jesus walked out of the tomb on Easter Sunday, God 'waved' Him before the universe. He went down into the grave, and then up, alive and undefeated, to declare:

a) "The payment is made. Death is conquered. And because Christ the Firstfruits is accepted, all the rest of the harvest, meaning every believer in Jesus, is equally accepted by God forever too."

10. You don't worship God for acceptance; you worship him from acceptance.

a) You don't serve him for forgiveness; you serve him from forgiveness.

b) You don't follow God for blessing, you follow him from blessing.

11. And the waving of the offering is like you waving your arms, announcing to the world, and announcing to every corner of your dark psyche, and to every crazy voice inside your head... hey everybody, check this out... *Jesus loves me! This I know, for the Bible tells me so.*

VII. Back to Jacob and Esau

A. But it still gets better because 500 years before Moses commanded the offering of Firstfruits, Jacob came face to face with Esau after 20 years estrangement.

B. And it's a scene of epic beauty.

C. There they are for a long embrace, weeping, and laughing until finally they speak.

D. Esau asks his brother what's up with all your guys with all the money you sent ahead of yourself?

1. *Then Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company which I met?" And he said, "These are to find favor [lit. "grace"] in the sight of my lord."* (Genesis 33:8)

E. I was trying to buy your acceptance. I was trying to buy your love. Your favor and your grace.

F. Which was exactly what I spent years trying to do with God. Trying to buy my way out of rejection. Trying to come to grips with a gospel that just felt too good to be true.

G. Esau says,

1. *"But Esau said, 'I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.'"* (Genesis 33:9)

H. Now remember, that Esau is actually standing in the place of God in this story... Do you realize that God has enough? Do you realize that God doesn't need anything from you? He's doing fine! God is self-sufficient.

I. This is the core truth that makes grace possible.

1. *"Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things."* (Acts 17:25)

a) He is not needy so he never begs.

b) He is not lacking so he never demands.

c) He is not overwhelmed so He never panics.

d) He is not insecure so He never manipulates.

e) He is not confused so He never hesitates.

f) He is not uncertain so He never wavers.

g) He is not fragile so He never breaks.

J. And because God has enough, and because God is enough,

a) He doesn't want your barter. He wants your faith.

K. And every single time you try to buy off God, bribe him, pay him, or barter with him, like Esau, God says to you, "I have enough... keep what you have for yourself."

1. You do not give to God to supply HIS need; you give to God to supply YOUR need—which is to establish your psychology in the love of God.

L. This is the mental shift, the emotional shift, the psychological shift the whole Festival Calendar is trying to make inside you.

1. Esau refused the gift from Jacob because it wasn't a gift from acceptance but for acceptance.

2. And when Esau said that, the lights finally went on for Jacob. His heart woke up to amazing grace and he said so.

M. Look at the change in Jacob.

N. When he is sending the money to bribe Esau he says this:

1. *"For he said, 'I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me.'"* (Genesis 32:20)

a) That's bartering for acceptance. Working for it.

O. When Esau says I have enough, I don't need it, keep it for yourself, he says this:

1. *"And Jacob said, 'No, please, if [behold!] I have now found favor [grace] 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 [ratsah, accepted] with me. 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." (Genesis 33:10-11)

- a) That's not bartering for acceptance. That's anchoring his heart in his acceptance, and from that being fully free and fully alive in grace.
 2. When you get saved, you get an identity transplant. You become a new creation.
 3. What you don't get is an emotional transplant. Or a mental transplant. That comes later.
- P. Jacob was loved by Esau long before he realized it.
1. You are loved by God long before you realize it. You are unrejected.
 2. And everything God is teaching, training, cleansing, purging, giving, reminding, saying, and showing to you, is to help get your whole inner world—your mental health and your emotional health and your moral sanity—anchored in the love of God instead of in the rejected slavery thinking of your past self.

VIII. The Prodigal

- A. Let's go back to that dramatic meeting, because there's a secret hiding in plain sight.
 1. *"And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him."* (Genesis 33:4)
- B. When Jacob limps toward Esau in Genesis 33, he expects judgment, but what he receives is mercy. The Bible paints the moment with three explosive verbs: Esau **ran**, he **fell upon his neck**, and he **kissed him repeatedly**.
- C. Now fast forward 2,000 years and listen to how Jesus tells the story of the father and the prodigal son.
 1. *"But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him."* (Luke 15:20)
- D. When the prodigal drags himself to his Father in Luke 15, he expects judgment, but what he receives is mercy.
- E. And when Jesus tells the story of the prodigal son, He deliberately uses the *same* verbs to describe the father's response.
 1. The father **ran**, he **fell upon his neck**, and he **kissed him repeatedly**.
- F. Do you see it? When Jesus wanted to describe what God the Father looks like when He sees a sinner, He didn't invent a new story. He went back to Genesis, grabbed an already familiar portrait of Esau—who had been betrayed and yet passionately forgave—and said, "That's My Father. Running. Neck-hugging. Kissing. Grace-giving. Loving. Forgiving. That's what God looks like."
 1. And Jacob actually said so: "I have seen your face as though I have seen the face of God." If you want to know what God looks like, look at how Esau embraces Jacob.
 2. And if you want to know how God will receive YOU, today, tomorrow, and everyday, then I'm here to tell you he's the same God with the same heart as he was in Jacob's day, and in the Prodigal Son's day, and every day, no matter what a mess you've made.

IX. Replacement Ending

- A. Some of you have heard the word "grace" so many times it has been sanitized into a Hallmark card.
- B. To the moral, middle-class churchgoer, "grace" is a welfare program for the spiritually bankrupt—and since you pay your taxes and keep your lawn mowed, you think you are the middle class of heaven. You don't need the handout; you just want the tax write-off.
 1. This is the most grace-resistant place to be in this room today.
 2. I say this with love:
 - a) **Your moral self-confidence blocks the fulness of God's love from really saturating your heart.**
- C. This is not just a theological mistake. It is a psychological tragedy.
- D. As long as you push grace onto 'those bad people' out there, you stay trapped in the exact same exhausting legalism that plagued the Pharisees. The waving of the firstfruits goes right over your head because you are still counting on your own success instead of what Christ has done.
 1. **Christian, the reformation you need is not BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION, it's PSYCHOLOGICAL RESURRECTION to align your soul's machinery with grace.**
- E. Which brings us to the ultimate, scandalous twist of the Gospel.
- F. Because the Father didn't just go out to the Prodigal. He went out to the elder brother too. The moral, hard-working, clean-cut churchgoer—stood aloof from the party God threw for the bad guy.
- G. The Father left the party and went out to him, too.
- H. Do you remember his message to that moral, decent, thrifty, brave, and clean one?
 1. *"My child, all that I have is yours."* (Luke 15:31)
- I. The biggest dysfunction is not feeling loved by God. The biggest healing is resting your whole psychology in the unfathomable love of God.
- J. The party is ready, the Father's arms are open wide, even for good people. How about you come home to his party today. You won't be rejected. You're already unrejected. Come home.

X. Prayer

- A. Father, we confess we've spent years dragging the heavy baggage of our yesterday, trying to buy a safer tomorrow. We have lived with the limp of the rejected, terrified of Your judgment. But tonight, the illusion is broken. You don't want our barter; You want our faith. You have enough. Because Jesus—our glorious Firstfruits—was waved before the universe and accepted on our behalf, we are permanently accepted. We no longer worship for acceptance; we worship from it. Grant us a psychological resurrection tonight. Whether we are the prodigal dragging ourselves out of the mud, or the elder brother standing self-righteously outside, run to meet us. Fall on our necks and kiss us with Your scandalous grace. We quiet every voice of condemnation in this room and declare over our anxious souls: We are unrejected. Let us step into the party and reign in life through the abundance of Your grace. In the undefeated name of Jesus, our Firstfruits, Amen.

XI. [Addendum 104 words]

- A. [Word for word, the same phonemes in the Greek translation of the OT, 600 b.c., called LXX, are used in both Genesis and Luke. I underlined them. Jesus' parable of the prodigal son is an intentional word for word allusion to the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau.
- B. [LXX Gen 33:4 καὶ προσέδραμεν Ησασ εἰς συνάντησιν αὐτῷ καὶ περιλάβὼν αὐτὸν ἐφίλησεν καὶ προσέπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔκλαυσαν ἀμφοτέροι
- C. [Luke 15:20 καὶ ἀναστὰς ἦλθεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ ἔτι δὲ αὐτοῦ μακρὰν ἀπέχοντος εἶδεν αὐτὸν ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐσπλαγχνίσθη καὶ δραμὼν ἐπέπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ κατεφίλησεν αὐτόν.]